Collaboration between business schools and organisations to maximise the impact of the MBA programme

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ABSTRACT

Despite numerous successes and appreciable advantages of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, the reputation of the MBA has deteriorated in the eyes of businesses, as its relevance has been questioned and businesses often fail to see students applying acquired skills practically back at work.

While previous research has focussed on the experience and opinions of MBA students themselves, this research sought insights of businesses and business schools, specifically considering the value of collaborative relationships for strengthening the MBA’s impact.

This research aimed to understand how collaboration can improve the impact of the MBA, first by affirming the successes of the MBA, confirming its importance to business and then exploring current challenges. Previous initiatives have been unsuccessful in reviving the MBA’s ailing reputation, as they were isolated initiatives, lacking the support and involvement of other MBA stakeholders.

This research, therefore, investigated the requirements for a collaborative relationship to be willingly entered into and sustained, looking particularly at in-house programmes which were successful in encouraging collaboration and involvement of stakeholders.

From the research findings, the Collaborative Impact Model was designed to set out how a collaborative relationship can be established and maintained, optimising the impact of the MBA while also minimising its many challenges.

KEYWORDS

Leading and development, collaboration, MBA
DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

________________________

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, the MBA programme has come under quite severe scrutiny with regard to its relevance in the workplace. For a long time, the MBA has been considered the flagship of business and management education; however, its value-add in recent years has been questioned (Baruch, 2009). While there is evidence of definite benefits for all stakeholders in an MBA—students, schools and organisations—the growing perception created through the various shortcomings of the MBA including the following: 1) concerns of a lack of understanding of the distinct purpose of the MBA; 2) concerns of the programme not producing the necessary skills for the marketplace; and 3) concerns of lower entrance requirements resulting in deteriorating reputations.

What is clear is that there appear to be several gaps in the MBA programme, and in particular, the relationship between the business schools and organisations funding MBA students and employing MBA graduates. This study seeks to understand ways in which business schools and organisations can collaborate to ensure that each stakeholder extracts maximum benefits from the MBA programme. Several studies have focused on MBA students and much of the literature centres on the perspectives of the MBA students. This study will look into the views of business schools offering an MBA programme and organisations that employ or fund students for their MBA.

1.2 Background to the research problem

Temkin (2011) suggests that an MBA gives an individual a distinct advantage over those who do not possess the degree. Furthermore, Temkin (2011) suggests that the qualification is important across industries for people aspiring to general management, senior management and CEO roles. However, the quality and seriousness of the degree has been negatively impacted by business schools which have produced MBA graduates who have not made the expected noticeable difference to the workplace (Temkin, 2011).

James (2011) supports this view by suggesting that the MBA has traditionally been regarded as a ‘golden ticket’ to career advancement but that in reality this has not been
the case. He comments that the MBA is over-rated and ‘out of touch’ with the demands of business in actual practice. Furthermore, he suggests that the MBA fosters poor management practices (James, 2011).

James (2011) provides five reasons why an MBA is a poor investment. The first reason, he believes, is a poor return on investment from the programme. While many people study an MBA with the promise of earning higher salaries, this does not necessarily materialise. While MBA graduates earn more money than colleagues who do not possess the degree, those who take on loans and financial commitments to fund their MBA do not necessarily reap the benefits thereof in that the degree does not always translate into significantly improved salaries and in fact often results in work disruptions.

The second reason is that theory does not translate into practice. Too much emphasis, he feels, is placed on theory rather than developing practical skills for the workplace. He suggests that case studies taught in the MBA programme, often ‘dated’, do not necessarily have relevance in today’s economic climate (James, 2011).

The third reason identified by James (2011) is that the MBA is a ‘one-size-fits-all’ degree: it promises to develop students into competent leaders, but if students have not experienced management for themselves, the content of the courses will be predominantly theoretical and the students will not be able to apply what is learned in class to the business world. He also feels that management consists of practical, real-world experiences, experiences which, according to James (2011), would be difficult if not impossible to replicate in a classroom setting. James (2001) feels that without adequate experience and exposure to management, a student will not be able to fully appreciate the content taught and yet, according to James (2011), the MBA promises to transform graduates into successful managers irrespective of their experience.

The fourth criticism levied by James (2011) against the MBA is that the programme promotes irrelevant and unsustainable fads resulting in companies implementing interventions which are often disruptive and which require re-engineering upon their likely failure. These companies, then, go around in circles rather than progressing forward (James, 2011).

The final criticism levied against the MBA is that James (2011) believes that business schools foster cheating. He cites research by the Academy of Management Learning and Education which revealed that 56% of all MBA students admit to cheating. James
claims that students in the MBA plagiarise work, copy from other students and bring prohibited material into exams. He believes that MBA programmes unwittingly encourage this by tolerating unethical behaviour and that allowing this to happen may ultimately result in WorldCom and Enron type scandals. Ultimately, the attainment of the degree by any means necessary suggests that the pursuit of an outcome is based on performance rather than the manner in which it is achieved (James, 2011).

Arguing the contrary, 79% of the participants in a forum by GMAT Club (2011), in response to James (2011), disagreed that the MBA is a bad investment. Respondents conceded that James (2011) makes a few valid points. However, they believed that the MBA provides graduates with the enviable opportunity to change careers. Further, it provides graduates with the potential to choose jobs for that which they enjoy and regard as meaningful. They suggested that undertaking an MBA is more about finding a career that is enjoyable and less about the money. In addition to this, the MBA provides students with a break from their current routine and encourages them explore their potential. Additionally, respondents believed that an MBA allows for social interaction with a diverse set of new people, affording opportunities for individuals to develop and sustain invaluable business networks and friendly relationships (GMAT Club, 2011).

In response to criticism of the MBA, respondents of the GMAT Club (2011) forum questioned the appropriateness of the ‘return on investment’ requirements levied against the MBA, arguing that the MBA is more about career choice rather than return on investment. In regard to the practical applicability of the programme, they felt that this point relates to any degree programme and that the MBA programme is a school programme and not a virtual reality simulation of the real world. They agreed that leadership cannot be taught but rather has to be acquired. Respondents defended business schools by suggesting that business schools are tasked with the challenging and undeniably difficult mission of staying relevant, current and engaging year after year, and that deciphering trends as opposed to fads is a difficult, if not impossible, challenge.

Respondents did not agree with the point relating to cheating in the MBA, arguing that the best business schools emphasise group work and encourage collaboration rather than competition. They stressed the importance of being team players in achieving goals. Finally, they felt that business schools do indeed take precautions against plagiarism and cheating and that business ethics is not really about what is taught in.
the MBA, but rather a larger societal issue. Some participants felt that both sides presented valid points and consequently uncertainty exists as to whether or not an MBA is worth pursuing.

The contrasting views of Temkin (2011) and James (2011) to those views of the GMAT Club (2011) highlight a ‘disconnect’ between MBA students the business schools are developing and the acquired skills that are expected and suitably required by business. This suggests a gulf between the practical applicability of the MBA and while possessing an MBA degree does give a graduate an advantage over lesser qualified colleagues, the qualification itself does not necessarily translate into benefits for business (Temkin, 2011; James, 2011). Negative views pertaining to the MBA raise questions as to the relationship between business schools and organisations. It appears that there is a lack of collaboration between these institutions, and that business schools are not delivering adequately to the expectations of organisations. Furthermore, there is a lack of evidence that these expectations are being agreed upon at all. MBA alumni and students definitely view the MBA much more positively than their employers and there does not, at this point, appear to be a ‘silver bullet’ in terms of bridging these contrasting perceptions.

Ramanathan (2011), in responding to Australian newspapers questioning the value of the MBA, suggests that for individuals the MBA allows for career shifts, while for businesses, thankfully, there have at least been positive shifts in terms of how these business perceive the MBA. There remains, however, a need for strengthened collaboration between business schools and businesses. In order to avoid commoditisation of the MBA, business schools must continue to invest in resources—faculty, alumni and infrastructure—with the goal of providing a differentiated and experiential learning experience (Ramanathan, 2011).

Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010), in reviewing the results of two surveys pertaining to the MBA, suggest that while many employers still hold the MBA in high esteem, there are significant gaps between employers’ views of the benefits of the MBA in relation to the views of business schools and students. They further suggest that despite a general satisfaction with the MBA and an understanding in organisations of the curriculum of the MBA, there is discomfort in relation to the skills acquired in an MBA and the market in which graduates are seeking employment. Employers are cautious at best when ascribing merit to the MBA, and employers’ views on MBA
graduates’ attitudes and salary expectations reveal a growing gap in how much each of these parties values the learning from an MBA (Donovan & Stewart-Smith, 2010).

In addition to this growing gap, Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010) suggest that the most striking finding from the surveys is that the requirement of MBA internships is well accepted by both organisations and students. The results revealed that 77% of organisations and 79% of students/alumni responded positively to the idea of an internship programme linked to the MBA, commenting that these internships were a potential vehicle through which business schools could bridge the gap between the expectations of organisations and MBA students/alumni (Donovan & Stewart-Smith, 2010). Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010) further suggest that business schools and the MBA programme are critical to economic and skills development and that a key success factor in achieving this is to ensure that organisations and students have a common understanding of the value of an MBA. What is clear is that there is a critical need for business schools, organisations and students to work together to achieve the economic and skills benefits so desired and needed by all parties.

Contemporary press and recent surveys concerned with the MBA highlight that the majority of stakeholders in an MBA acknowledge the benefits of the MBA; however, due to the lack of collaboration, these benefits do not appear to be materialising. There is an undeniable need to collaborate, to make learning practical and relevant in the context of a changing global economic climate. This research will seek to understand some of the challenges faced by the MBA and investigate if indeed collaboration is the key to bridging the gaps between business schools, students and organisations in the MBA.

Some MBAs, it seems, have got it right. Despite the negative press, there have been isolated cases of MBA programmes getting the mix between practical learning and skill creation for the workplaces. Bennis (2012) describes the reforms that Dean Nitin Nohira implemented at Harvard Business School to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Nohira, he explains, implemented a form of ‘action learning’ whereby students are required to undertake a newly designed course to complement their MBA curriculum. Students, in groups, are required to plan, design, implement and lead an entirely new enterprise, with the objective of this learning intervention being to assimilate all the learning from the MBA through action by ‘doing’ those things students learned in the classroom. Semester debriefings allow students to reflect on their successes and failures (Bennis, 2012). So, while there are criticisms of the MBA,
arguments in favour of the MBA are just as compelling. As with Nohira’s interventions, it appears possible for business schools to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

1.3 Motivation for the research

In reviewing the background information and popular press, two themes emerge which require research:

1) The first distinct theme that emerges is the transfer of learning. There appears to be a gulf between theory and practice and the view of antagonists is that students are incapable of taking back to the workplace that which they have learned. In those cases, organisations and students are unable to reap the full benefits of the MBA.

2) The second theme that emerges is the relevance of the MBA programme. Antagonists again view the skills and the content of the MBA as irrelevant to the actual needs of business, arguing that content is outdated and, in many instances, even disruptive to business as it relies of fads.

The common need that has developed is the need for collaboration between business schools and organisations. This raises several integral questions:

1) What does it mean to collaborate?
2) Under what circumstances does collaboration occur?
3) How does this affect the transfer of learning?
4) What are the various ways in which stakeholders can collaborate to realise more benefits of the MBA and ensure that these benefits are realised more efficiently and effectively?

Given the themes that have emerged, this research will seek to understand the circumstances under which learning is best transferred from school to work. Using this information, it will further investigate the ways in which collaboration between business schools and organisations can help business schools better prepare MBA students so that MBA students are more effective in the workplace.

1.4 Aim and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study will be to explore different ways in which collaborative learning can achieve the maximum output from an MBA programme for business
schools, students and organisations involved with an MBA programme. At this stage in the research, collaborative learning to achieve the maximum output from an MBA programme will be generally defined as ‘business schools and organisations working together to ensure that all stakeholders, including students, maximise their respective benefits’. Conger and Xin (2000) believe that if this is successfully achieved, students will benefit from the application of theory to practice, and business schools, whose students successfully apply what they learn to real and practical business situation, will invariably become preferred suppliers for an MBA. Businesses will benefit from an enlightened employee who will add to the company’s human capital, bringing in new and creative ideas to the organisation and ultimately work together to drive the business’ strategic objectives (Conger & Xin, 2000). However, the challenge remains in the practicalities of these collaborative relationships to ensure maximum benefits from the MBA are realised.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction – An understanding of learning

Jarvis (2006, p. 13) defines learning as being “the combination of processes whereby the whole person-body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs, and senses) experiences a social situation, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotionally or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the person’s individual biography resulting in a changed (or most experienced) person”. Jarvis (2006) suggested that experiences can be transformed into learning three ways, singularly or in combination—thinking as a way of learning, doing as a way of learning, and feeling as a way of learning. The combination of these three ways of learning results in various types of learning, including critical thinking, action learning, problem-solving learning and reflective learning (Jarvis, 2006).

2.2 Theories and schools of adult learning

Several theories and schools of adult learning are explored in contemporary literature. The following section describes the various schools of learning and motivates those schools which are most appropriate of this study.

2.2.1 Androgyny and pedagogy

Marquardt and Waddill (2004, p. 187) explain that adult learning, androgyny, is concerned with how adults learn, “recognise and acknowledge that a number of factors influence how adults learn differently from children”, or pedagogy. They indicate that according to Knowles (1970, 1984), the distinguishing factors between androgyny and pedagogy include adult learners being self-directed, adults engaging in education with either a life, problem or task-centred orientation to learning, and adults finding internal motivators as the most potent, internal motivators which include “…self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life, self-confidence, and self-actualization” (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004, p. 187). This study relates to androgyny as the MBA is an adult-based learning programme.
2.2.2 Orientations of learning

According to Marquardt and Waddill (2004), over time, five major schools, or orientations, of learning have emerged, namely cognitivist, behaviourist, humanist, social learning and constructivist. Marquardt and Waddill (2004) suggested that these schools are distinctive, yet some of their perspectives and approaches have common features. According to Marquardt and Waddill (2004) cognitivists believe that people are capable of insight and perception and that they can attribute meaning to their experiences. This school is mainly concerned with people using internal processes to acquire, understand and retain knowledge.

**Behaviourists** are concerned with learning through people controlling their external environments (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). The three assumptions underpinning the behaviourist school are the following: changes in behaviours are indications of learning; elements in the environment determine learning; and repeating and re-enforcing learning behaviours help contribute to the learning process (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004).

**Humanists** believe that people seek self-actualisation through learning and therefore determine what they learn (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). Furthermore, they believe that learning is self-directed, placing emphasis on the development of a person as a whole (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004).

**Social learning** theory is concerned with how people learn through interactions with other people (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). They believe that people can learn by imitating other people like role models and mentors (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004).

**Constructivists** believe knowledge is contextual and that an individual’s internal understanding of reality allows a person to assign meaning to learning (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). Reflection is vital to this school of learning and the importance of changing oneself and the environment are emphasised (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). According to Orey (2008), there are three key elements to constructivism, namely activity (practice), concept (knowledge) and culture (context). Transfer of learning, then, takes place where tasks are authentic and have a meaningful context (Orey, 2008).

The context and purpose of the MBA is vital in understanding if collaboration exists between stakeholders, and in determining the effectiveness of this collaboration. The
context has a significant effect on the transfer of learning and thus the perceived benefits to stakeholders. Where collaboration is authentic and meaningful, we would expect that transfer of learning will occur, thereby lending this approach to the constructivist views of learning. Given that this study is concerned with understanding the collaboration in the MBA (context) and key features may include changing the thinking of the individual stakeholders (knowledge) as well as the curriculum and environment of the MBA (practice), a constructivist approach to learning suits this study.

2.3 Transfer of learning

O’Connor and Cordova (2010) identified variables that address the personal needs of the individual and the business needs of an organisation in the learning process. Figure 1 demonstrates the interrelationships amongst the variables that impact learning, according to O’Connor and Cordova (2010). They identify three inputs to learning: 1) the individual’s characteristics; 2) the work environment; and 3) the academic learning environment. What this model suggests is that learning occurs when there is synergy among these variables. When these three learning inputs—individual characteristics, work environments and academic learning—overlap, learning is optimised (O’Connor & Cordova, 2010).
Figure 1: The relationships of individual characteristics, the work environment, and the academic learning environment on the transfer of learning, as supplied by O'Connor, B. N., and Cordova, R. (2010).

2.3.1 Job involvement/engagement

Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris (2008) suggested that research on employee burnout resulted in research on engagement. Two distinct schools of employee engagement appear to exist, with both schools considering employee engagement as “employees being in a positive work-related state of being or fulfilment” (Bakker et al., 2008).

2.3.1.1 Burnout theory

Bakker et al. (2008) suggested that the first school of thought links employee engagement with burnout, seeking to understand burnout and how interventions can shift an employee out of a state of burnout into a state of engagement. They suggested that employees who are engaged view and respond to their work differently, much more optimistically, than those who are burned out. Engaged employees have an
energetic and effective connection to their work, viewing work as engaging and challenging, while employees suffering from burnout are disconnected from their work and view their jobs as stressful (Bakker et al., 2008). Leiter and Maslach (2008) intimated that employees’ psychological relationships to their jobs could be conceptualised as a continuum between the positive experiences of engagement and the negative experiences of burnout. They cite their earlier works Leiter and Maslach (2005) in suggesting that this continuum had three dimensions: exhaustion-energy, cynicism-involvement and inefficacy-efficacy. The significance of these three dimensions is that they seek to understand an individual’s psychological state of being in the context of work and unpack the individual’s conception of himself and others (Leiter & Maslach, 2008).

Leiter and Maslach (2008) suggested that their earlier focused on the negative aspects of the continuum. They suggested that the individual strain dimension is exhaustion and is described as a state of being where an individual feels over-extended with depleted emotional and physical resources. According to Leiter and Maslach (2008) the interpersonal dimension of burnout is cynicism, referring to an individual’s negative or detached response to the various aspects of his job. They suggested that inefficacy is the self-evaluation dimension and is described as an individual’s feelings of incompetence, lack of productivity and lack of achievement on the job. By implication, energy, involvement and efficacy are the opposite of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy (Leiter & Maslach, 2008).

Leiter and Maslach (2008) investigated the factors leading to enhanced energy, vigour and resilience in the workplace and found, first of all, that a critical dimension to engagement was job-person congruence. They suggested that if a person maintained a good relationship with his job, he was more likely to resolve minor issues and remain engaged. They suggest that interventions should be considered when an individual outgrows his current position as this will otherwise result in a deteriorating relationship with a current role (Leiter & Maslach, 2008).

2.3.1.2 Engagement theory

The second school of thought views job engagement as an independent and distinct concept in relation to burnout (Bakker et al., 2008). Bakker et al. (2008, p. 188) quoted Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002) who define an employee’s
engagement to his work as “positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption”. They refer to engagement and fulfilment existing in contrast to voids which result in feelings of burnout such as emptiness. They referred to vigour as a feeling of energy, mental resilience, and an individual’s willingness to make a conscious effort in his job, even in the face of difficult or nerve-wracking situations. They suggested that dedicated employees experience numerous positive feelings including significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge, all of which result in strengthened involvement in work. ‘Absorption’ refers to individuals being happy and immersed in their jobs, so much so that they may experience difficulties in parting or detaching themselves from their work (Bakker et al., 2008). Bakker et al. (2008) further argue that vigour, dedication and absorption are direct opposites of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy.

Bakker et al. (2008) clarified that employees who are engaged make greater efforts with more intensity at their jobs because they identify with these jobs. They further suggest that there appeared to be a common understanding that job engagement involves two distinct dimensions: an energy dimension and an identification dimension. Job engagement results from high levels of energy and a strong identification with one’s job (Bakker et al., 2008). In contrast, however, Macey and Schneider (2008) intimated that the meaning of employee engagement is at best ambiguous amongst practitioners and academic researchers, arguing that practitioners and academic researchers often have inconsistent and competing definitions of the meaning of employee engagement. They raised questions as to whether employee engagement is a unique concept or rather the re-packaging of various other constructs like burnout theory. Macey and Schneider (2008, p. 4) sought for commonality among the various definitions of engagement by referring to the construct of employee engagement as “a desirable condition” which “has an organisational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioural components”.

According to Macey and Schneider (2008) engagement is more than just being involved in one’s job and being committed to an organisation. The emphasis has been increasingly on passion, absorption and effect (Macey & Schneider, 2008). They further indicated that while to some, engagement and satisfaction were one in the same, engagement was far more than just being satisfied in one’s job or being loyal to an employer. They proposed that engagement meant that an employee displayed passion
and commitment: employees who were engaged would invest in themselves and expend their efforts beyond just ‘doing their jobs’ to ensure that their employer succeeded.

Macey and Schneider (2008) break engagement down into various categories in order to further clarify the various distinct meanings of engagement. They intimated that state engagement related to high levels of energy and enthusiasm rather than just satisfaction, moderate at best. They suggested that most surveys concerned with engagement focused merely on satisfaction and consequently were misdirected, not yielding useful information.

Next, behavioural engagement was associated with a concept of adaptive behaviour (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Adaptive behaviour means that when employees are engaged, they will go beyond the status quo of their jobs to engage in activities through which their current positions might evolve and add value to an organisation (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

According to Macey and Schneider (2008) trait engagement comprised a number of inter-related personal traits including conscientiousness, autotelic personalities and pro-activeness. Trait engagement refers to employees’ inclinations to experience their work in an energetic, positive and proactive manner, tantamount to be adaptive, going above and beyond their current role description (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Macey and Schneider (2008) suggested that trait engagement is a cause of and directly related to state engagement and that it is indirectly related to behaviour engagement. Engaged employees, according to Macey and Schneider (2008), are key to giving a company the competitive edge over rival companies. They suggest that companies getting engagement right with its employees will be able achieve accomplishments which their competitors will find difficult to replicate. Macey and Schneider (2008) suggested that it is relatively simple to follow a price change or product strategy, but infinitely more difficult to replicate a state and behaviourally engaged workforce.

O’Connor and Cordova (2010) suggested that job engagement occurs when an individual’s characteristics and job environment overlap. O’Connor and Cordova (2010) suggested that where high job involvement and intelligent career planning existed, individuals were more likely to apply what they had learnt to their jobs. Furthermore, they argue, learning is impacted by an individual’s ability as well his position within a
2.3.2 Personal relevance

Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004, p. 59) intimated that learner engagement is a critical and complicated component of education and that there is a need to better understand how “students behave, feel, and think”. The detail of these constructs will help educators develop more aligned interventions to ensure that learning is maximised (Fredricks et al., 2004).

2.3.2.1 Self-determination theory

Sørebø and Hæhre (2012), researching personal relevance of students playing educational games, proposed that competence, autonomy and relatedness were critical in arousing intrinsic motivation in students. Deci and Ryan (2000) refer to ‘relatedness’ as the desire of an individual to feel connected to others, while ‘competence’ is referred to an individual’s desire to feel effective in achieving goals and ambitions. They refer to ‘autonomy’ as the desire of an individual to self-initiate and self-regulate his own behaviours.

Sørebø and Hæhre (2012) suggested that students’ interest in a subject, in conjunction with their intrinsic motivation in that particular type of teaching intervention, are important components of how relevant students considered the subject and the interventions were in regard to their chosen field of study. Sørebø and Hæhre (2012) argued that the arousal of intrinsic motivation is more important than a student’s initial interest in a study in making the study relevant.

Gagné and Deci (2005) argued that the core elements of self-determination theory are extrinsic and intrinsic motivation as well as a set of basic psychological needs that underlie motivation. Sørebø and Hæhre (2012, p. 347) refer to ‘motivation’ as the reasons for carrying out an activity and defined ‘intrinsic motivation’ as “…the motivation to engage in a task for its own sake out of interest and/or enjoyment—and not as a means to another reward”. Roca and Gagné (2008) argued that extrinsic motivation has four dimensions. The first dimension is where the reasons for carrying out an activity may be external, as in seeking to achieve an external reward. 'Identified' is based on a feeling of personal importance (Roca & Gagné, 2008). 'Integrated'
suggests a harmony with one’s self, making a conscious decision to undertake an activity (Roca & Gagne, 2008). Finally, according to Roca and Gagné (2008), ‘introjection’ suggests that an activity is carried out to avoid a feeling of shame. Roca and Gagné (2008) further supported the notion of these basic psychological needs of relatedness, competence and autonomy in finding that the adoption of intrinsic motivation, or internalising, the self-determined types of extrinsic motivation, like identified and integrated, depends on satisfying the aforementioned needs.

### 2.3.2.2 Personal interest

Ainley and Ainley (2011) found that students who had an embedded interest in a particular subject were more likely to enjoy that subject and explore the topic, enhancing their knowledge and understanding thereof. When students believed that the topic they were studying had personal relevance and meaning in their lives, they were more likely to experience interest and enjoyment from engaging with the subject (Ainley & Ainley, 2011). Silvia (2008) likewise suggested that interest motivates people to explore new ideas and engage in new experiences. A lack of interest results in people doing the same things they are used to, repetitively, as if in a ‘rut’ (Silvia, 2008). ‘Interest’, as a trait, relates to unconventional curiosity, meaning that an individual interested in a particular topic is more open to that new experiences, increased learning surrounding that topic (Silvia, 2008). Silvia (2008, p. 59) finally intimated that if something is interesting, it is more likely to be viewed as “…complex, unfamiliar, negative, and disturbing” rather than just “simple, positive, and calming”. This implies that for something to be interesting, it would move an individual out of his comfort zone.

Sørebø & Hæhre (2012, p. 348) conceptualise personal interest as “being interested in a subject or course like the MBA”. They differentiate personal interest from intrinsic motivation by suggesting that personal interest is to experience something as important while intrinsic motivation is to experience something as enjoyable. They conclude that personal interest is a precursor to intrinsic motivation.

Personal relevance occurs when the individual’s characteristics and the academic learning environment overlap (O’Connor & Cordova, 2010). Cheng and Ho (1998) performed a regression analysis on two attitudinal factors (training value and training motivation) and two organisational factors (opportunity to transfer and transfer reward) to determine if these affect the transfer of MBA knowledge into work. What they found
was that the greater the perceived value of training, the more likely the individual was to apply this training.

Hidi and Renninger (2011) suggested that interest can be nurtured and developed through interactions with others and through the design of the learning environment. They also suggested that interest appears to enable students to connect with the subject, a connection which results in learning. Interest was found to be a mediator in learning and was reciprocal to self-efficacy, goal-setting and students being able to regulating themselves (Hidi & Renninger, 2011). However, Hidi and Renninger (2011) found a gap between appreciating the impact of interest and the enabling of educators to realise methods for supporting students and designing learning environments which cultivate this interest.

### 2.3.2.3 Situational interest

Hidi and Renninger (2006) reported that situational interest is a powerful construct that can be manipulated by educators. They suggest personal interest tends to be more stable and predefined while situational interest could be manipulated through the application of instructional materials and thus was under the direct control of the teacher.

#### 2.3.2.3.1 The role of educators in creating and sustaining situational interest

Hidi and Renninger (2006) suggested that, in general, studies related to interest have yielded several highly useful findings for educators. Educators can help maintain students’ attention to challenging topics and subjects either by providing support to students so that they experience induced situational interest or by providing students with feedback so that their interest is piqued and as such, sustain the situational interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). They suggested that educators can create an environment which fosters the curiosity of students and provides a comfortable learning space in which to ask questions in relation to their curiosity. Another option available to educators is to utilise resources that encourage and promote problem-solving and the generation of strategy (Hidi & Renninger, 2006).
2.3.2.3.2 Key characteristics of educators which foster situational interest

Rotgans and Schmidt (2011) conducted research to determine whether social congruence, subject-matter expertise and cognitive congruence increased situational interest in students. They found that cognitive congruence significantly influenced situational interest. Rotgans and Schmidt (2011, p. 38) cited Schmidt and Moust (1995) in defining cognitive congruence as “the ability to express oneself in a language students can understand, using concepts they use and explaining concepts in ways easily grasped by students”. Cognitive congruence, they argued, positively impacts learning. As a further consideration in increasing situational interest, Rotgans and Schmidt (2011) concluded that by improving an educator’s subject matter expertise, the educator’s cognitive congruence would increase and thus indirectly impact situational interest. Subject matter expertise could be enhanced either through additional resources and materials or through more detailed and in-depth briefings where a deeper understanding of the subject or problem is achieved (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011).

2.3.2.3.3 The four-phase model to develop and deepen learner interest

Hidi and Renninger (2006) presented the four-phase model for developing and deepening learner interest: 1) triggered situational interest; 2) maintained situational interest; 3) emerging individual interest; and finally 4) well-developed individual interest. They define the various phases of interest, detailed the needs of a learner in each phase and provided suggestions as to what educators could do to sustain interest at each phase.

2.3.2.3.3.1 Triggered situational interest

Hidi and Renninger (2006, p. 114) define triggered situational interest as “a psychological state of interest that results from short-term changes in affective and cognitive processing”. They intimated that triggered situational interest is predominantly externally supported, triggered by providing learners with information that is extraordinary and causes a surprise, by character identification or personal relevance or by creating an intense situation. They suggested that learning environments making use of various kinds of resources including puzzles, working in groups and computers
have been successful in triggering situational interest. They see triggering situational interest as a precursor to re-engaging content.

2.3.2.3.2 Maintained situational interest

According to Hidi and Renninger (2006, p. 114) maintained situational interest refers to “a psychological state of interest that is subsequent to a triggered state, involves focused attention and persistence over an extended episode in time, and/or reoccurs and again persists”. They suggest that by ensuring that tasks and activities were meaningful and ensuring that learners were personally involved, situational interest could be maintained. Like triggered situational interest, maintained situational interest is predominantly externally supported, conducive to learning environments which include activities like project-based learning, collaborative group activities and one to one tutoring (Hidi & Renninger, 2006).

2.3.2.3.3 Emerging individual interest

Hidi and Renninger (2006, p. 114) suggested that emerging individual interest refers to “a psychological state of interest as well as to the beginning phases of a relatively enduring predisposition to seek repeated reengagement with particular classes of content over time”. They suggested that characteristics of this phase include positive emotions, stored knowledge and stored value. In this regard, students will re-engage topics and subjects based on their previous positive experiences with that topic (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). While an emerging individual interest is typically self-generated, it may require some external support including peers and experts who could contribute to a better understanding of the topic (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). As such, the learning environment should provide access to knowledgeable peers and experts to further stimulate emerging individual interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006).

2.3.2.3.4 Well-developed individual interest

The last phase in situational interest as defined by Hidi and Renninger (2006, p. 115) refers to well-developed individual interest as “the psychological state of interest as well as to a relatively enduring predisposition to reengage with particular classes of content over time”. At this stage, according to Hidi and Renninger (2006), an individual has a great deal more positional emotion and stored value and knowledge from past
experiences than in any other phase. They suggested that an individual in this phase of interest will undertake learning effortlessly and this phase will ensure that the individual is able to sustain long-term activities in a constructive and creative manner. Like emerging individual interest, well-developed individual interest is typically self-generated and promoted through a learning environment which provides access to resources for extending and enhancing an individual’s understanding. This environment should provide learners with vital interaction and challenges which result in knowledge escalation (Hidi & Renninger, 2006).

2.3.3 Content relevance

O’Connor and Cordova (2010) suggested that content relevance occurs when the work environment and the academic learning environment overlap. Lindel and Stenstrom (2005) view content relevance as information being learnt at school being directly applicable to work. O’Connor and Cordova (2010) concluded that what is being learnt at school and expected at work are mutually dependent—where there is a lack of understanding of what is being taught and when this material does not relate directly to an individual’s work, learning is diminished.

Key to this research is the finding of O’Connor and Cordova (2010) that when individuals were studying in a challenging graduate programme, they felt alive and rejuvenated. A major disconnect arose when an alive student encountered a work environment that failed to take advantage of the individual’s capabilities and personal being (O’Connor & Cordova, 2010). Students expressed the need for job engagement, course content relevance, and personal relevance and when all of these were aligned, students reported that “they had changed—become—the person they wanted to be” (O’Connor & Cordova, 2010, p. 368).

2.4 Learning concepts

2.4.1 Developmental learning

Konkola, Tuomi-Gröhn, Lambert, and Ludvigsen (2007) refer to a concept called ‘developmental transfer’ which focuses on the collaborative efforts of organisations to create new knowledge and practices rather than the individual transferring knowledge to the organisation. They suggested that over time, boundaries have been created
between school and work, so transcending these boundaries will be challenging yet necessary to achieve transfer of knowledge from school to work and vice versa. In order to achieve this, they recommended setting up a team of teachers, students and practitioners to consider challenges faced by business. This team would benefit from the theoretic and practical expertise of the group and this would result in developmental transfer (Konkola et al., 2007).

Konkola et al. (2007) suggested that the generation of new ideas based on theory could potentially give businesses a competitive edge, as teachers are able to better integrate practice with theory for future classes, and students are actively practising what they learn, thus solidifying their learning. A key challenge, identified by Konkola et al. (2007), will be the willingness of businesses to open their doors to teachers, given issues around confidentiality of information, processes and ideas which form the basis of businesses’ competitive advantages. However, the potential of this collaboration certainly offers more anticipated benefits to an organisation, and, for assurance, confidentiality agreements could mitigate business risks (Konkola et al., 2007).

Schilling and Klamma (2010) made a similar suggestion that projects should occur at participating businesses; they recommend that these projects integrate both students and company experts. As the main goal of these interventions is the establishment of best practice between academia and business, they recommend that only companies willing to offer up their facilities should be collaborated with. Furthermore, they explained that a long-term relationship seeing the implementation of many small projects would be more profitable and beneficial to all parties, cautioning against once-off projects or engagements as these would not result in long-lasting or long-term benefits to any of the stakeholders. Schilling and Klamma (2010) saw group coaching in these projects as a vital part of successful collaboration and suggested that lecturers should be more inclusive of this project work.

### 2.4.2 Action learning

According to Marquardt and Waddill (2004), action learning is centred on a problem, project or challenge and the resolution thereof is of high priority for an individual, team or organisation. They suggested that the problem should be substantial, within the control of the team and yet creating an exciting opportunity for learning. According to them, action learning is a powerful method of learning which results in relevant long-
term learning condensed into a short span of time applicable across various entities including individuals, teams and organisations. Action learning combines elements of the various schools of learning, allowing for the solving of complex problems and adding speed to learning (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). Marquardt and Waddill (2004) further suggested that action learning provides a basis for reflection and that the constructivist theory of learning supports an action approach.

Lysø, Mjøen, and Levin (2011) suggested that management learning is more likely to have an organisational impact if learning and action are balanced and if action learning projects are collaborative. They argued that for action learning projects to be effective in practice, organisations must have clear reasons for sending managers on management development courses, ensuring that such managers have the support of their direct superior and facilitating the participation of other members of the organisation in the action learning projects.

Gosling and Mintzberg (2006) challenged the design of traditional executive development programmes, in particular the MBA programme, suggesting that learning needed to be more interactive and reflective. They proposed seven key principles in structuring learning, including limiting education to practising managers and selecting such managers based on their demonstrated results. They further suggested that managers should remain in their jobs and apply what they have learned back to their jobs. Continuing on, they suggested that management education should leverage life and work as fully as possible. They have noted, however, that the key to learning is reflection. Affording managers time and space to sit back and reflect on their studies and work experiences was key to ensuring that managers actually applied what they learned (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2006). This reflection should therefore result in beneficial impact to the organisation. Gosling and Mintzberg (2006) felt that management education should be a process of interactive learning by addressing managerial concerns from practice through facilitated discussions in class.

2.5 Collaboration

2.5.1 Definition of collaboration

Winer and Ray (1994, p. 10) define collaboration as “a process that gets people to work together in new ways. The process does not end but spawns new collaborative
ventures. Collaboration becomes a continuing phenomenon with a wide range of results that can empower people and systems to change”. This definition suggests that collaboration is a continuously evolving process that empowers change.

Another definition of collaboration is “a process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process” (Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2009, p. 25). This definition suggests that collaboration is a multi-dimensional, variable construct and that it comprises five key dimensions (Thomson et al., 2009). The two structural dimensions of collaboration are governance and administration, while the two social capital dimensions are mutuality and norms (Thomson et al., 2009). The final agency dimension of collaboration is organisational autonomy (Thomson et al., 2009).

However, Bedwell et al. (2012) argued that none of these definitions or works takes a multidisciplinary approach to defining collaboration. They argued that these definitions merely referred to different forms of interactions and that as such they provided little clarity around the true meaning of collaboration. Bedwell et al. (2012, p. 130) went on to define collaboration as “an evolving process whereby two or more social entities actively and reciprocally engage in joint activities aimed at achieving at least one shared goal”.

2.5.2 Emergent themes in understanding collaboration

From the literature review considering the definition of collaboration, the following themes emerge to clarify the characteristics of collaboration, as identified by Bedwell et al. (2012).

2.5.2.1 Collaboration is an evolving process

Collaboration is an outcome rather than a goal. It is, in essence, the process through which people engage to achieve a predetermined goal, a process involving interpersonal relationships and interactions which evolve and develop over time (Bedwell et al., 2012).
2.5.2.2 Collaboration requires two or more social entities

Collaboration exists between and across various entities including individuals, teams, units, departments, functional areas and organisations (Bedwell et al., 2012).

2.5.2.3 Collaboration is reciprocal

Collaboration requires active, mutual engagement so there cannot be a dominant party as this would constitute delegation of work or coercion (Bedwell, et al., 2012). Having said that, though, the engagement and involvement of all parties need not be equal (Bedwell, et al., 2012). It must be stressed that interdependence and sufficient contributions toward common goals are critical to achieving collaboration (Bedwell et al., 2012).

2.5.2.4 Collaboration requires participation in joint activities

Collaboration is applicable to a variety of activities, both within and outside the work environment: a key feature is that it requires interdependent efforts, by all parties concerned, which are focused on joint activities (Bedwell et al., 2012).

2.5.2.5 Collaboration is aimed at achieving a shared goal

Bedwell et al. (2012) suggests that a shared goal differentiates collaboration from other forms of shared work; it is necessary for these goals to be mutually defined or agreed upon. Without the shared goal there is little incentive for entities to work together (Bedwell, et al., 2012). A point of contention does exist in that while entities have shared goals, they may also have conflicting goals so entities will need to minimise their own conflicts in order to attain their shared goals (Bedwell et al., 2012).

Having defined collaboration and identifying its key characteristics, the next step is to understanding how the key stakeholders in an MBA view the programme and understand the challenges facing the MBA.
2.6 The MBA under pressure

2.6.1 What is wrong with the MBA?

Donovan and Steward-Smith (2010) summarised the findings of two independent surveys—one performed by UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) and the other by MBA.co.za—to establish the perception of South African employers toward the MBA. Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010) reported that the results revealed significant gaps in the perceptions of business schools and MBA students and employers who fund and hire MBA students and graduates.

2.6.2 Skills for the marketplace

Gap #1: Business schools can aid students in better understanding what an MBA offers and help manage students’ expectations with regard to the skills that are actually required in the marketplace and workplace (Donovan & Stewart-Smith, 2010). Temtime and Mmereki (2011) also found a gap between the skills and knowledge required by industry and the programmes provided by the MBA with the skills that students actually acquired in the programme. They found that most skills identified as ‘critical’ were not adequately covered by the MBA curriculum and classroom lessons.

Blass and Weight (2005, p. 232) raised several questions regarding the MBA including the following two: 1) “Are we doing students a disservice by even offering them an MBA?” and 2) “Does one size fit all?” They felt that the skills taught in the MBA programme did not travel well and that an MBA as a global qualification may not necessarily be appropriate if the programme did not consider the specific culture and work context of students in a particular location. Their view was that the MBA curriculum did not necessarily develop ‘international’ managers.

2.6.3 Understanding the purpose of the MBA

Gap #2: Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010) suggested that MBA providers should help employers better understand the MBA programme. Some important items which they suggested, among others, as critical to creating this understanding, included the relevance of the curriculum, the importance of the accreditation and the marketing presentation and output of the respective business school. Rowland and Hall (2011)
suggested that the MBA is a post-experience programme and the incoming students must bear this in mind, as the experience of students ultimately affected the way in which subjects were taught and the overall culture of the programme.

### 2.6.4 Approach to learning

Gap #3: The MBA curriculum should provide opportunities for practical application, applied research and live cases so that students are better able to relate their MBA learning with real business practice (Donovan & Stewart-Smith, 2010). In light of this, they also recommended internships as valuable in this regard. Another suggestion is that MBA providers could better educate the business community on why an MBA is truly value for money (Donovan & Stewart-Smith, 2010).

Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) suggested that managers cannot be developed in a classroom, however, that practicing managers could profoundly improve their capabilities in class. They suggested that management education added little value for those people who did not practice management. Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) criticised the MBA for teaching students business functions rather than the practicalities of business administration. What this meant is that students become graduate specialists rather than collaborative managers (Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002).

Rowland and Hall (2011) suggested that there is a gulf between the expectation of students and business school employees with regard to the various approaches to learning. Given the diversity of the incumbents of the MBA, the requirement on educators was to vary their teaching methods; yet, this was not consistently achieved. Furthermore, those educators who had taught abroad were found to be better equipped at varying their teaching methods in line with the requirements of students (Rowland & Hall, 2011). What is clear from this research is that while employers, business schools and students alike see significant value in an MBA, the extent to which they perceive that value is materially different (Donovan & Stewart-Smith, 2010). The onus, it seems, is on the business schools to bridge the existing gap (Donovan & Stewart-Smith, 2010).

### 2.6.5 Admission standards into the MBA

Rowland and Hall (2011) suggested that the MBA is a post-experience programme and the incoming students should bear this in mind. They further suggested that the
experience of students ultimately affected the way in which subjects were taught and the overall culture of the programme.

This study will seek to understand if collaboration between business schools and organisations can bridge the gaps identified by Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010) and if so, to what extent. Furthermore, it will seek to understand which forms of collaboration will maximise the success of bridging these gaps.

Abdullah and Yee (2009) found that MBA graduates’ attributes and work values were extremely important criteria considered by the hiring organisations. The quality of graduates, in fact, depended largely on the effectiveness of the MBA programme and it was vital for business schools to develop MBA programmes which supported the needs of business, as this provides the foundation for business schools to review their admission criteria, reassess and realign their MBA programmes to meet the business needs of organisations and the employability of students (Abdullah & Yee, 2009).

2.7 Why choose the MBA?

Annesley, Hernandez, Morgan, Pescovitz, and Wright (2012) defined leadership as “…someone who leads, commands, or moves a group toward a goal.” They further suggested that the more contemporary views of leadership included concepts such as influencing, guiding and inspiring people. They suggested that leaders need to be adaptable and resilient in the face of rapid and relentless change. They further described a leader’s ability to listen and provide feedback, assimilate data and make informed decisions as being critical to succeeding in the evolving business environment. They felt that authenticity was critical to being a good leader and that leadership was a skill that could be learned.

In a report by Finweek and MBAconnect.net (2012), 1,575 graduates responded to a survey which sought to provide a holistic view of MBA students’ and graduates’ perceptions of the MBA qualification. Over 90% of the respondents indicated that the impact on their leadership abilities was positive as a result of the leadership skills taught in the MBA and the skills acquired during group work (Finweek & MBAconnect.net, 2012). According to Finweek and MBAconnect.net (2012) this was further enhanced by an increased level of self-awareness. Baruch (2009) suggested that MBA graduates performed better at their jobs as the MBA programme tended to enhance their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. However, Rubin and
Dierdorff (2011) suggested that the MBA as a training ground for leaders and not managers was only a half truth. They suggested that business schools often confused management with leadership and that they were in fact training competent managers rather than qualified leaders. In their view, certain management functions required competent leadership. They suggested that the leadership-versus-management rhetoric was merely a distraction from the real capabilities required by managers to do their jobs effectively.

Respondents also felt strongly that the MBA was worth what they had paid for it, with an average payback period on financial returns of 1.8 years. If non-financial returns were to be included, this payback time would be shorter (Finweek & MBAconnect.net, 2012).

While students viewed the MBA as having a positive impact on their leadership abilities, this study will seek to understand the collaborative ways in which students can take these skills back into the workplace to ensure that both the student and hiring organisations achieve the maximum benefits of the degree.

While the report suggested a strong positive impact on the lives of MBA graduates, it also highlighted a few concerns: there appears to be a ‘disconnect’ between work and studies (Finweek & MBAconnect.net, 2012). Approximately 68% of the students experienced a negative financial impact needing to cut back on lifestyle expenses, certainly, but more importantly, having to take vacation leave to study for the MBA (Finweek & MBAconnect.net, 2012). This invariably impacted on their personal lives and increased the stress levels of students (Finweek & MBAconnect.net, 2012). In this regard, this study will seek to understand the collaborative ways in which business schools and organisations can better support students during this stressful period with the view of reaping the benefits thereof during and post MBA.

Additionally, graduates felt that business schools were not efficient enough in keeping details and records of their alumni up-to-date (Finweek & MBAconnect.net, 2012). Furthermore, the report suggested that business schools were ineffective at helping graduates access MBA-level job opportunities. The general perception was that graduates would like business schools to have a stronger impact in their lives and that business schools were failing in this area of job-placement once students graduated (Finweek & MBAconnect.net, 2012). This study will seek to understand if collaboration can provide business schools with the necessary guidance for improving their service
offering to students and graduates and in turn, help themselves for improved after-delivery service. The post MBA support could prove to be an additional revenue generator which would, in turn, be to the benefit of the business school (Finweek & MBAconnect.net, 2012).

2.7.1 Organisations

According to Conger and Xin (2000), learning needs to be less functional and more strategic to be of greater benefit to organisations. They suggested that companies such as General Electric, Phillips, and Ernst and Young viewed executive education as a means to aligning their organisations to strategic objectives. Companies like these have reshaped the focus of executive education with the aim of uniting and equipping senior management to work together to change and drive organisations rather than focus on an individual’s education (Conger & Xin, 2000). Thus, education should be guided by three objectives: 1) to raise awareness and support for strategic change; 2) to facilitate organisational development; and 3) to ensure that organisations are able to achieve their changing strategic objectives by creating a pipeline of leadership talent (Conger & Xin, 2000). Carmichael and Sutherland (2005) reported that behavioural changes in students translated into improved business results.

Baruch (2009) suggested that companies which sponsor MBA students deliver a clear message to employees that it invests in its people. According to them, this premise holds true even if students leave the employ of the organisation on the completion of their studies. Baruch (2009) recommended that companies may need to investigate the real reasons for employees leaving on the completion of their studies as the lack of recognition and appreciation of their new skills may be a contributing factor.

Siebert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) suggested that there was a positive correlation between sponsorship and career advancement. This was confirmed by Kraimer, Siebert, Wayne, Liden, and Bravo (2011) who suggested that individuals who were presented with opportunities to learn new skills and were sponsored by senior members in the organisation, as compared to their counterparts who were not sponsored, had a better opportunity to increase the return on investment for both the organisation and themselves.
2.7.2 MBA graduates

Carmichael and Sutherland (2005) suggested that, for MBA graduates and current students, perceived benefits of the MBA are both financial and non-financial. They suggested that financial benefits include salary increases, secure employment, business networks, promotion and new career opportunities. They also suggested that non-financial benefits include self-confidence, a worldview and global insight, increased skill and knowledge, greater productivity and greater job satisfaction. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of students to ensure that they maximise their return from the MBA through adequate preparation and class participation as these commitments lead to behavioural changes which translate into improved business results (Carmichael & Sutherland, 2005). Baruch (2009) also supported the view that the MBA provided students with a valuable range of knowledge necessary to ensure they became more efficient and effective managers.

Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) argued that success in an MBA was wider than just career advancement. The MBA, they said, added increased qualitative improvements to a student’s career including confidence and career choice flexibility rather than quantitative improvements such as hierarchical advancement. Increased confidence was found to be the most common gauge by which students measure the effectiveness and success of an MBA. Furthermore, a larger array of career choices helped students build resilience in the current uncertain economic environment. Hay and Hodgkinson (2006, p. 120) simplified this by suggesting students, ironically, valued both the “stability and movement” that the qualification offered them.

Bensley, Crowea, Bernhardt, Buckner, and Allmana (2010, p. 91) defined critical thinking as “reflective thinking involved in the evaluation of evidence relevant to a claim so that a sound conclusion can be drawn from the evidence.” Glynn and Wood (2008) analysed six years of data to determine which business skills were most successfully developed in MBA students. Surveying MBA alumni to elicit their views, they found that critical thinking and problem solving were the most improved and developed skills in MBA graduates.

Kelan and Jones (2009) argued that the MBA broadened horizons and widened perspectives by exposing students to new experiences in a wide variety of contexts. They suggested that this was critical to developing a graduate’s career capital. Temtime and Mmereki (2011) supported this view by suggesting that students studied
an MBA to gain basic management skills, to develop their careers and to broaden their business insight.

Business schools, therefore, must consider MBA students as key stakeholders and should actively support them to achieve and maximise their educational benefits (Carmichael & Sutherland, 2005). Students and educators alike are encouraged to collaborate in order to determine which learning methods are most effective and if this learning can be maximised, it will lead to better returns for all parties (Carmichael & Sutherland, 2005).

Vazquez and Ruas (2012) suggested that students valued the integration of analytical-associative capability with a reflective capability as this enhances learning by allowing them to exploit mistakes and discoveries in the MBA educational context. For integration to happen they suggest that the learning process required students to make an effort in appreciating alternative interpretations (openness), to think outside their immediate daily routines (analysis and association), to find meanings in what they learn and how it relates to practice (reflection), to challenge and accept different views (tolerate differences) and to increase their social interactions (relational competences).

What the literature suggests is that there are several challenges and benefits to the MBA and as it relates to this study will be used as an entry point to opening a conversation with respondents and confirming the literature in this regard.

### 2.7.3 Business schools

Carruth and Carruth (2006) suggested that MBA programmes, while historically highly regarded by both the academic and business fields, are now being scrutinised and criticised for lack of relevance to the current business environment. They suggested that the perceived lack of relevance combined with increasing costs of the MBA have resulted in declining applications and enrolments as companies turn to in-house programmes and interventions. In-house programmes are not only more cost effective but also more relevant to the organisation’s needs (Carruth & Carruth, 2006). Business schools will not be viable in future if they fail to provide students with specialised knowledge, the skills with which to effectively use this knowledge and instil the key attributes of leadership including sound ethics, sound judgement, innovative thinking and insight (Carruth & Carruth, 2006). They intimated that it is thus critical that business schools, like businesses, reinvent themselves in accordance with the
changing global business environment a reinvention which must include understanding
the perspective of students and creating an environment in which students are
challenged to nurture their creativity so that they can be successful personally and at
work. This creativity is more likely to result in business success than following
prescribed steps to success (Carruth & Carruth, 2006).

In-house programmes, for a start provide a basis for presenting potential areas of
improved for the MBA. Again challenges facing the MBA will for a basis for a
conversation with respondents to determine whether collaboration between business
schools and businesses can potentially address some of these challenges.

2.8 Conclusion

Much of the literature and research to date relating to the MBA has been from the
perspective of students. This research seeks to support and build on existing theory by
investigating the views of business schools and business. The first step will be to
explore and confirm the existing literature, garnering an understanding of the current
views of both business schools and businesses with respect to the MBA programme.
The successes and failures of the MBA, as perceived by business schools and
organisations, will provide insight into whether or not the MBA still has a justifiable
place in the current business world, as well as insight into what is necessary to
heighten its impact.

Literature has suggested several circumstances and conditions under which adult
learning is optimised; however, there appears to be only isolated instances of success.
In particular, even though current press calls for more collaboration between business
schools and organisations, there has been little research on this subject as it applies to
the MBA. Research suggests that collaboration is a process that can empower people
and systems to change by getting people to work together (Winer & Ray, 1994). This
research will seek to understand if collaboration between business schools and
business can, in fact, act as the adhesive that holds the key stakeholders in the MBA—
business schools, organisations, and students—together. It will also seek to
understand if collaboration can piece together the isolated initiatives being carried out
by various parties and ensure that they are all striving toward the same common goal.
Finally, this research will attempt to understand how business schools and
organisations can enter into a collaborative relationship, and how this new relationship can be strengthened and maintained.

These missing links in literature have given rise to several research questions which are discussed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 suggests that very little research has been conducted concerning the notion of collaboration of organisations and business schools for maximising the impact of the MBA programme.

Consequently, this researcher will seek to better understand how collaboration can improve the impact of the MBA. The initial step is to unpack the MBA programme itself and confirm the theories in Chapter 2 regarding the successes and challenges faced by the stakeholders to the MBA programme. Once this has been established, the researcher will then explore the key elements required for an MBA programme to be impactful to both business and the students themselves.

Having established the base for an impactful MBA programme, the researcher will explore ways in which business schools and organisations can develop such collaborative relationships, investigating the requirement for such a relationship to exist.

Finally, the researcher will seek to understand what is required to ensure that this collaborative relationship will be maintained.

Essentially, the research will aim to understand what collaborative relationships currently exist between organisations and business schools, considering how the principles of these relationships can be paralleled with the MBA programme to achieve similar benefits in the MBA.

As such, business schools and organisations that employ and fund MBA students are considered stakeholders in the process.
3.2 The research questions

The research is explanatory in nature and seeks to answer the following research questions, answers for which will add value to the current body of literature:

**Research question 1:** What are the successes the MBA programme?

**Research question 2:** What are the challenges faced by the MBA programme?

**Research question 3:** What are the essential elements required for an MBA programme to be impactful?

**Research question 4:** How can business schools and organisations enter into a collaborative relationship to improve the impact of the MBA?

**Research question 5:** What elements are required for maintaining and strengthening a collaborative relationship between MBA stakeholders?
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1.1 Research method

The purpose of this study was to explore different ways in which collaboration between business schools and organisations could achieve maximum impact from an MBA programme for all invested in the MBA programme—business schools, students, and organisations. Collaboration to achieve the maximum output from an MBA programme was generally defined as ‘organisations and business schools working together to ensure that all parties, including students, maximise their respective benefits from investing in an MBA programme’. The study obtained the views of businesses and business schools as to how they might enter into a collaborative relationship and how such a relationship could be maintained.

Rossman and Rallis (2012, p. 4) suggested that qualitative research best fits research which seeks “to learn about some aspects of the social world and to generate new understandings that can then be used”. Based on this view, a qualitative research design suited this research as it sought to learn about the ways in which business schools, students and organisations collaborate, and then further understand which methods of collaboration could potentially be applied to the MBA programme. Qualitative research was also recommended for research “that elicits tacit knowledge and subjective understandings and interpretations” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 29) and this is precisely what this study aimed to accomplish. Scott Holste and Fields (2010) suggested that tacit knowledge is highly personal and difficult to capture. Tacit knowledge arises from an individual’s abilities, their developed skills, experiences, undocumented processes and gut-feelings (Scott Holste & Fields, 2010). In some settings, tacit knowledge may be the most useful as it goes beyond the obvious and the documented (Scott Holste & Fields, 2010). The aim of this research was to uncover knowledge which the subjects possessed but did not openly or readily disclose, yet which would likely be beneficial to better understand the collaboration process and if indeed the MBA become more impactful. Tapping into this tacit knowledge provided interesting insights of collaboration which could be beneficial to stakeholders in an MBA programme.

Furthermore, qualitative data provides rich and detailed data for research (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In this regard, this research required rich description in order to fully
understand the perspectives and needs of the various stakeholders and the manner in which they collaborated. Collaboration is a difficult concept to truly understand without a fuller view; this fuller view could only be achieved with data that had sufficient depth and detail. This sort of data could be extracted from qualitative data.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 54) suggested that “cross-sectional studies are used to explore macro-level change” and that the focus is on the context in which individuals exist rather than the individuals themselves. Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 123) added to this understanding of cross-sectional research by defining it as “the study of a particular topic at a particular time, i.e. a ‘snapshot’”. Both these definitions supported the design of the current study as it firstly sought to understand the context in which stakeholders in the MBA viewed the successes and failures of the MBA. Furthermore, due to the time constraints and limitations with regard to the research, a point in time study was most appropriate; hence, this research was a qualitative, cross-sectional study.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 24) noted that applied research “…is concerned with using the knowledge acquired through research to contribute directly to the understanding or resolution of a contemporary issue”. Rossman and Rallis (2012, p. 5) further elaborated on applied research by suggesting that “applied research aims to inform action and enhance decision making”. This research lent itself to an applied research approach as it used the knowledge acquired from understanding the different forms of collaboration between the relevant stakeholders and how they could potentially enhance the benefits of the MBA programme with the view of providing stakeholders with information that could inform their actions and decisions in this regard.

4.2 Research philosophy

Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 106) described ‘interpretivism’ as “a research philosophy which advocates the necessity to understand differences between humans in their role as social actors”. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) mentioned Immanuel Kant’s (1781) proposal that people view the world through more than just direct observation. Their interpretation of Kant’s proposal was that perceptions relate to our human interpretations of what we sense and not our senses alone and that our understanding of the world results from us thinking about our experiences and not our experiences alone (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).
The research sought to understand the ways in which business schools and organisations collaborate and how this could be applied to gain greater value from the MBA. It also sought to uncover the perceptions of the above-mentioned social actors and their thoughts and feelings pertaining to the MBA programme. Given that these social actors each perceived the MBA programme and the value derived from it quite differently, the research sought to understand these differences. As such, this research lent itself to an interpretive philosophy.

4.3 Research approach

Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 109) defined ‘induction’ as “a research approach which involves the development of theory as a result of analysing data already collected”. With inductive reasoning, research seeks to observe patterns or occurrences of particular phenomena which can then be investigated with the ultimate aim of developing conclusions or theories (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 109) further suggested that with an inductive approach the emphasis of the research “is on a close understanding of the research content” and that as the research progresses a more flexible structure will allow for changes in the research emphasis.

Since the research aimed to unearth an understanding of collaboration in the MBA between business schools and organisations, this phenomenon constitutes the more specific observations with which the researcher began, and the aim was to observe or unearth common patterns and occurrences around collaborations between these parties. The research further sought to gain deep insights and thus develop a deeper understanding of collaboration. As such, an inductive approach suited the research.

4.4 Type of research

Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 27) described contextual research as “describing the form or nature of what exists” and explanatory research as “examining the reasons for, or associations between, what exists”. Contextual research suited this study as the research first described the successes and failures of the MBA and then explored ways in which stakeholders might collaborate in the MBA. In addition to this, the research was explanatory as it examined how key stakeholders collaborated and how this could be applied to the MBA.
4.5 Research strategy

A flexible research strategy was followed and a naturalistic inquiry in the ‘real world’ was conducted (i.e. business schools which offer an MBA programme and organisations which fund MBA students) (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

4.6 Research process

According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), triangulation enhances the credibility of the research and ensures the validity of the data by applying a variety of methods in data collection. Furthermore, triangulation prevents a researcher from studying only a portion of the complexity that the research aims to unearth (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

In this regard, two distinct data sets were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. The results and major themes that arose from the interviews with organisations were validated in the interviews with business schools.

4.6.1 Semi-structured, in-depth interviews

Rossman and Rallis (2012) recommend that before deciding whether in-depth interviews are appropriate to the data collection process, certain rationale should be considered for interviewing. This rationale would include obtaining an understanding of individual perspectives to deepen understanding, to generate data which is rich and descriptive, and to obtain an understanding of the context (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). It is precisely this sort of data around collaboration and the MBA that this study sought to gather. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted the academic heads of each of the four major South Africa business schools offering an MBA programme, and the Human Resource directors from several multinational and international organisations which either employ or fund MBA students, as these people will offer the most valuable insights.

4.7 Scope

The scope of this research pertains to Learning and Development. The reason for this is that the research sought to explore collaboration in an attempt to optimise the transfer of learning in an MBA specifically in the context of academia to the individual and the business.
4.8 Population

Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 132) defined a population as “the complete set of group members”. Given that this study will focus on the views of business schools and organisations, the population for this study included business schools which offer an MBA programme, as well as businesses which employ full-time employees who are or have been students in an MBA programme.

4.9 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis was a stakeholder in the MBA programme. These stakeholders included, but are not limited to, business schools who offer an MBA programme and organisations that fund full-time employees in obtaining their MBA. An ‘organisation’ referred to a company which funded an employee, either fully or partially, in undertaking an MBA or employed an MBA graduate.

Students are not considered stakeholders in this research as previous studies have engaged MBA students, but not thoroughly considered the perspectives of the business schools or the businesses that are funding this higher education of employees. This research focused on the views of business schools and businesses that are involved in the MBA.

4.10 Sampling

4.10.1 Sampling technique

Since a complete list of business schools and organisations that employ MBA alumni and MBA students was not readily available, a non-probability sampling technique was employed. Purposive sampling is a technique where a researcher “is using their judgement to actively choose those who will be best able to help answer the research question and meet the objectives” (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 138). Purposive sampling allows the researcher the freedom to select individuals who are or have been involved in collaborative initiatives between business schools and organisations. This sample of individuals will be in a position to provide valuable input in terms of their experiences and thus the information solicited would be critically relevant in terms of answering the research questions. The four leading business schools in South African
were considered essential for the purposes of this research given their well establish history in offering an MBA and their excellent reputation in the business world. From a business perspective, a range of multinational and international companies were considered for their employment of and experience with MBAs as well as their relationships with business schools.

4.10.2 Sample size

There were two distinct groups who provided input into the research: academic directors at business schools running an MBA programme, and organisations who employ MBA alumni and students.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Human Resource directors of these companies, conducted either face to face or telephonically. Further to this, four in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the academic heads of each of the leading four business schools in South Africa.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggested that a sample size should provide sufficient variability of the phenomenon and sufficient depth for the study to be useful and, given the time and funding constraints, will afford the researcher sufficient time to conclude the research within a fair budget.

Ten interviews within organisations achieved both variability and depth, while ensuring that the time and funding constraints were adequately addressed. The four academic heads of the business schools provided sufficient depth and experienced views to be valuable to this research. This was considered to be illustrative and representative of the population, albeit not statistical, given that there are more organisations employing MBA graduates than business schools who offer the programme. Furthermore, ten organisations and four business schools ensured a diverse sample which provided variation in the data collected. Ultimately, this sample led to the surfacing of key themes and areas of interest and concern (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

4.11 Data analysis

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative data analysis involves refining data collected into a more manageable amount, preparing summaries and then identifying patterns and themes. The content analysis technique involves the manual or
automated coding of data including transcripts, documents or audio with the intention of identifying words which occur more frequently in the data. A narrative analysis technique allows respondents to re-live their experiences through the process of telling a story with the view to identifying the hidden meaning behind the story (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

This research used Atlas.ti which is data analysis software. Data was initially sorted into mini themes. These mini themes were then later grouped into major themes or constructs. The data collection and analysis was an evolving process; a constant comparative analysis method was adopted as early as the second interview where new data was compared with existing data. In this regard, data collected from each new interview was compared with data already collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Themes were changed and rearranged several times for appropriateness of classification. These themes or constructs formed the basis for Chapter 5 and the interpretation of the results.

4.12 Potential research limitations

The following aspects are potential limitations to the study:

Interviews were only conducted with the leading business schools in South Africa offering an MBA. To gain a wider and more in-depth view of the study, other business schools should be included. This limits the research generalisation, as there are numerous other schools, both accredited and non-accredited, which offer MBA programmes.

The intervention model that is presented may not be applicable or practicable across different industries. Another limitation, then, is that this study considers ‘business’ as a general field and doesn’t consider various and differing industries, for which the intervention model may not apply as readily.

Only business schools and organisations were interviewed. The other key stakeholders are current students and graduates of an MBA. As their perspectives may be different from those of the other two stakeholders, and yet were not sought for this particular study, the study is restricted.
4.13 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology that was used in this study. The most appropriate methodology for this research was considered to be qualitative as it tapped into the tacit knowledge of respondents to unearth interesting insights with regard to collaboration. Furthermore, qualitative data provided this research with rich description in order to fully understand the perspectives of the various stakeholders around collaboration. Given the time and cost constraints this research was a qualitative, cross sectional study. The research adopted an applied research approach. The research adopted an interpretive philosophy to understand and unpack the perceptions of the various respondents.

The research approach was inductive in nature as it sought to gain deep insights from business schools and businesses and thus develop a deeper understanding of collaboration. Contextual research suited this study as it first described the successes and challenges faced by the MBA and then explored ways in which they might collaborate to improve the programme’s impact. A flexible research strategy was followed and a naturalistic enquiry into the ‘real world’ was conducted.

The research compared the results of the two distinct data sets, namely business schools and organisations, to validate the results and major themes. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the academic heads of the four major business schools in South Africa and the Human Resource directors of ten multinational and international organisations who either employ or fund MBA students. The scope of this study pertained to Learning and Development. The population of this study was business schools who offered an MBA programme and organisations that employed or funded MBA students. In this regard a purposive sampling technique was adopted. The ten businesses and four business schools provided sufficient depth and variation in the data and surface several key themes. Data was analysed using Atlas.ti, a data analysis software. The identification of themes was an evolving and iterative process.

Limitations of the study include interviews only with the leading business schools in South Africa, the intervention model that is presented may not be applicable across industries, and the study only considered the views of business schools and organisations and did not considering the views of students who are another key stakeholder in the MBA.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative, cross-sectional study, beginning by outlining the sample demographics, the characteristics of the sample and then proceeding to detail the data analysis techniques. Finally, the results of the semi-structured, in-depth interviews are presented. The results are discussed and interpreted in Chapter 6.

The research adopted an interpretive philosophy to understand and unpack the perceptions of the various respondents. The research approach was inductive in nature and the type of research was contextual. A flexible research strategy was followed and a naturalistic enquiry into the ‘real world’ was conducted.

5.2 Sample demographics and characteristics of sample

This qualitative study explored how collaboration between business schools, students and organisations could maximise the impact of the MBA programme for all invested parties. Key stakeholders who were interviewed for this research were the four major business schools in South Africa who offer an MBA programme and ten international businesses across various sectors. The sampling method, as detailed in Chapter 4, was convenient and purposive. Details of all respondents have been kept confidential.

The academic directors of the four highest ranked and highly regarded South African business schools were interviewed. Table 1 represents the sample demographics while Table 2 provides the characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: Sample demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEWEE</th>
<th>NO. OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED</th>
<th>NO. OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisations</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTOR</td>
<td>NO. OF INTERVIEWS</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION OF COMPANIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aviation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Company 1 is a leading South African (SA) aviation company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment, Automotive &amp; Logistics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Company 3 is a multinational corporation, headquartered in South Africa and is a distributor of leading international brands, providing integrated rental, fleet management, product support and logistics solutions. Company 4 is a global logistics and supply chain leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Company 2 is one of the largest professional services companies in the world and a &quot;Big Four&quot; audit company. Company 5 is one of South Africa's largest banks. Company 6 is a leading asset financier in South Africa. Company 10 is one of South Africa's largest banks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMCG &amp; Retail</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Company 9 is a large clothing retail company in South Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTOR</td>
<td>NO. OF INTERVIEWS</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION OF COMPANIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Company 7 is a South African company specialising in information technology services and operating internationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Company 8 is an American multinational hardware and software corporation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>The four leading business schools are based in South Africa. Their specific locations the business schools have not been disclosed to maintain confidentiality.</td>
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</table>
For ease of reference, Table 3 provides details of the transcripts which have been attached in the appendices and where respondents have been quoted in Chapter 5. Each quote has been referenced accordingly. Where appropriate, transcripts have been edited to maintain the confidentiality of respondents.

**Table 3: Respondent and transcript references**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company 1</td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company 2</td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company 3</td>
<td>C3</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company 5</td>
<td>C5</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company 6</td>
<td>C6</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company 7</td>
<td>C7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company 8</td>
<td>C8</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company 9</td>
<td>C9</td>
<td>J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company 10</td>
<td>C10</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>BS1</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>BS2</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business school 4</td>
<td>BS4</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**5.3 Individual data analysis**

Data from each interview was analysed to identify the major themes and concepts. Since semi-structured interviews allow for both open and closed-ended questions, the various themes were grouped underneath the relevant research questions, where appropriate. The content of the interviews was analysed to identify the richness and depth in the data.

The interview questionnaire is attached in Appendix A. It was designed based on the interview guide of Clark (2006b). Pre-testing of the instrument involved mock interviews with colleagues and fellow MBA classmates to determine relevance of questions. The mock interview transcripts were discarded once the researcher felt that the questionnaire was adequately designed.
The views as expressed by the respondents and their actual words and points are presented in this chapter. Many views and themes were expressed only once; others emerged from more than one respondent. Certain themes appeared directly while others implied by respondents. Some respondents spoke readily and others required a bit of probing and prompting to explore their views and thoughts with greater depth.

Certain themes expressed by businesses featured strongly amongst the various respondents and provided support for the concepts and views expressed. This was then cross-checked against the views of the business schools. Some themes emerged consistently, while others highlighted a divergent gulf in the views of these two groups.

The semi-structured questions asked initially led to a general discussion surrounding the successes and shortcomings of the MBA, thereby confirming current literature and current views on the MBA. Then the discussions proceeded to explore greater understanding of the ways in which business schools and businesses collaborate, including a discussion around the business school support. Finally, respondents were asked their views on how the impact of the MBA could be improved for greater benefit of all three parties. The views have been classified into main themes, with sub-themes contributing to these main themes and these follow the research questions.

5.4 Research question 1: What are the successes of the MBA programme?

The interviews began broadly by seeking understanding of the opinions of respondents toward the successes of the MBA. Probing and prompting allowed the unpacking of reasons why an MBA programme was worth the investment and encouraged a dialogue with respondents. When questioned about the successes of MBA programmes, most respondents viewed success in relation to the student and how the MBA contributed to a student’s development. Company 9, in fact, commended MBAs quite highly: “I don’t think there are many weaknesses, far more strengths in the MBA than there are weaknesses” (line 3748).

There were a number of specific areas of success as agreed on by a range of respondents, successes which included broad exposure, the ability to manage complexity, critical thinking skills, leadership skills, preparation for general management, business knowledge, and finally, confidence and teamwork skills.
5.4.1 Broad exposure

Broad exposure was identified as the most common success of the MBA. Many respondents supported the view that an MBA gifted students with a broad view of business, as exposure that is crucially important to contemporary business. Broad exposure informed decision-making and ensured that decision-makers considered a variety of aspects of a business and our global society rather than just focusing on a single area of expertise. The broad exposure ranged from interacting and engaging with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, to being exposed to subjects and courses which were outside a student’s current field of expertise, to being exposed to global markets and countries beyond their local border.

Broad exposure, according to the business schools, is indeed a significant advantage to an MBA: “One is exposure to 80 different, very, very different diverse individuals in terms of their thinking, their work experience, their background, engaging, learning from them” (BS2, line 4979). Similarly, business school 3 underscored the fact that the MBAs have “been designed in such a way to teach you how to operate and make management decisions under pressure, how to view it through a multiple lens, not just a siloed kind of marketing or a finance lens, so you see it in a broader scope” (line 5365). As such, this school says, an MBA’s “impact is profound” (line 5364).

The businesses themselves offered many accolades to the MBA programmes in this regard. Company 10, for example, commented appreciatively: “I think the idea that candidates…get to do that overseas leg, which broadens their experience to beyond their own borders and their own boundaries, I think is also a very powerful experience because it exposes them to other economies, other industries and the markets or the countries that are typically chosen for travel are unlike ours, you know” (line 4145). Company 4 also appreciated the global aspect of the MBA: “They also give you a wider view of the business world, in other words, it’s the opposite of isolation. It is openness, understanding what goes on in different parts of the world. It gives you a strategic understanding of the global economic issues and powers” (line 1502).

Other companies appreciated the broad exposure to business concepts and management practices. Companies 1, 2 and 3, for example, all commented along this vein: “I just think that… an MBA gives an individual a broad knowledge of business, all right, it gives knowledge of factors, external or internal, that will and can affect how the business operates or the business world specifically” (C2, line 619). And “In terms of
the successes of the MBA, some of the things that we believe an MBA does very well for the students are obviously understanding business concepts, it gives its students excellent ability to do that” (C3, line 1024). And “So I think that firstly the value was that people acquired knowledge and had the opportunity to think more broadly outside of everything that they know, and I think that that was hugely helpful” (C1, line 177).

5.4.2 Ability to manage pressure

Many respondents felt that the MBA instilled in students the ability to manage pressure. Business schools specifically attempt to make MBA programmes challenging, ensuring that students learn to be resilient and learn how to navigate through complexity within the business environment. Pressure ranges from dealing with time pressures from balancing work, school and private lives, as well as dealing with copious volumes of information, researching, reading, and assimilating into intelligent and informed decision-making. Both parties suggested that students built up resilience during the MBA process and that this skill was appreciated in business.

The business believed that the pressure element was an essential component of the MBA curriculum by suggesting that “we’re bringing complexity into the two year programme because you have to juggle multiple things…like why we make your life so difficult, why do we make your deliverables so...It’s about teaching you those skills so that you can operate like that in the real world” (BS3, line 5367).

The business schools agreed on the value of an MBA enhancing students’ ability to manage under pressure, appreciating the time management skills. Company 3 applauded the MBA for delivering these skills: “we think it assists the students for the ability to cope under pressure and work under a heavy workload, particularly if they are currently working full time and studying part time” (line 1027). And Company 10 found value in the developed resilience, saying of their sponsored MBA student: “She’s not married but the demands that the MBA placed on her time, she still managed to not give up anything at work, not give up anything at church because she knew she had to just fit more into her day. And also what it teaches in terms of managing pressure and managing competing demands…I suppose the thing that comes out of that is the resilience” (line 4159).
5.4.3 Critical thinking

Critical thinking is essentially thinking carefully and reflectively in evaluating evidence about claims which are made, and drawing sound conclusions from the evidence (Bensley et al., 2010). Critical thinking was considered an increasingly important ability as a person moves higher up within an organisation. Given that organisations these days are becoming increasingly complex, the ability to think critically is undeniably an important element of mature management. In the current economic climate, managers are often required to sift through copious amounts of information and discern high quality information from irrelevant information, an essential skill for decision-making.

It was believed by both the business schools and the companies that the MBA programme did teach students essential critical thinking skills. In fact, business school MBA programmes deliberately aimed to foster critical thinking so that students develop the ability to review and analyse information and exercise discernment. Business held a similar view and found MBA students’ ability to think critically very useful in assisting in informed decisions.

According to the business schools, “An MBA is trying to teach a person to think critically and conceptually, because that’s what’s needed at the higher levels of management” (BS1, line 4577). Furthermore, the business schools recognise that “organisations are immensely complex these days, and everybody needs to be able to read quite sophisticated research, so if you’re studying a Masters and you do some research, it gives you a much better learning curve, to realise what is good research and what is bad research” (BS1, line 4586). Likewise, business schools 2 and 4 are also very intentional in their focus on the development of critical thinking. Business school 2 said, “So for me, from a programme director’s perspective, it is the changes...that have been made to our MBA programme, the greater infusion of critical thinking, the greater awareness of the impacts of decisions that individuals make to community, to shareholders, to the environment” (line 5003) and “a successful MBA programme develops a candidate that can formulate his argument, can take an argument apart, can critically argue the case that he’s about or take somebody else’s argument apart if he doesn’t agree with it” (BS4, line 5865).

Again, the business perspective was the same, immensely valuing the MBA’s ability to think critically, as “it will enable the participant to develop their critical analysis thinking skills, and I think that is very, that is very, very important, so that when you’re looking at
a picture, you're not just looking at, you know, the number of strokes the painter used, but to delve in a little bit deeper, all right, and give a broader overview…critical thinking is very, very important” (C2, line 621). Company 9 agreed: “I think the research capability that they bring is always very good, because they've developed that judgmental capability, the ability to research something that differentiates between what’s good, what’s bad, what works, what doesn’t work, and so we use them in those capacities” (line 3701). And again, “We believe it gives you the enhanced ability to write reports and assignments; it obviously improves your self-knowledge and it gives you structure to your thought processes” (C3, line 1035).

5.4.4 Leadership

Leadership is an essential component of any business and consequently, leadership development was regarded by both business schools and businesses as a key success of the MBA programme. Business schools sought to include leadership training as a key component of the MBA programme and had a broader view of fostering the leadership abilities in their students, attempting to go beyond just teaching about leadership by developing students' practical leadership skills.

Businesses also felt that MBA programmes give students the leadership exposure and development opportunities required to succeed in business. They also believed that the MBA programme was successful in helping students, who are technical experts, transition into business and build their leadership capabilities.

Business schools view leadership as an essential and critical component of the MBA programme. Business school 3 went right to the core of an MBA programme: “Remember, the whole idea of the MBA programme or any good MBA programme in this country or around the world is to make sure that we create the management and leadership pipeline” (line 5347). Business school 4 is adamant about the desire to train leaders: “I mean a successful programme will develop the leadership of a particular person, not merely teaching leadership but actually develop his leadership skills” (line 5859) and “I think part and parcel of what we’re doing is actually exposing students to leadership throughout the whole MBA. It’s not just a module that you do for six months and you’re done with it. The leadership programme is a continuous process that involves a fair amount of reflection from students” (line 5877).
Businesses agreed. Company 1 said, “I think that the value there obviously is that in what I was saying earlier, and that is that it is preparation for actually for leadership in a more general role in organisations” (line 81) and Company 5 said, “an MBA is able to bridge that gap between being a technical expert, and what is required of you as a leader or manager within an organisation” (line 1845).

5.4.5 Preparation for general management

The MBA is widely considered a general management degree and so another apparent success of the MBA is that it provides students with skills for becoming general managers within an organisation. Respondents believed that the MBA exposed students to the various aspects of business which are essential for a business’s success and that these skills give students a “toolkit” to become general managers. One respondent did caution, however, that teaching these disciplines did not necessarily increase a student’s management competency. Interestingly a weakness identified by this research relating to students not applying their skills contradicts this finding relating to students being prepared with the skills required for general management.

Business schools reported that many of their alumni eventually take up general management positions or similar positions from which they are capable of running entire business units. The MBA taught students the fundamentals of business necessary for becoming general managers.

The business schools felt that the MBA prepared students for general management in several ways: “it teaches integrative management and in the old days, it was called general management, but if you have any CEO has to be able to integrate all aspects of business, so it actually gives them the theoretical knowledge of probably all the aspects of business, from governance to finance, to operations, so I think that is an integrated way of thinking, the systems way of thinking” (BS1, line 4496). According to business school 3, “80% of our alumni grow into a general management role because that’s what we’re a school for, general management, running business units” (line 5377). Business school 4 felt the same: “Well, an MBA is an academic learning programme and successes of an MBA learning programme is developing generally a young to middle-aged managers and budding managers to hopefully manage the rest of their careers” (line 5845).
Businesses were also positive that a success of the MBA was that it prepared students for general management by suggesting that “the value of an MBA is very much related to individuals being exposed and prepared for the challenges that one finds particularly in a business and commerce environment at the level… at senior and executive level generally” (C1, line 73). And, “It gives you a toolkit to manage, to be a general manager, meaning it gives you a skill in analysing financial statements, if that’s not your background, you can start doing that” (C4, line 1520). Company 10 offered a very clear statement of MBA success in regard to management training: “I think that one of the critical things in a country like South Africa, where we need a new set of leaders who are much more diverse, to get into management positions. And MBA is very successful in teaching people the fundamentals of how to run, manage and grow a business, and I think it teaches them the fundamentals” (line 4136).

However, Company 4 went on to clarify with a word of caution: “To my view, this does not necessarily increase management competency” (line 1514).

5.4.6 Knowledge

The basic reason students study is to acquire knowledge. The imparting of knowledge, then, was regarded as yet another success of the MBA programme. Knowledge from the MBA is gained by students through various curriculum strategies: through formal class work and lectures, through classroom and out-of-classroom experiences, and through relationships developed with peers and faculty. Respondents felt that the MBA does give students knowledge of the business world and that obtaining such broad knowledge in an arena other than the MBA would be difficult. As such, the MBA provides an ideal platform for students seeking to increase their knowledge of the business world.

Business schools sees the imparting of knowledge, skills and relationships as undergirding the achievements of the MBA programme: “our graduates are being recognised for their quality, for the way they think, for their ability to contribute to institutions and add value to those institutions so we are particularly happy with that” (BS2, line 5065). Business school 3 acknowledged the same: “It’s about imparting knowledge, skills, relationship, exposing students to relationships and experiences that teach them how to deal with complexity because that’s the lay of the land” (line 5349).

Nearly all the businesses also applaud the merits of the MBA in this regard:
Company 1: “So I think that firstly the value was that people acquired knowledge” (line 177).

Company 2: “I just think that…an MBA gives an individual a broad knowledge of business, all right, it gives knowledge of factors, external or internal, that will and can affect how the business operates or the business world specifically” (line 619).

Company 3: “In terms of the successes of the MBA, some of the things that we believe an MBA does very well for the students is obviously understanding business concepts” (line 1024).

Company 4: “MBA gives you a proper understanding of the business landscape, and challenges of the day, in other words, the present” (line 1501).

Company 7: “So it's the knowledge that they gain, practical experience that they gain, and then their self-awareness as well” (line 2757).

Company 8: “That’s really valuable. I can’t see how a person would gain that type of knowledge and exposure in any other way” (line 3222).

5.4.7 Confidence and teamwork

Other successes as viewed by both business schools and business included confidence and teamwork. Respondents believed that the MBA developed in students a sense of confidence through exposure to group interactions and classroom presentations, and by pushing them outside their comfort zone. Further, the MBA fosters teamwork by requiring students to engage with their colleagues to maximise their learning from the MBA. The business schools pointed out that by interacting in teams, students are exposed to new ways of thinking which encourages them to appreciate different perspectives. The level of teamwork and the individuals with whom they interact guide students into maturation during their MBA studies.

Business schools agree that to “construct a report, to make the pitch or in the context of the classroom to be able to convince others, to be able to hold my own in terms of the positions that I took, so again, very kind of critical skills that were developed” (BS2, line 4987). And as explained before, a student is “exposed to 80 different, very, very different diverse individuals in terms of their thinking, their work experience, their background, engaging, learning from them” (BS2, line 4980).
This confidence was visible to businesses: “Those who have come out of it have come out a lot more confident, with that broader knowledge, able to see exactly where they want to take their career next” (C8, line 3216). Company 3 agreed: “I think the networking and team dynamics of the MBA students helps in terms of future business relationships. It does mature students to a larger extent, because you’re not just at a university, you’re obviously at business school and you’re interacting with business people, not fellow undergraduate students” (line 1030).

But company 9 issued a bit of a warning, as confidence and maturity are not necessarily a panacea: “You’re actually more mature than somebody who hasn’t gone through that experience, but that said, it’s not necessarily more valuable. They are mentally a lot more mature; that’s not necessarily that they’re a lot more valuable” (line 3721).

5.5 Research question 2: What are the challenges faced by the MBA programme?

The second research question, turning a corner from the successes of the MBA, concerns the challenges faced by the MBA. The challenges that have been highlighted indicate areas where the MBA is lacking; addressing these challenges will likely improve the impact of the MBA.

5.5.1 Academic versus practical

Arguably the biggest criticism levied against the MBA is that it is often far too academic, and as such, students are unable to adequately apply that which they have learned back at the work place. At this point, there was agreement amongst business that, in many instances, the MBA was too academic. To the contrary, though, business schools felt that they are teaching students very practically and that the methods of teaching employed, while imparting a theoretic base, seek to also embed the material learned through practical initiatives like case studies and real-life assignments.

Business unanimously believes that there is insufficient evidence to prove that the MBA material has any true and distinct benefit to either the student or the organisation, resulting from a lack of application back at the workplace.
In defence, business schools had several points to make about the MBA being too academic and not practical enough. According to business school 1, while that “possibly is true, and maybe the MBA could be more practical, I think on the other hand, the MBA is meant for people who will be strategic, conceptual thinkers, so you know, if they’re looking at direct, practical stuff, it depends what level you’re talking about” (line 4571). Business schools 3 and 4 imply that the application is the responsibility of the student: “It’s the way you take what you’ve learnt and apply it immediately so the learning becomes immediate, impactful and it becomes part of your mindset. It’s about giving you local and global best practice” (BS3 (line 5404). And Business school 4 said, “One way in which we, is to analyse case studies but the other way is actually going and applying the work in the workplace and come with recommendations for particular businesses that are part of a syndicate or whatever. So actually candidates can do it in real life. So yes, if it’s all just theoretical, there’s very little value added” (line 5922).

Businesses expressed disappointment over the practical application of an MBA’s theoretical learning. Company 2 said, point blank: “It was too theoretical, you know, versus, ja, the practicality side of things” (line 739). Company 3 agreed: “One of the other failings of the MBA is, sometimes it can be too academic and conceptual” (line 1103). As did company 5: “It’s still around the fact that when MBAs become too theoretical, when they become too academic, it becomes hugely problematic” (line 1864). And company 6: “So it becomes more or less an academic exercise and the fact that you've got an MBA, more than that we don't very often see the application” (line 2178).

Company 4 explained that often those students who are highly qualified academically do not always turn into astute business people: “The other thing is you find people who are very inclined to deal with stuff in an academic way...they like to look at stuff from a scientific, academic perspective. They will be good MBA students, because they like the academic environment, and they can write nice reports and dissertations and whatever... but those people who like to deal with the business world, or the world in terms of that academic orientation, are not necessarily good business people” (line 1541). Company 10 summed up the disappointment succinctly: “And I think that the failure, I can imagine, comes with the perception that the distance between what is taught in class and the application back at work...is too large” (line 4187).
5.5.2 MBA not a pre-requisite for employment

Interestingly, while an MBA qualification is highly regarded in the business world, it is not actually considered essential to business needs. Many companies suggested that an MBA is not a necessity for business, but rather a value-add. This calls into question the actual need and bottom-line purpose of the MBA given that businesses don’t actively recruit MBAs. With so few positions requiring an MBA, and businesses considering an MBA a somewhat advantageous but unnecessary degree, it is reasonable to question whether or not an MBA has a place in the current economical and global climate.

Companies quite openly revealed the following with regard to requiring an MBA when hiring an employee: “yes, there are people with MBAs in the management executive, but it is not a rule. And it’s not necessarily a requirement, and we just don’t have the vacancies or the opportunities” (C1, line 144). And, “There are a number of those people, and are busy or have been doing MBAs, but we don’t put a requirement on, to say we want to employ MBA students” (C4, line 1483). Company 6 admitted, “We haven’t had a single role profile where MBA is a required qualification. So MBAs seem to be positioned as icing on the top” (line 2708). And company 9 was quite blatant about the high cost to the company: “You get a very expensive personal experience and MBA together, and in a business like ours, we don’t actually recruit a lot of MBAs at senior levels, because of that. They’re just too out of the market” (line 3681).

5.5.3 Deterioration of the value of an MBA

With numerous educational institutions offering an MBA, the value of the MBA, it seems, has come into question. Business schools are making the distinction that accreditation is paramount to maintaining the standards of the qualification and that students who obtained the MBA qualification from a non-accredited school are less likely to have attained the skills necessary for true benefit to business. They also condemn the process of obtaining the MBA degree merely for the purposes of possessing a qualification rather than for personal growth and development.

Business concurred with this view that not all MBA programmes are alike and of equal standing. They were discerning about the more established and creditable institutions and felt that an MBA from educational institutions which were less reputable or with a shorter history of establishment lacked both quality and depth.
Business also believes that entry standards into the MBA programmes have been lowered and that the lesser experience of entering students affects their learning. Students who have had more experience understand and grasp concepts with more clarity and certainty, so from their view, the MBA adds little value to students who are inexperienced as those students are often too caught up in theory to excel in the real practicalities of real business.

Business schools acknowledge the qualitative difference of various schools, and one suggested the following: “I think that the accreditation of the MBA by country or by a system like the Amber or in America, the Association of Business School, yes, the American equivalent. Here, they credit the MBA, some are not accredited” (BS1, line 4512). Business school 3 stated quite matter-of-factly: “So the shortcomings would firstly be the choice of the wrong MBA programme because there are MBA programmes and there are MBA programmes” (line 5391). Recognising that some schools are undeniably better than others, business school 4 said, “They give a piece of paper that says MBA but it’s not worth the paper it’s printed on. So it depends on the quality of the programme that you engage in, whether you actually undergo that development that is possible in order to make an individual a better manager in his particular environment” (line 5851).

Businesses clearly accept what the business schools admit to: “I think you have MBAs and you have MBAs” (C3, line 1091). Company 9 said the same thing in different words: “you can probably do an MBA online these days, but since...unless you’ve got a good quality business school, like UCT or like Harvard, or NSEAD or Gibs and so on, you know, and as long as they’re maintaining a certain standard, I think you’re going to get a good quality MBA” (line 3904). The comment of company 4 strongly suggests that a student should select an MBA programme with great care: “business schools can make huge claims, because they might not be aligned to a reputable tertiary institution. Like, Gibs, Wits, University of Stellenbosch, those are reputable business schools, they are aligned to reputable institutions” (line 1606).

### 5.5.4 Inflated student expectations

Both business schools and companies alike believe that students’ expectations are overly inflated. In their view, students expect and even demand, on completing the MBA, better positions, higher pay and more opportunities. Business schools brought
into question the real reasons for students undertaking an MBA and suggested that the MBA is meant to grow an individual’s self-awareness and management abilities to benefit a business. Their belief was that students’ unrealistic demands were unfounded given that they had not actually delivered anything beneficial, and even more so in the current challenging global economic climate.

Business agreed as they admitted they were unable to meet some of the unrealistic demands of students, demands that came even before delivering quality work. Having the MBA certificate alone did not necessarily in their eyes qualify an individual for a higher position or elevated pay but rather, the outputs of that individual was what was required first. Another important point was that businesses themselves had to be quite realistic about their expectations. MBA students needed time to deliver, and to be expecting them to deliver on unrealistic challenges or even prior to completion of their MBA degrees was unrealistic.

Business schools made several astute points in regards to their awareness of students’ inflated expectations and demands: “The MBA is used as an entry point…into a management position. It no way endorses the capability of the individual. The individual has to show that he or she is capable once he or she gets into an organisation” (BS2, line 5215). Business school 3 cautioned, “You will be smarter, you will have more knowledge, experiences and relationships but the world doesn’t suddenly owe you because you’ve got an MBA programme. You have to work just as hard as everyone” (line 5439). And something similar from business school 4: “I think MBAs should, or MBA graduates can certainly be more modest. There’s no big achievement in doing an MBA. Yes, it is an achievement but it is not something that, you know the standard joke, how do you know somebody’s got an MBA? He tells you” (line 6173). Business schools clearly recognise that businesses don’t just want to hear that someone has an MBA, they want to see the difference this degree can and should make to their company.

Business school 3 however cautioned that business should consider that “People have been identified for career progression, people, especially in South Africa where 70 to 80% of the applicants are sponsored by their companies. So it’s very well for business to say to you students have grandiose expectations” (line 5429). Business school 3 also provided insight into why students may have unrealistic expectations by suggesting that “You know, I could, in fact I’ve been here for almost 11 years so I can tell you historically there were 60 to 70% increase in salary. There is still a significant
increase in salary for most graduates but that’s normal because, you know, if you come from a small company or you’re a self-employed individual, because you have different kinds of people in the room, so the management of expectations has to happen on all fronts” (line 5451).

Companies believe that MBA students must prove their degree, not merely speak of it and flaunt it. As company 3 has said, the “negativity that comes out of that is that when they come out, like you’ve said before, they have higher expectations and demand things, but yet they haven’t actually proven it, that they can do it” (line 1063). According to this company, an MBA student must deliver: “They haven’t proven that they have the ability to deliver on certain elements, yet their demands and expectations because they now have this Master’s, is, whether it’s in remuneration, whether it’s in positions, they expect to move quicker and they expect to be, well, they are probably more marketable, but, well, they haven’t delivered something in the business for us” (line 1069).

Companies believe that the onus resides with the students: “If you as a person see an MBA as a way to change your personality, and make you an MD of a company instantly, then it’s going to be a failure, but failure is not on the MBA side. The failure is on the expectation of the individual side” (C4, line 1585). Company 8 concurs: “I think there’s a lot of hype around an MBA and I think to a certain extent it does give a bit of false expectation of an employee. You know, it just gives a false sense of if you get an MBA the world is your oyster, so to speak” (line 3302). As does company 9: “There is this thing that MBAs are a bit pretentious and they come out with these high expectations, and so on, but I must be quick to say, you get very good MBAs, and you get very bad MBAs” (line 3902).

5.5.5 Integration of learnings from the MBA

Business schools often face the challenge of integrating the subjects learned on the MBA. Failing to link subjects perpetuates a ‘silo’ mentality, an undesirable mentality for both business schools and businesses. While business schools have attempted to integrate subjects and foster holistic thinking, they conceded that subject integration is not always easy. Businesses had a similar view in this regard.

Business schools understand the need for integration: “I think the traditional one has just been where we perpetuate the siloed way of thinking - here’s finance, here’s
marketing, here's economics and we don't necessarily show the linkage, you know, between all three areas and more" (BS2, line 5015). According to business school 4, “If you just teach a student some functional disciplines and you don’t get to a point where they actually start thinking about that in business these things are all integrated, where the level of what they learn is far too low, where you teach them and say you can solve a financial problem or this problem by applying certain models and not think about all the other issues involved, if you don’t bring that as part of an MBA then you don’t know about the risk side or the investor world” (line 5899).

Business, too, view integration as a significant challenge of MBA programmes: “there is often not integration between the different subjects in an MBA. And that remains a problem because business doesn't work like that” (C1, line 1872).

5.5.6 Students in a vacuum

Business suggested that students are isolated during their time of study and that they, the company, merely pay for students and off they go without any interaction. This lack of interaction and communication means that business does not see any benefit of their monetary investment during the study period, and students feel alone, unsupported. As the programme progresses, often this gap between employer and employee grows, invariably resulting in a loss to both parties. Business loses the student in whom they have invested, and students lose out on the opportunities to apply what they have learned for the organisations that funded them. Strained relationships, ill feelings and resentment often result from a process which was actually intended to add value to both the student and the business.

Companies see isolation as common and collaboration, its antithesis, as uncommon. According to company 1, “in a sense what happens is that the student is just left in a kind of a vacuum grappling with, you know, obviously very often quite a sort of a tough situation, because I mean a lot of them work as well” (line 465). Companies 10 and 6 were quite blatant that they just “pay” for the MBA: “We still find too often the distance between the employees on this fabulous intervention is so far from what the manager knows even... it typically ends with him or her signing off your leave, paying the bill and hoping to God that you are actually going to learn something” (line 4279). And even more straight forwardly, “Just from our perspective, we just pay” (C6, line 2496). Company 6 laments the lack of collaboration: “So when you say the collaboration
between business schools and business, I'm saying there isn't any, not formalised in the way that there is in a 'learnership' space. It's extremely poor between the learning provider, the organisation, and the learner” (line 2249).

Clearly there is work to be done.

5.6 Research question 3: What are the essential elements required for the MBA programme to be impactful?

The following section considered the key elements required for business and business schools to celebrate with certainty that an MBA has a beneficial impact in the business world. Application of skills was by far considered the most important aspect, primarily for students to cement their skills and acquire knowledge from the MBA. Business also felt that if students were to better apply their skills, the degree would show more benefit to the business.

Having discussed both the strengths and challenges faced by the MBA, and having highlighted the desire for MBA students to more practically apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge, business schools and businesses made several suggestions in regard to improving the impact of the MBA. These suggestions arose out their own experiences with regard to the MBA as well as existing management development programmes where business has already partnered with business schools on their own in-house programmes. Businesses believed that some of the thoughts put forward for in-house programmes could be easily replicated in the MBA environment. It is vital, for example, that business schools and businesses enter into more of a partnership arrangement. Engagement and commitment to these partnerships were also seen as key elements necessary for extracting that maximum benefits for all parties.

5.6.1 Application of skills

The application of skills garnered within an MBA programme is considered to be an absolute necessity in order to have an impact on business. Without the application of skills, respondents felt that the MBA becomes merely a ‘paper’ exercise. Business schools indicated that they do their best to ensure that students apply what they have learned at school through practical assignments. They conceded that if students cannot apply what they have learned to their own companies, then there truly is little value in the MBA. As such they feel that their programmes are in fact designed to ensure that
students apply material learned and consequently deliver value to the business during and after the MBA.

Business, too, craves delivery of results and action. In many in-house programmes, businesses get participants to deliver on projects and therefore feel that much more could be done in regard to the MBA. They would like to see students take more of an initiative in delivering projects and practical research at work as a benefit to the company. Businesses feel that by undertaking projects which are aligned with their studies, students can better understand the subject matter and more strongly grasp the concepts.

Business schools suggest bridging this gap by practical projects: “They will be changed...for instance, I was at UNISA before, and a lot of the companies used the MBAs to do an industry analysis, or do a company analysis of their own company” (BS1, line 4713). Business school 3 agreed: “It’s the way you take what you’ve learnt and apply it immediately so the learning becomes immediate, impactful and it becomes part of your mindset. It’s about giving your local and global best practice” (line 5404). All the business schools seemed to agree...it’s not just about learning, it’s about doing: “It’s not about you having to say... It’s what you demonstrate and what you do. And it’s not just about strategy because everybody wants to only be involved in strategy. Without the doing, without the operationalising, what happens to strategy? Okay, so it’s doing” (BS3, line 5781). And again, “So it’s really about broadening or raising and understanding the limitations of what one can do in a learning programme, taking a person that thinks he knows a lot and just pat him on the back and tell him that he knows a lot, I mean, that’s been the downfall of many programmes in the sense that they take high achievement as learning a couple of models and now you can do whatever you want to do” (BS4, line 5905).

Businesses question the MBA from a business perspective, not merely the student perspective: “Because typically what happens is...individuals find themselves being accepted onto an MBA programme, but in terms of their career path and their stepping stone, they’ve learnt all these skills, but they're not going to be able to implement them immediately, so, you know, was it the right decision from a business case perspective instead of the individual?” (C2, line 667). Another said this: “Personally I think the MBA is becoming very much like the BCom was five years ago, and I don't think we always see the academic learning applied in the business environment” (C6, line 2176). For company 7 as well, it’s not about the money but about reality: “I think for the student to
be able to be exposed in a real life situation, to the real life issues, and having to deal with people, and having to see what it's like on the ground, I just think you can't put a price on that” (line 3034).

As one company said without hesitation: “the reality is back in the boardroom” (C5, line 1925).

5.6.1.1 How to facilitate the application of skills?

The previous section clearly highlights that both business schools and business are on the exact same page with regard to hoping students apply their MBA skills, not only to benefit business but also to enrich the learning and understanding of students themselves. Business schools have suggested that students could possibly take on projects at work and provide recommendations to their respective companies in this regard. Further, they suggested that students use their assignments from the MBA and apply these to relevant companies and industries, transferring their learning experiences into real experiences.

Business schools appear to understand the value of this viable ‘action learning’: “I view action learning as applying your knowledge in the real life and we already do that as a major part, a distinguishing part of our MBA programme. Students get many assignments that they actually have to go and do and apply the knowledge in the real business world. So action learning is an important facet of business education where you not only apply the knowledge that you got through your case study but actually go to a live business and see the real live thing” (BS4, line 6038). Business school 1, for example, shared, “I did a project on small business, I analysed small businesses for...you know, and I gave advice on that, so if they then want to apply to be a small business advisor...they actually have a real project as well” (line 4783).

Companies are in strong support of ‘action learning’. Company 3 agreed that action learning is “where it becomes real for the business, and the student is getting the academic and the conceptual thinking...we do very much the action learning projects, and it is relevant to our business” (line 1120). Company 3 continued, “One of the elements is what we call an Action Learning Project where our strategy teams identify, depending on the number of people that we have, six to seven key strategic projects...And then those projects usually get implemented, or if further research is
Company 10 as well supported action learning: “And what we do in these programmes is we have action learning projects and USB-ED is particularly good because what they do is they have a coach who works with each of the action learning sets and guides the group from the conceptualisation of the concept, from testing if it's a good topic, from making sure that it’s a real business challenge, to making sure that the quality of the research is good, that the findings are credible, to making sure that the executive will support this project. Those are the things that make for good action learning projects” (line 4365).

5.6.2 Executive and line management involvement

Another key factor in ensuring that the MBA is impactful in business is executive and line management involvement. Respondents believe that executive and line management involvement is a major success factor in their in-house executive programmes, that without executive involvement the programmes would make significantly less of an impact.

Business schools acknowledge that companies invest large sums of money funding MBA students and therefore the MBA programme deserves more executive and line management attention. Executives need to have a plan for those ‘high flyers’ who are being funded for an MBA. In view of that, business schools suggested that the executive of an organisation needed to commit more than just monetary resources, but also time to listen to MBAs who could keep them updated on latest trends in the economy and industry.

Businesses cited several instances where the CEO and executive of the company were actively involved in their in-house programmes, encouraging and motivating participants to produce projects and presentations of a substantial quality. The executive, in most instances, provided strategic direction for participants by presenting them with the challenges faced by organisations. Participants then had to conduct research and present proposals addressing each issue. Whether new ideas and solutions were generated, or the executive found that students verified existing strategies, students benefited from applying their newly acquired knowledge, while the business benefited from implementable solutions or confirmation thereof.
Respondents felt that this sort of executive involvement in an MBA was paramount to ensuring that the programme was a success.

Business schools agreed that businesses have a responsibility beyond the monetary. “I do actually think that business could also accommodate MBAs better, because you find a lot of the MBAs leaving the place they worked at, and going somewhere else, because often a company hasn’t...said, look, here’s somebody who is ambitious, who actually has now done something” (BS1, line 4685). And a further suggestion, “They can come and do a presentation to the board. The board doesn’t need to have to accept it, but they hear the latest trends” (BS1, line 4718).

Companies agree, citing numerous situations of beneficial executive involvement in their in-house programmes:

Company 1: “There is strong guidance right from the CEO in terms of the direction that the group is taking” (line 251).

Company 1: “Our executives were very, very, very involved. Our CEO was… he came to literally every session” (line 503).

Company 3: “Our board and our strategy guys decide...And our board is divisional CEOs, so they look in their own business, what is a key project that they need to be researched” (line 1150).

Company 4: “I specifically was involved in designing the programme with Gibs and with our executive directors of the business, so we obtained the needs from the businesses, executive directors” (line 1648).

Company 4: “We also have a panel, our own panel that evaluates the people. It’s consisting of our directors and so on...” (line 1766).

Company 7: “We had other leaders and CEOs come in to expose them more to our own CEOs, and our own group executives, to challenge them with real life strategic project that they had to work on” (line 2850).

Company 7: “The whole executive can question, the whole panel can question the team, and then a decision is made there and then, what will happen with that proposal from that strategic challenge” (line 2936).
Coaching, or mentorship, was seen as a critical component in an MBA programme. But business schools felt that although there were resources available to students, students were frequently too caught up with their studies and work to give this aspect any attention. Yet businesses reported that for their in-house programmes, coaching and mentoring were an essential element of the journey. They suggested that having the right coach or mentor ensured that participants were engaged throughout the learning process. Likewise, business considers coaching and mentoring a key ingredient for extracting value from an MBA as coaches and mentors guide and grow students through their MBA experience and help them better integrate what has been learned back into the business environment. Both the mentor and mentee learn from each other. But commitment to the process is vital. A caution, however, is that the correct level of person as mentor or coach is essential to ensuring the success of the relationship. It was suggested, for example, that people who have completed an MBA could add significant value to the experiences of current MBA students.

Business schools realise that to some extent, students themselves need to take responsibility. As business school 3 said, “I’m not apportioning blame to the business but also the students because the students are, I’ve got to put my head down, I’ve got to pass this subject, I’m not interested in mentoring because that’s just a side kind of show, it’s a soft skill kind of thing, oh, it’s... But yet it’s such a critical part of this journey” (line 5685).

The response from companies shows just how critical they believe coaching to be. According to company 2, “business is driven by people, you need to coach them, this is how things are done. Coaching induction, taking them through a proper, on-boarding process and engaging with them from start to finish is very, very important” (line 714). Company 3 agreed: “I think business should be able to mentor, somebody who has been down the railroad line, who knows and can assist the students” (line 1366). And company 5 stressed the need for the proper individual to do the mentoring: “So you need quite a high level of individual that is able to mentor successfully really within an MBA” (line 1898). Finally, company 10 said, “They have a concept which they call Manager Led Learning and that’s also how you get your ROI. If... and this also answers your original question; so, as much as we engage with the business schools, we need to engage with our line managers who are the sending managers, who are
proving for you to go and study. So in that interaction there has to be a contract between you and your line manager or you and your mentor” (line 4258).

5.7 Research question 4: How can business schools and organisations enter into a collaborative relationship to improve the impact of the MBA?

Unfortunately, the general view appears to be that while there are isolated pockets of excellence, business schools and businesses do not work very well together on the MBA programme. This is in stark contrast to in-house programmes where business schools and businesses partner exceptionally well to ensure the programme’s success. The key factors that make the in-house programmes such a success are the establishment of a common understanding of the purpose of the programme, the contracting of the relationship, and then the assurance that a feedback mechanism exists. Business schools and business alike felt that these three areas were essential to finding common ground on the MBA as a start to extracting maximum benefit from the programme.

5.7.1 The purpose of the MBA

The general feel is that purpose of the MBA must be clarified and agreed upon upfront. While all parties have a conceptual view of the purpose of the MBA, given the evolution of the programme and the significant changes in the world’s economic climate, respondents presented a case for revisiting the purpose of the MBA and solidifying agreement on this. There was not a unified common agreement of the purpose of the MBA.

Business schools were of the view that the MBA was for relatively senior individuals who would be required to think strategically. They further suggested that business expectations upon MBA students needed to follow this as opposed to expecting the impossible from MBA students. Further to this, they suggested that if a company was to fund a student for an MBA programme, this should be part of their talent management strategy. The view was that by agreeing upon the purpose of the MBA upfront, businesses could in turn help manage the expectations of students.

Businesses cited examples of their in-house programmes where establishing a common purpose and goal upfront gave participants direction, yielding superior results. Once the purpose of the MBA is agreed upon, a business case would be used to
determine the appropriateness of a candidate’s enrolment. Business agreed that the MBA was aimed at more senior people in the organisation and that it provided a toolkit for becoming a better manager. One suggestion was that business schools would need to find a common factor amongst their many participating organisations in the MBA as the starting point in reaching some sort of common understanding on the purpose of the MBA.

Business felt that, just as with their in-house programmes, by being clear about the purpose of an MBA one could manage the expectations of all parties involved in an MBA. This agreement was paramount to the perceived success of an MBA programme.

According to business school 3, “the managing of expectations is not just the business school’s responsibility. In fact, to a large extent its management between the business and the individuals they nominate because it’s part of the talent pipeline” (line 5434). Business school 1 acknowledged the importance of a common understanding: “you have to actually ask the companies what they are wanting, because they might be asking the wrong person, if they’re asking the MBA for certain things” (line 4904). And “the MBA is meant for people who will be strategic, conceptual thinkers, so you know, if they’re looking at direct, practical stuff, it depends what level you’re talking about” (BS2, line 4572).

Companies see great value in being united with a common goal: “It was to do with the way that people came from various different parts of the organisation, had a common goal, and through the study process as well as all the action-learning projects etc that they were involved in, achieved superior relationships where possibly the relationships had not been that great before” (C1, line 186). Company 10 agreed: “So we need to be very clear what our strategic objectives are; we need to be explicit with the business schools to say, this is the problem that we want to solve” (line 4206).

Companies feel that a common goal and clear understanding of its purpose will add value to the MBA: “you’ve got to understand what the purpose of an MBA is. If you see that as the purpose, personality growth, giving you a toolbox to manage, then it’s not a failure” (C4, line 1583). Company 8 concurs: “So they would need to find the common factor across the various organisations that they can deliver on and then... for those organisations that have unique differences in what they want for their students or their employees, to get out of it how they would then incorporate it in such a way that each
individual still gets individual expectations that are met as well” (line 3423). Even company 2 sees value in mutual understanding: “The discussion around well, what are the expectations? Are we 100% clear that what you see the expectations to be is what it is that we’re actually expecting”? (line 920).

5.7.2 Contracting

Contracting is a key component to formalising the common goals, understanding the purpose of the MBA, and establishing the roles and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders—business schools, business and students.

Business schools felt that organisations should enter into a contract with students to formalise, upfront, the expectations of each party pertaining to the MBA. They believed that the contract should clarify each party’s roles and responsibilities in the MBA. A word of caution was noted, however, that this had been attempted before but that a lack of commitment was the downfall. Urgency and commitment are vital for adherence to and enforcement of the contract.

Business went a bit further by suggesting that the business school should be an integral part of this agreement, a belief stemming from their experiences with in-house programmes where such agreement was successful in guiding each party to deliver on the expectations and commitments. Business suggested a ‘memorandum of agreement’ or a ‘tripartite agreement’ to govern the relationship, expectations and deliverables. An interesting suggestion was made that a business school should contract with an organisation as a whole rather than with individual students. This sort of arrangement would be even more welcome where business has funded students for an MBA. Business felt that students would benefit in that a company’s commitment to the agreement would signal their intent and commitment to the future of the student. Business schools would also benefit from the active involvement and participation of business.

Business schools see the need for businesses to be committed and realistic: “I think it’s about... business themselves, they’ve got to have that tough discussion with individuals who come onto the programme and say we’re saying this to you because we believe in you, because we think you can... but we want you to be realistic” (BS3, line 5445). And again, “it’s not a case of not having done it because that was always the case but it’s
about, again, where's the urgency and the commitment and once you start it, you must see it through, all parties" (BS3, line 5715).

Companies supported this idea of a business school/business contract. “I think first and foremost when you're working with corporate clients, and you're actually contracting them as an organisation rather than just as an individual, it does make a difference, because, you know, if you've got, for example, 25 students from Nedbank, it is a sensible approach to actually understand the organisation in a much better way” (C5, line 1915). Company 6 agreed: “maybe not a contract, but maybe it's something like a memorandum of understanding, or you know, something along those lines where we can take it to the next level so that we're all on the same page, and we collaborate...But the taking the step further to the kinds of memos of understanding, or tripartite agreement, or meetings, would be more so if the organisation were actually funding” (line 2602).

Mutual understanding secured with a committed contract is fully supported by business: “So the business schools benefit from our active involvement, and that raises the bar for them. So we challenge them and we say we've come to you because we recognise your expertise; we recognise the network of faculty that you've got, and that's why we've come to you. And so we expect nothing less than your best effort” (C10, line 4326). Why? “It really sends a strong message and a very clear message that they are key talent within the organisation and the organisation takes great pride in helping them leverage their learning and taking their career to the next level so to speak” (C8, line 3248).

5.8 Research question 5: What elements are required to maintain a collaborative relationship in relation to the MBA?

Underpinning all the ideas thus far was the concept of partnering. Partnering was considered by both business and business schools as key to unlocking the potential of the MBA degree, the one element that appeared to be missing from all the unsuccessful initiatives employed by and for the MBA, and interestingly, the one element that appeared to be presented on the successful in-house programmes—interactive partnership. Two distinct partnerships were presented: 1) a partnership between business schools and organisations, and 2) a partnership between business schools themselves.
5.8.1 Business school-to-business partnerships

Both business schools and organisations expressed eager willingness to partner on the MBA. Business schools were open to a partnering relationship with business and began a transparent conversation on how the two institutions could collaborate on the MBA. Business schools believed that by creating a platform where various businesses and business schools could come together and discuss current issues could be the start of a partnership arrangement.

Businesses suggested that communication between business schools, students and organisations is critical to entering into a partnership. In their in-house programmes, this communication was frequent and transparent as business expressed their needs to business schools, which led to recommendations and programme preparation specifically to meet expressed business needs. The process is described as ‘iterative’. Business felt that business schools could be more active in fostering a partnership by involving the managers of students in the process. Business suggested that business school involve them in the conversation of the classroom as an open exchange of resources, expertise and knowledge would be desirable. By working together, ensuring that students’ learning is supported, identifying and addressing gaps in students’ learning and understanding in the MBA is enhanced. Business would also like more input into the curriculum of the MBA programme with the notion of making it a more relevant and impactful programme.

Business schools admitted the need for collaboration, for hearing from business as a starting point: “I’m just saying, it depends, we don’t have this clear-cut process here, but I’m sure if people came and said, we’d like somebody to do a project on this, we would certainly look at that” (BS1, line 4740). And “So I think it needs to start off with collaborations where we can have open, honest conversations” (BS2, line 5226). Business school 2 iterated, “So one is to create a common kind of conference where we can all kind of come together because we are all facing similar kinds of issues, so create a platform where we come and talk about those issues but not only talk for the sake of talking but then look at ways in which we can then work together with one voice and articulate that particular position to government in terms of helping shape and inform government strategy around education” (line 5265).

Business school 4 spoke of already being well on its way with partnerships: “We do assignments within companies and we do, and so we have a facilitator at the school
who works with that particular company, they arrange for a particular learning experience in that company....So there's an active interaction between business and the school" (line 5971). And “I mean investing in such cases that the business school and the business sits around the table and decides what is fundamental, what is in their mutual benefit and then come up with a proposal and do a proper costing for the proposal and then you can get to a point where you say okay this can work or this cannot work” (BS4, line 6142).

Business school 3 astutely referred to collaboration as ‘partnering for progress’: “if our reputation as the graduates who leave this place, if you're not making an impact, do you think your company's going to say okay, we'll send five more people to Gibs? So there’s a whole, it's a, there's a connectedness and that's... It's almost if you want, I like to think of it as partnering for progress” (line 5523).

Companies see great value in partnering with business schools, with communication as the key: “I honestly think if you can get that structure that we've just spoken about, because there you've got communication going between all three parties...we sit down with the advisors at Gibs, at the business school, and we decide on the modules that we want covered” (C2, line 904). “I think the closer the business school is to its business partners and clients, the closer, the better information the business can share with what they fitting into their strategy, or what they would be looking to take on” (C7, line 2812).

Company 8 also agreed, seeing the messages and expectations being more realistically conveyed through partnerships “The business school then needs to partner with the organisation in understanding that message also upfront and just reiterating part of that message at appropriate times throughout the period of study as well, and of course trying to assist the employee as much as possible in terms of taking what their expectations are and making them a bit more realistic throughout the study as well” (line 3386). And “the business school also needs to partner with the organisation and understand what it is that the organisation can offer to the student and the limitations of what we can offer to the student so that that also gets incorporated into the reality of what they deliver in the learning for the student as well” (C8, line 3404).

Company 6 values interaction: “So having your senior executives come and talk at an MBA programme I think it should be something that organisations could commit to, in the same way that having a Steve Bluen, the rock star of HR, come and share
knowledge with us would be great, other than paying…” (line 2554). Company 4 has already begun such discussion: “I discussed that with Gibs, and we came with a draft curriculum, that draft I’ve tested with the executives again, and then we have finalised the two curricula and one of the executive programmes, and we revamp that every year…we keep them focused on our needs because we design the curriculum with them, in regard to our needs” (line 1650). And company 9 as well is already succeeding through partnerships: “We’ve only had serious successes, it’s great, it’s been really good both ways, so Arkansas, both Arkansas and Harvard are very happy to send us people, and we’re very happy to host them, so it’s a great relationship, and we of course, at the same time, are getting straight from the MBA classes, we’re getting the latest in research and the latest research tools and methodologies and things that they’re learning, we’re getting access to, so you know, it’s a great win-win all around” (line 3813). And, “We in turn, are now sending some of our senior executives across to Arkansas to be trained there, in supply chain, so there’s a very good interaction” (C9, line 3853).

Company 10 summed it up quite succinctly: “The business school, for me, how I measure how good a relationship is, is when the business school knows my business inside out!” (line 4347).

5.8.2 Business school-to-business school partnership

The second type of partnership that emerged as valuable is partnerships between the business schools themselves. One business school in particular was quite keen that the only manner of tackling the issues facing businesses today is for business schools to unite in a common forum. They believe that by collaborating with other business schools, the impact of educational institutions would be much more dynamic. They called for openness and an alignment of thinking. Another business school, however, viewed themselves as a ‘silos’ and sought to maintain a competitive advantage over the others. This view presents a challenge facing the potential collaboration of business schools.

Business schools recognise this challenge: “I think one of the things that I struggle with which keeps coming back home is that we don’t do enough collaboration. You know, we’re very separate education institutions” (BS2, line 5223). But they are beginning to speak of the advantages of collaboration: “South Africa is a large country and the
continent is incredibly large so we shouldn’t necessarily see it as we’re in competition with each other for students. I think we all have offerings and these offerings are sometimes similar but different because of the nature of the institution and we will, you know, attract students that kind of align their thinking with the offerings that we have, so collaboration, definitely so, much more openness…I think we have like the South African Business Schools Association meetings, SABSA forum, but just to kind of use that in a much more dynamic way to allow us to kind of share some of the issues that we are facing and to jointly host things where we can be seen from, you know, by the public as coming together as educational institutions to address” (BS2, line 5228).

The talk is tentative at best, but at least it presents a beginning: “Also, you know, at this particular level over here, programme directors need to be able to kind of share more information about their programmes and see how we can learn, what kind of innovations we’re talking about on our programmes, does it make sense? Perhaps have, you know, students come up to your institution, any other incitation and spend some time. I mean, we’re talking about the economic hub of the continent in Johannesburg. How can we leverage that?” (BS2, line 5246).

5.8.3 Continuing the conversation

If a collaborative relationship is to be maintained, the conversation around the MBA would need to continue far beyond the current two or three years of study. Alumni and feedback were seen as important pillars in continuing the conversation.

5.8.3.1 Alumni

Alumni are critically important for the continuing success of any MBA programme. However, business schools and businesses both suggest that alumni are not being used effectively, truly a missed opportunity. Alumni could be the solution to many of the challenges faced by the MBA. Business schools ideally want more alumni involvement and suggest that contracting alumni should be from the beginning of the MBA and extend out beyond graduation. Business schools also felt that alumni would likely be good mentors to existing students as they themselves have been through the process of obtaining an MBA. Alumni input and feedback is also important for the business school to keep the MBA programme up-to-date and relevant to business. But business schools conceded that a deliberate plan was required for more alumni involvement.
Business also believes that MBA alumni were not adequately leveraged in the programme. They believed, based on their experiences with alumni in their own in-house programmes, that alumni could mentor existing students, not only to expedite their learning but also to manage expectations.

Any programme involving alumni, though, would require commitment and engagement so business schools must ensure that the enthusiasm levels of alumni were maintained. Unfortunately, alumni response rates are currently poor and commitment typically wanes during the process. This, then, presents a challenge. Business schools 1 and 2 admitted that this is “very hard, that’s what I’m trying to say, because they’re all...we’ve got an alumni office, but I’m saying, I’ve seen a couple. It’s usually a few very dedicated people that come in and help. You don’t get huge attendance, because business people are very busy, and obviously they’re also busy doing their own careers, their own lives” (BS1, line 4811). “I think one of the challenges for South African based institutions is kind of creating a greater alumni involvement and presence, you know, with the institutions...unlike in the US where alumni, they’ve certainly had a longer period of time where they’ve been able to kind of get this to where it is, alumni absolutely contribute in terms of their own time, contribute financially and they’re really passionate about their institutions” (BS2, line 5093).

Growing alumni loyalty will take some time and require a plan: “So on the front end, you know, students need to be told the engagement or the relationship with the institution doesn’t stop in ten months, 11 months of 24 months. It’s a longer kind of term engagement” (BS2, line 5153). And, “So I think there has to be a very deliberate kind of plan when it comes to that kind of engagement where alumni are told firstly, you know, it’s going to take ten, 20 hours spread out over, say, two or three months or six months, this is what it’s going to look like, so there are no surprises, you know, when it comes to that mentorship” (BS2, line 5124).

But according to business school 3, the value of alumni and alumni partnerships is undeniable: “You know, we can spend millions, as some other business schools do, on advertising their brand but who’s our best brand? You guys. You, a student in the work, as alumni back in the work, what you do and how you do it?” (line 5776). And, “A lot of our, like through the learning and development and HRDs in those companies, a lot of that has been referrals by our alumni so there’s a huge, it’s partnership” (line 5598).
Companies agreed: “We don't leverage our alumni in South Africa the way in which it is done in the States... in some ways it's about, you know, handing over the banner of the next level and generation of leadership, and students from one alumni to another” (C5, line 2033). But they were enthused with the idea of an ‘alumni buddy’ for mentoring: “I would say every MBA student should have an alumni buddy, because that person has been through the process, and they can save them so much time and pain” (C7, line 3049). “And so we have started to use the alumni of previous courses, bringing them back, and use those alumni as buddies into the teams, helping the teams prepare for the presentations that they give to the group executives, or just being involved” (C7, line 2957).

Company 8 agreed on the value of partnerships between alumni and current students: “I would make sure that the mentors are, for example, people who have completed, people who have taken huge learnings out of that process and people who have seen the benefits, even after it’s completed, the benefits of having gone through that process and completing” (line 3587).

5.8.3.2 Feedback

Once the purpose of the MBA is agreed upon and a contract or memorandum of understanding established, a feedback mechanism was considered essential for sustaining the process. Companies in particular wanted more feedback on the progress of their students. Business cited the need for feedback based on experiences from their in-house programmes and how feedback contributed to the programme’s success. Lack of feedback is regarded as a contributing factor of students feeling as though they are in a vacuum, of the increasing chasm between student and organisation. The expectation from business is that they would receive regular feedback from both business schools and students to ensure they are adequately aiding in the development of MBA students. Businesses, however, feel that business schools are not active enough in providing businesses with feedback on the MBA programme.

Business schools had little to say: “I think as a general thing, as you were saying, maybe there should be more contact with business” (BS1, line 4682).

Businesses made it clear they would appreciate more feedback: “I think where it sometimes falls down is, you don't get status updates, because, you know, you may agree that in a particular instance you want to assist this person to develop certain
skills, you agree on the MBA process, off you go, and when do you hear, so what is happening, how is this adding to your performance, your development and that type of thing...I would like to get status updates from the business school, via the student, obviously, and, in my mind, if I can see okay, they're now doing a module on XYZ, these are the two main outcomes they're focussing on…” (C2, line 754).

Company 3 agreed: “If we've sponsored someone to do an MBA I would expect feedback, I would expect to know the attending lecturers, their progress; I would expect to know how they're doing on the relevant... I would also need to have sessions with the individual to understand from their line manager, are they meeting business expectations, as well?” (line 1314). And “I would presume from the lecturers, or in a written format, like a report, you know, a report would be good to say okay, this person's done these modules, they've achieved these results; attendance, diligence, attitude” (C3, line 1346). Company 8 desired feedback as well: “I think it’s not so much the organisation giving feedback to the business schools as to what it is that they can offer but possibly the business school giving the organisation some guidance, some ideas as to what it is that they can do to improve and better cater for the students’ expectations as well” (line 3555).

5.9 Conclusion

By encoding data and summarising the major themes and constructs, the researcher has arrived at certain realisations. In Chapter 6, the information will be analysed in more depth by comparing the detailed and substantive results of Chapter 5 against the literature review of Chapter 2. This comparison will support literature, highlight further gaps in literature as well as identify future areas for research.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and evaluates the various themes and constructs that arose from Chapter 5 in context of the literature in Chapter 2, as well as the research questions posed in Chapter 3.

6.2 Research question 1: What are the successes the MBA programme?

Research question 1 sought to establish the key factors for success of the MBA programme as viewed by business schools and organisations. It was imperative to establish this at the outset and confirm the theory in Chapter 2, as this formed the basis for opening up a conversation with respondents.

Chapter 5 indicated several benefits of an MBA programme including broad exposure, ability to manage complexity, critical thinking skills, leadership skills, preparation for general management, acquired knowledge, increased confidence and teamwork. These results confirm and add to the literature surrounding the benefits of an MBA programme.

6.2.1 Broad exposure

*Finweek* and MBAconnect.net (2012, p. 84) suggested that broad exposure involves “exposure to many disciplines, and includes diverse course content.” The data discussed in Chapter 5 suggests that students who undertake an MBA are exposed to different people, cultures and experiences, giving students a broader perspective of business and society which ultimately leads to more informed decision-making. Further to this, the data suggests that this broader view and wider understanding of business outside their current narrower contexts meant that students adopted an expanded vision which afforded them more insight into both local and global business.

Business school respondents reiterated that the MBA was specifically designed to challenge students to make holistic decisions and to consider multiple disciplines and decision points in doing so. They also suggested that MBA students learned from the diversity of their programme’s colleagues who offered different perspectives, various backgrounds and unique experiences.
Business respondents agreed and further elaborated by suggesting that the MBA gave students a wider view of the business world, including a valuable global perspective. They agreed with business schools in suggesting that the MBA exposed students to various aspects of business, aspects which were wider than their current roles or contexts. Business respondents, too, valued MBA students’ broad exposure, suggesting that what this ultimately meant for business was improved results through a more holistic decision-making process.

This finding supports the views of Carmichael and Sutherland (2005), Kelan and Jones (2009) and Temtime and Mmereki (2011) who also suggested that the MBA gives students broad exposure, thereby adding to their career capital. Broad exposure is arguably the most celebrated success of the MBA.

6.2.2 Ability to manage pressure

*Finweek* and MBAconnect.net (2012) suggested that pressure and intensity on the MBA resulted from a steep work-load and that this high pressure and intense pace forced students to quickly learn coping skills.

Business school respondents suggested that the MBA programme is deliberately designed to stretch and extend students beyond their existing frame of reference. The results suggest that students are required to manage work and life in addition to delivering on assignments, classwork, papers and exams. Business schools view this as a very necessary component of the process which builds resilience in students, preparing them to face head-on the challenges of moving up the ranks in an organisation.

Business respondents whole-heartedly appreciated that the MBA programme taught students how to manage the pressures associated with balancing work and studies. They suggested that learning to deal with this pressure instilled a sense of resilience in students.

Carmichael and Sutherland (2005), in describing the non-financial benefits of the MBA, suggested that MBA students benefitted from an appreciable increase in productivity and job satisfaction. Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) further elaborated that the benefits of the MBA were wider than just career advancement and that the MBA helped build resilience in students. The results recorded in Chapter 5, relating to the MBA building
resilience in students and teaching them how to manage pressure, confirmed what was suggested by Carmichael and Sutherland (2005) and Hay and Hodgkinson (2006).

Students who have been on the MBA are clearly better able to manage pressure and quickly develop resilience—undeniable benefits of the MBA.

6.2.3 Critical thinking

As defined by Bensley et al. (2010) critical thinking is “reflective thinking involved in the evaluation of evidence relevant to a claim so that a sound conclusion can be drawn from the evidence.”

Business school respondents viewed information in a globalised business world as both voluminous and inconsistent. They made mention of managers having to sift through copious amounts of data requiring discerning skills to ascertain what is relevant and important and what is not. They explained that information must be assessed critically and that this is especially important when resultant decisions have a direct and vital impact on the future of a business. The data suggested that overlooking key trends and missing potentially profitable opportunities could certainly be detrimental to a business’s future. The views of business school respondents, as discussed in Chapter 5, was that the MBA is designed to teach students applicable skills, firstly the ability to discern whether the source of information is reliable and verifiable, and secondly, how to assess the validity, accuracy and completeness of the information. Once students are able to verify this, the MBA then instructs students in analysing data by asking pertinent questions.

Business respondents agreed by suggesting that part of this process entails being able to decipher information and discern whether or not a source is reliable. They mentioned that being able to think critically and resolve daily business issues are essential to the success of a business. The data reveals that business respondents added to the notion of critical thinking by suggesting that the MBA helped students structure their thinking.

Given the critical nature of decision making, we can understand why this is vitally necessary and why this is then regarded as such a laudable success of the MBA.

This finding adds to the findings of Glynn and Wood (2008) who suggested that critical thinking and problem solving skills were the most notably improved and developed skills from the MBA. Glynn and Wood (2008), however, surveyed students, while this
study interviewed business schools and businesses, and the results were congruent. Indeed, critical thinking skills and problems solving skills are regarded as an important benefit of the MBA.

6.2.4 Leadership

Annesley et al. (2012, p. 667) described a leader as “…someone who leads, commands, or moves a group toward a goal.” They further suggested that the more contemporary views of leadership included concepts such as influencing, guiding and inspiring people. They explained that business leadership has long been a topic of discussion and contention. According to Annesley et al. (2012), in every aspect of business, the style, quality and implementation of leadership frequently defines the success and failure of a business. Understanding the basics styles and theories of leadership is important; however, actually developing an individual’s leadership competencies and skills is the ultimate end goal (Annesley et al., 2012).

The data as discussed in Chapter 5 suggests that business schools viewed leadership development as an essential and critical part of the MBA curriculum and educational journey. Business school respondents felt strongly that the MBA programme is meant to create leaders and managers and in order to do so successfully, MBA programmes must actually develop students’ leadership competencies. The data suggests two things pertaining to leadership: 1) that the leadership theme runs throughout the programme, and 2) that a key component for developing leadership competencies is reflection.

Leadership is what business respondents confirmed as being a true success of the MBA. In fact, business school respondents also suggested that the MBA exposes people who have specialised somewhat narrowly to the broader scope of leadership in business, transitioning them from specialists into worthy leaders.

The views of business schools and organisations in this study corroborate the results of the research conducted by Finweek and MBAconnect.net (2012) which investigated the perceptions of MBA students and graduates. According to their research, over 90% of the students perceived the MBA to positively influence their leadership abilities. The results of this research also confirmed the views of Annesley et al. (2012), in that while understanding theories surrounding leadership is important, actually developing and reflecting on those competencies is critical to becoming a competent leader.
The evidence of the *Finweek* and MBAconnect.net (2012) study, supported by the results of this study, suggests that the views of Rubin and Dierdorff (2011) may not necessarily hold true. This evidence suggests that the ‘half truths’ of Rubin and Dierdorff (2011), arguing the MBA teaches ‘management skills’ rather than ‘leadership skills’, may be misplaced and that the MBA does in fact teach both skills.

### 6.2.5 Preparation for general management

Nag, Hambrick, and Chen (2007, p. 944) suggested that the field of strategic management “deals with the major intended and emergent initiatives taken by general managers on behalf of owners, involving utilization of resources, to enhance the performance of firms in their external environments.”

Business schools respondents, as evidenced in Chapter 5, believed that the MBA is a general management degree to equip students with the tools and skills required to manage an entire business or a business unit. The research suggests that the MBA exposes students to all aspects of business, including sales and marketing, human resource management and finance. Teaching students best practice in general management allows students to progress through their careers until they are equipped to deal with the various challenges of general management, and according to business school respondents, many MBA alumni eventually assume general management roles.

Business respondents agreed with business schools suggesting that the MBA exposed students to the challenges of business at very senior levels and that it provided students with a toolkit for becoming a general manager. They suggested that without the MBA it is unlikely that students could obtain this kind of exposure in their current jobs. Building these essential business skills is undoubtedly a key success of the MBA. The data suggests that the MBA is successful in teaching students how to run, manage and grow a business. The data ties in nicely with the definition of strategic management as described by Nag et al. (2007) as what it suggests is that students are taught to utilise the resources of their firms to enhance the performance of their organisations.

By acquiring these general management skills, graduates are overall more strategic and less pointedly functional within their organisations. They are able to drive change and align and implement the organisation’s strategic objectives as they grasp how all the different components of business fit together to impact business. This study
supported the views of Conger and Xin (2000) who suggested that learning that is more strategic and less functional is of greater benefit to an organisation. It also supported the research of Temtime and Mmereki (2011) where the perception of students was that the MBA taught them valuable management skills.

6.2.6 Knowledge

Faucher, Everett, and Lawson (2008) defined knowledge as “a meaningful and procedural abstraction of existence. It has a purpose and is a procedural understanding of existence.”

The data as discussed in Chapter 5 suggests that as an academic programme, increasing the knowledge base of students is an important component of the MBA. Business school respondents suggested that one clear success of the MBA is that it depends upon multiple mediums to impart knowledge to students, ranging from formal classroom lectures, to experiential learning exercises and even through the interaction and engagement with fellow students and lecturers within the programme. They believed that the recognition from business was evidence enough of the MBA successfully imparting knowledge to students.

Intriguingly, as discussed in Chapter 5, business resoundingly agreed with the MBA that the MBA helped student understand the context of business and in doing so imparted sound knowledge to them. They almost unanimously agreed that the MBA is a versatile programme, an excellent source of knowledge for any student desiring to expand his view of business.

This study confirmed the literature by Baruch (2009) and Carmichael and Sutherland (2005) who suggested that the MBA was successful in imparting various types of knowledge and that students, equipped with this knowledge, could potentially become more efficient and effective managers.

6.2.7 Confidence and teamwork

Chuanga, Chengb, Changa, and Chianga (2012) suggested that self-confidence played an important role in decision making and that people with higher self-confidence were more comfortable with their decisions.
Business school and business respondents both agreed that another key component of a prestigious MBA programme is that it instils a sense of confidence and self-belief. Both parties felt that MBA students under-go several self-awareness initiatives in the MBA that force them out of their comfort zones through the process. Business schools in particular suggested that the MBA challenges students to interact, to debate, and to articulate their views and opinions to their peers. The data suggests that this social interaction, combined with newly acquired intellectualism, fosters in many students a heightened sense of self-confidence.

Erhardt (2011) views teams as ‘knowledge integrating mechanisms’, explaining that teamwork requires knowledge sharing, knowledge creation and on-going learning.

Business school respondents viewed a valuable MBA programme as one which requires extensive group and syndicate work as students are required to engage and interact with their peers in the sharing of knowledge and the creation of knowledge. This, they believed, aided their on-going learning through the MBA process.

Interestingly, business respondents also suggested that learning to work in a team has many guises, from learning to curb one’s extroverted and domineering tendencies, to becoming more assertive and outspoken in the case of introverted personalities. They believed that delegation skills and involvement in ‘actioning’ projects are also key learning components for delivering teamwork timeously and of an acceptable quality. The data suggests that all of these skills learned in the MBA are transferable to work, immediately applicable into an organisation.

Both Carmichael and Sutherland (2005) and Finweek and MBAconnect.net (2012) saw confidence and teamwork as important successes of the MBA, and this study reaffirms their findings through the perspective of the business schools and business.

6.2.8 Conclusion

This study confirms that the MBA has many significant successes while playing a prominent role in both management and leadership development. In fact, this research adds to current literature by enlisting the perspective of business schools in terms of what they intended to incorporate into an MBA programme and then receiving confirmation from businesses that these successes were indeed valid and recognisable in students coming through an MBA programme. Given the significant successes of the
MBA, the research validates the urgency for tackling the challenges of the programme to ensure that business and students alike enjoy more of these successes. It also highlights the need for business schools, businesses and students to celebrate the successes of the MBA collectively and openly.

6.3 Research question 2: What are the challenges faced by the MBA?

Research question 2, like research question 1, seeks to support and confirm literature concerning the MBA, but very importantly, from the perspective of business schools and organisations. Following on from the successes of the MBA, the second research question examines the perceptions of business schools and organisations with regard the challenges facing the MBA. Understanding what the issues are gives the researcher a view as to the enormity of such challenges and perhaps potential avenues for resolutions.

Some of the challenges facing the MBA include the notion of the programme being too academic, the MBA degree not really being a pre-requisite for employment, the diminishing of the original value of the MBA, inflated student expectations, weak integration of the subjects within the MBA and students learning in a theoretical vacuum.

6.3.1 Academic versus practical

Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) suggested that the MBA teaches students about business functions rather than the practicalities of business administration. They suggested that management education is useless to students who could not practice what they learned, while for those students who could actually practice what they learned, the classroom could significantly improve their skills.

The data suggests that the strongest criticism of the MBA is that it appears to be far too academic and business is not seeing students apply practically that which they have learned from the programme back to the workplace.

Business school respondents, on the other hand, felt justified in their teaching methods and have quoted several instances of giving their students practical first-hand experience relating to the subject being taught. The examples as provided by business school respondents included unpacking real-life case studies, inviting industry experts
and practitioners to present to classes, and field trips which expose students to the topic being presented.

Business respondents vehemently disagreed with business schools, as evidenced in the discussion in Chapter 5, suggesting that the MBA was far too academic and that students were not applying their newly learned skills back to the workplace. The data suggests that for as long as students are unable or do not apply what they have learned at school, business will continue to feel that the MBA is far too academic, rendering little value to the organisation.

What is clear from the data and discussions with business schools and business is that there is an unfortunate disconnect between the two parties. In their own way, each party, business schools and businesses, are trying to get students to apply their learnings, but with varied success. The question then is: what is lacking, that could potentially bring the parties together, given that they have a common goal?

This research confirms the views of Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010) and Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) who argued that the MBA curriculum should encompass more opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, real opportunities to more practically demonstrate what they have learned. This study adds to the research by Rowland and Hall (2011) who suggested that there was a gulf between students’ expectations of learning and educators’ views of learning. This research adds to literature by also indicating that there also appears to be a gulf between organisations’ views of learning and the business schools’ views of learning—and potentially the outcomes thereof.

The results of section 6.4.1, which discussed the actual application of acquired skills into the workplace, address some of these challenges.

### 6.3.2 MBA not a pre-requisite for employment

A very intriguing point raised by the data is that while the MBA qualification is deemed important from a personal perspective and highly esteemed in the business world, it is seldom, in fact, a pre-requisite for employment.

The data suggests that business schools did not even consider the fact that an MBA is not necessarily a pre-requisite for employment.
Business respondents were very candid about this, suggesting that very few jobs actually require a current or prospective employee to hold an MBA qualification and even then, it is regarded as more of a ‘value-added’ qualification than an essential qualification.

One would then question, given that business has such a watered down view of the degree, whether it has a place in the current business world. The results of the data analysis seems to raise a paradox of contradictions: 1) that business widely accepts the numerous benefits as discussed in the previous section, yet ascribes such little value to the degree; and 2) that students’ expectations, as discussed in section 6.3.4, are so inflated while yet the MBA is seen merely as a value-add by employers and not an essential job qualification.

While unpacking the deeper reasons for this minimalist view of the value of the MBA is beyond the scope of this research, it provides the researcher with vital clues as to why stand-alone initiatives have failed to impact business or business schools. The long and short of it is whether MBA students and the MBA programme are getting enough attention from business and whether business schools need to look at repositioning and repackaging the MBA programme to be more appealing to business.

This finding sheds new light on what level of support may be required for the MBA to be truly impactful to business, as discussed in section 6.4. Further, it suggests that the purpose and values of the MBA need to be revisited, discussed in sections 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 respectively.

6.3.3 Deterioration of the value of the MBA

Both Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) and Rowland and Hall (2011) suggested that the value students acquired from the MBA was either greatly enhanced or stifled dependent on their level of experience coming into the programme. The more experience that students had, the more they could relate to their studies and the more value they acquired from studies. This is what the data from this research confirms.

The results of this research highlighted that the value of the MBA, in the eyes of business, is being discredited for two primary reasons: 1) a growing number of institutions offering MBAs who lack the necessary accreditation to ensure the
standards of the programme are upheld; and 2) an increase in the number of less-experienced students admitted into the programme.

Business school respondents condemned the growing number of institutions offering an MBA without the necessary accreditation. They acknowledged that the quality of the MBA qualification varied from school to school and that students needed to be discerning in their choice of school. The data suggests that institutional and programme accreditation is key to maintaining the exclusive standards of the MBA and is therefore crucial in preventing perceptions of further deterioration of the MBA.

Business respondents also agreed that there is a distinction between business schools and the quality of their respective MBA programmes. They, too, believed that MBA programmes offered by institutions which were less reputable and had a shorter history lacked the depth and high educational standards necessary to have a meaningful impact on students and thus on business.

The data also revealed that as a consequence of the larger number of MBA programmes lacking accreditation, the lower entry requirements of these programmes were considered a second reason for the deteriorating value of an MBA in the eyes of business.

Business school respondents suggested that selection and admission criteria into their MBA programmes was of the highest standards. The data reveals that business schools take due care and pride in screening applicants and generally have a fairly rigorous admission process which filters out weaker candidates. The data only confirms that the leading business schools do indeed conform to the expectations, rules and regulations concerning accreditation.

However, business respondents felt that the entrance standards in the MBA are continuously, even subtly, being lowered. They believed that students with lesser experience were being admitted into the MBA and that this was negatively impacting on the learnings of students and the educational level and quality of class discussions.

This study corroborates the views of Rowland and Hall (2011) who suggested that the quality of an MBA programme was affected by the experience of students which it admitted. The experience of students affected the quality of discussions in classes as well as the way in which the lesson was delivered. For example, students who are more experienced are able to draw on their experiences to readily link theory to
practice. What they learn in the MBA is of more relevance to them given their previous experiences. Experienced students appear to find more content relevance with their work and what they are learning on the MBA. This concurs with the research of Lindel and Stenstrom (2005) who suggested that content relevance occurs when what is being learned at school is directly linked to work.

6.3.4 Inflated student expectations

Evans, Honkapohja, and Mitra (2012) suggested that expectations are formed based on what people learn from their experiences.

The results of the research revealed that business schools and business alike unanimously agree that students and graduates on the MBA have over-inflated expectations on completion of the MBA, expectations which range from unrealistic salary requests to unreasonable demands for more senior roles within the organisation.

Business school respondents suggested that the MBA qualification should be viewed as one which provides the skills and exposure necessary for that person to become a more effective manager and leader. They viewed students’ expectations as unrealistic and called for students to acknowledge that delivery of results is what is desired for them to achieve greater salaries or enjoy promotion in an organisation.

They also provided valuable clues as to where inflated expectation arise by suggesting that historically graduates enjoyed a 60% to 70% increase in their salary, in line with how expectations are formed according to Evans et al. (2012). This point is congruent with the findings of Finweek and MBAconnect.net (2012) where respondents believed that the MBA was worth what they had paid for it and that the payback period was fairly short, suggesting relatively quick financial gain for students.

Business respondents too clearly articulated that promotions and monetary gain and senior positions follow only after there has been a delivery of work by graduates. The data suggests that just holding an MBA certificate, in itself, does not qualify graduates for higher salaries or more senior roles. Interestingly, business respondents suggest that there is a need for such inflated student expectations to be addressed at the beginning of the qualification and that business schools must play a greater role in curbing these unrealistic student expectations.
The data suggests that both business schools and business have a shared responsibility in guiding students by unpacking the real advantages of obtaining an MBA and realistic expectations of each party.

Business schools make a further and more interesting point in that business should also reassess and realign its own expectations of MBA students. Their views are if a business is funding a student on an MBA, they should have a clear and structured plan for that individual's career growth within the organisation. They feel that business should only fund a student if it is expected that the person will be aligned with the organisational roles that will ensure growth and profitable application of MBA knowledge into the business.

The data revealed that business should acknowledge that many graduates mature through the MBA process and as such often outgrow their current roles. Further to this, business schools caution business in suggesting that they should be aware that it is unrealistic to expect a student to deliver on work or projects which are beyond their current expertise or control. The data reveals that the MBA qualification is a process rather than a destination and the learning continues even after the formal studies are over.

What all parties do agree on is that someone who has the qualification and who can practically apply what has been learned is immensely valuable to an organisation. This, then—practical application—is the message that should ideally be communicated to prospective and current students on an MBA; this ties in with section 6.3.1 relating the need for practical application of the MBA. Both business schools and business have a common goal in that they crave practical application of skills. But the data reveals that students expect monetary and career gains on qualification of the MBA which, according to business schools and business, will only materialise over time as students apply practically that which they have learned. What the research has uncovered is a common goal for all three parties, and if a focussed and deliberate plan can be implemented to ensure students apply what they learn, there is an argument that their expectations may materialise after all.

This study has revealed only one part of student expectations as viewed by organisations and business schools, namely monetary gains and career advancement. It has not confirmed the views of Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) who suggested that students also valued both stability and movement.
6.3.5 Integration of learnings from the MBA

Vazquez and Ruas (2012) viewed integration wider than just the various courses on the MBA. They suggested that valued integration required business schools to create an environment where students could reflect on their learnings from the MBA, an environment especially for deliberating on mistakes and new discoveries. They suggested that integration of the MBA learnings would be enhanced if students were more open to new ways of thinking, set time aside from their daily routines to think about how school related to work, assigned new meanings to learnings and accepted different viewpoints appreciatively (Vazquez & Ruas, 2012).

Business school respondents conceded that integration of subjects in the MBA and integration of the course back into the business world was extremely challenging, yet critical to a respectable MBA programme. They believed that traditional MBA programmes perpetuated a ‘silo’ mentality and that it was vital for students actually think about business much more holistically. The data again suggests that students need to reflect on what they have learned and how all of the key dimensions and learnings fit together.

Business respondents, too, agreed that integration on the MBA was a problem given that business requires several disciplines and thought-processes to function.

This study confirmed the views of Vazquez and Ruas (2012) in that reflection is vital to integrating learnings on the MBA. Further, the data suggests that integration is a problem that needs to be addressed by both business and business schools if students and organisations are to truly benefit from the programme.

6.3.6 Students in a vacuum

Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenbarghe, Sucharski, and Rhoades (2002) alluded to students being in a vacuum because of a lack of visible support from their organisations. They suggested that students who are also employees recognised that supervisor support had a direct link to their perceived support from the organisation. They suggested that where supervisor support was poor, the perception was of poor overall organisational support which invariably resulted in poor employee retention.
The data from this study revealed exactly what Eisenberger et al. (2002) suggested. Business schools had little to say about this issue, but it was business respondents who actually viewed this as a serious challenge facing the MBA.

Business respondents suggested that there is a serious issue with regard to companies paying for students on an MBA only to find an alarming gap between student and organisation through the course of their studies. The data suggests that invariably expectations of both parties were divergent and the gaps grew, leaving both parties with the faltering sense that the MBA process had not delivered on their expectations. What results, according to the data, is that the graduate leaves the employ of the organisation, and both parties lose out in a process that was meant to add value, not detract.

Business respondents believed that all three parties—business schools, businesses and students—have a role to play in preventing students from feeling isolated during their studies, and consequently moving on to other businesses.

What the data alludes to is the need for the various stakeholders—business schools, students and organisations—to knit together more closely in prevention of this situation. Business schools should play a more active role in involving business representative, especially line managers, throughout the MBA process. The data suggests that organisations should themselves have a more vested interest in the development of students they have funded, engaging students and business schools more actively. It further requires students themselves to assume more assertive roles by communicating and feeding back to their organisations where they are in their studies and what they have learned, what is exciting and motivating them as a result of the studies.

The results, as discussed in Chapter 5, suggest that the key in this regard is opening and sustaining a conversation between all three parties. Only through such a conversation can parties bridge the gaps that emerge throughout the MBA process. This finding confirms the literature by Eisenberger et al. (2002) and also suggests that conversation and feedback between the employer and employee is the starting point for employee retention.

The question that this raises is as follows: could executive and line management involvement be the key to resolving this considerable challenge? This is discussed further in section 6.4.2 which addresses precisely this point.
6.3.7 Conclusion

The second research question has highlighted apparent reasons for the MBA’s diminishing reputation in the business community. It has, in many instances, confirmed current literature around the challenges facing the MBA. Further to this, it has revealed a few interesting challenges such as the MBA degree not being a priority requirement for employment, and students feeling isolated during their studies, both of which shed new light as to why many students leave their organisation during or shortly after the completion of their studies.

Highlighting these challenges suggests why the MBA’s reputation and its standing in the business world is somewhat marginalised despite the obvious benefits as admitted to and appreciated by business. Indeed, the MBA faces several critical challenges which, if left unaddressed, could potentially further erode what remaining positive reputation that the programme does have.

6.4 Research question 3: What are the essential elements required for the MBA programme to be impactful?

Having confirmed through the first question the successes of the MBA and the important role it still has to play in management and leadership development, this research then proceeded to understand what elements are required for respondents to appreciate an MBA programme as impactful. The challenges that were uncovered reveal the issues which continue to plague the MBA and the reasons for its deteriorating reputation. These challenges prohibit the MBA from being fully impactful.

By reflecting on successful in-house programmes, the next question looks to discover the core components which contribute to the success of those programmes. It further sought to understand whether these elements could potentially be transferred into MBA programmes to alleviate the challenges previously identified. A number of key components were identified, which, if applied to the MBA, could potentially strengthen its impact on business and students.

6.4.1 Application of skills

As previously suggested by Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010) and Mintzberg and Gosling (2002), if students are unable to apply what they have learned from the MBA,
then this raises several questions in terms of the value of the qualification. They suggested that it is vitally important that students are able to apply what they have learned and that they have an environment at work which encourages them to apply newly acquired skills. The further agreed that if students aren’t taking back what they have learned, or if the work environment is not conducive for students to practically apply what they have learned, this will invariably result in a minimised impact from the programme (Donovan & Stewart-Smith, 2010; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002)

Useful application of skills acquired on the MBA is regarded by respondents as by far the most important element for the MBA to be impactful to students and business.

Business respondents would like to see students take the initiative here by bringing their studies back to work. This then raises the question: how does one facilitate the application of skills and knowledge learned on the MBA back to the workplace?

Business school respondents regard action learning as vital in applying skills acquired on the MBA back to work. They suggest that only through ‘doing’ could students consolidate what they had been ‘learning’ and actually add true value to the organisation with which they are employed. Business school respondents further suggest that students should ideally use their assignments and school projects as they apply to their current organisations and the industries in which they operate, not only to make their learning real but also to add value back to the businesses by presenting them with their findings.

Business respondents agreed with business schools in this regard. The data reveals a call from business respondents for students to actively tackle the challenges facing the organisation, and by applying their MBA studies as a starting point, make recommendations for the business.

The findings of this study concur with those of Lysø et al. (2011) who also suggested that if learning and action are balanced they are more likely to have an impact to the organisation. The data also further supports the views of Marquardt and Waddill (2004) who suggested that action learning combines the elements of the various schools of learning and allows for the solving of complex problems which then results in adding speed to learning.
This data also revealed that such ‘action projects’ require a partnership between business schools and businesses in order to be successful. This further supported the views of Lysø et al. (2011) who called for collaborative action projects.

Interestingly, business school respondents revealed that business schools attempt to give students assignments which require them to consider real-life problems and issues and ponder how these issues affect their companies; however, organisations did not have sight of these submissions.

This critical finding suggests a missing link between business schools and organisations. It stresses that ‘action learning’, even with the best of intentions, cannot be fully impactful or successful if there is a lack of cohesion between business schools and organisations. If any application back to work through whatever form, whether ‘action learning’ or practical assignments, is to be effective and impactful, the gap between business and business schools must be bridged. The data suggests that both entities have to work cohesively to implement initiatives which will successfully result in school learning being applied in work environments. This very much supports the views of Schilling and Klamma (2010) who suggested that collaboration between business and school, in implementing projects, was very necessary to ensure long lasting benefits for stakeholders.

6.4.2 Executive and line management involvement

Siebert et al. (2001) and Kraimer et al. (2011) suggested that executive sponsorship improves the likelihood of students returning on their investment for both the company and themselves.

The data reveals that another key element that made in-house programmes so successful was the extent to which executives and line managers were involved in these programmes.

Business school respondents’ views regarding executive and line management involvement was that given the substantial monetary investment and time costs required, the MBA was no exception, and the commitment and involvement of executives and managers was even more necessary to ensure that the MBA had the desired impact on both business and student. By setting out the strategic challenges of the business to MBA students, executives and managers give students real direction in
terms of what is required to take the business forward. They further added that executives need to commit time to listening and unpacking the results even further. They are of the opinion that even if students are not able to develop new solutions, executives still have the opportunity to confirm existing thinking, which could also be useful.

Business schools cautioned that students are learning, and cannot be expected to deliver on projects or challenges which are unreasonably beyond their control or mandate. They felt that business should curb their own expectations in this regard, as discussed in further depth in section 6.3.4 around expectations.

Business respondents felt that without this element, this personal involvement, the impact of any programme would be significantly reduced. The data suggests that the most successful programmes were ones in which executives and managers committed to setting the strategic direction and purpose of the programme, and spent sufficient time themselves in talking with, listening to and guiding attendees. They viewed executive involvement as vital to employee engagement. These findings are very much in keeping with the views of Siebert et al. (2001) and Kraimer et al. (2011).

The findings of this research also confirmed the views of Leiter and Maslach (2008) who recommended that companies need to be sensitive to the engagement of their employees and interventions need to be implemented to ensure that such engagement was maintained.

Business respondents added that the onus is then on students to utilise the skills they learned, to research and investigate organisational challenges and construct programmes or offer recommendations for the business to implement.

The data suggests that this involvement also has the effect of communicating, whether directly or indirectly, that the student and their development is a priority for the organisation. It confirmed the thinking of Baruch (2009) who suggested that this is a powerful motivational tool, even if individuals leave an organisation, as the message that is being transmitted is that the development of people is a priority and that executives are willing to listen to their employees. The data suggests that executive and line management involvement creates a connectedness with the company and thus confirms the views of Bakker et al. (2009) who suggested that engaged employees make greater efforts with more intensity because they identify with and appreciate their jobs.
This sort of interaction addresses the challenges raised with regard to students being in a vacuum. If executives and managers are more involved throughout the MBA process, this will certainly go a long way in bridging the gap between students and the business.

### 6.4.3 Coaching and mentorship

Edwards (2003, p. 298) suggested that coaching “enables people to develop new individualised ways of working to increase their performance and the performance of their teams.” Cottrell (2009) suggested that mentoring was a “process by which an older and wiser colleague passes on wisdom, experience and advice, and helps to guide a more junior person.” He further added there was much confusion around terms and concepts such as coaching and mentoring.

The data reveals that coaching and mentorship were regarded as critical components of in-house programmes. Business school respondents felt that students need to acknowledge that this element of the journey, being coached and mentored, is important and cannot be taken lightly or overlooked if students are to receive maximum benefits from the MBA journey. They felt that if students are left on their own to propel their own personal growth and development, there is always the risk that their growth and development may not be as channelled and focused as if they were under the tutelage of a coach or a mentor.

Business respondents agreed that coaching and mentoring were critical to students’ development. They indicated that coaches and mentors have been successful in helping students on in-house programmes by guiding their development, helping them better integrate what they have learned at school back into work. They felt that coaching and mentorship were regarded as pivotal elements to ensure that students are adequately supported throughout the MBA process and beyond.

The data alone suggests that coaches and mentors are key to managing the unrealistic expectations of students as well as ensuring that students were engaged and felt supported. The data suggests that coaches and mentors experience of the real business world will help ground students and through the relationship, they can constantly pull students back to reality. Data further revealed that the benefits from the relationship can be reciprocal in that coaches and mentors themselves can learn from students. It is a two-way iterative relationship that will evolve and grow.
However, both business and business schools cautioned that it is critical that coaches, mentors and students commit, and remain committed, throughout the entire process.

6.4.4 Conclusion

In unpacking what elements are required for an MBA to be impactful, the most important factor was a call for students to apply what they have learned back to the organisation. If students could apply knowledge and practices acquired, they would benefit greatly from being better able to relate with and thus absorb what they have learned; similarly, businesses would see direct benefits from the practical implementations. A very important point to note is that there is a call for business schools and business to work closer together to achieve more sustainable results.

Two further important points were noted with regard to organisational support. The greater the involvement of senior executives, the greater the impact of the intervention. Further to this, mentoring and coaching of MBA students while in the MBA programme is an important developmental initiative to address a student’s growth and development during the programme.

6.5 Research question 4: How can business schools and organisations enter into a collaborative relationship to improve the impact of the MBA?

The data suggests that collaborative processes works admirably with in-house programmes, where the organisation understands what its needs are in terms of training and development and business school and business work together to ensure that these needs are addressed through the programme. Many respondents expressed how well the relationship worked and how it was an iterative relationship constantly striving to refine and optimise the programmes. The measure of the success of such a programme was based on how well it met the needs of business. This supports the findings of Carruth and Carruth (2006) who suggested that in-house programmes are more cost-effective and relevant to an organisation’s needs than the MBA.

How then can this information be transferred into the context of the MBA?
6.5.1 The purpose of the MBA

According to Bedwell et al. (2012), collaboration is an evolving process beginning with two or more entities working together toward a shared pre-determined goal. Bedwell et al. (2012) further go on to add that without a shared goal, there is little incentive for these entities to work together.

The research reveals that since its inception, the MBA programme has been continuously evolving and somewhere along the line its original purpose has been lost. The data reveals that business schools and business cannot express a unified understanding of the purpose of the MBA.

Business school respondents acknowledged the importance of arriving at a common understanding with business. They believed that this common understanding will help them better serve the needs of business. For business schools, as discussed in Chapter 5, clarity of purpose will help manage the expectations of business in that the programme itself is not meant to deliver on unrealistic expectations. The data reveals that business schools displayed a willingness to agree a common purpose and partner with business on the MBA.

Business respondents suggest that clarifying the purpose of a programme upfront establishes the expectations of all parties. They revealed that this common purpose on in-house programmes created a platform for them to achieve superior results as all parties knew exactly why they were undertaking such a programme.

Business and business school respondents suggest that it is important, before a collaborative relationship can be entered into, that all parties agree on the purpose of the MBA.

The findings of this research suggests that in establishing the purpose of the MBA, business schools and businesses would ideally identify a shared goal; this confirms the views of Bedwell et al. (2012). While this research suggests a solution to a gulf between the expectations of business schools and organisations, it also suggests a potential solution to the gulf identified by Rowland and Hall (2011) between the expectations of students and business schools.
6.5.2 Contracting

Peel and Boxall (2005) suggest that contracting requires a relationship which is mutually beneficial and where the needs of both parties are considered. A very interesting point which the data itself unearths is a call for the relationship between the business school, organisations and even the student to be formalised.

Business school respondents suggest that by contracting the expectations of each party, business schools, organisations and students are each brought to the table. They believe that the involved parties are able to prioritise which of their actions contribute to the shared goal, and which do not, resulting in a more productive relationship.

However, business school respondents have submitted several instances where contracting has not been effective due to a lack of commitment of involved parties. The question raised is this: how do business schools and businesses get it right in their in-house programmes?

Business respondents also viewed contracting as an essential element of their in-house programmes. They suggest that it comes back to a sense of urgency and investing in those programmes the time and resources necessary to ensure success. They also firmly believed that even more so, given the substantial time and monetary commitments of the MBA, urgency and a sufficient level of commitment are critical for ensuring success.

The findings of this research point to a collaborative effort and support the views of Thomson et al. (2009, p. 25) who neatly defined collaboration as “a process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process.”

There is a clear desire by business schools and business to establish a shared goal and to formalise such an agreement contractually. The data itself reveals a few key elements in contracting, the success of which has been demonstrated in in-house programmes: urgency, commitment and a willingness to enter into a mutually beneficial contract. These key psychological findings contribute to the building of the Collaborative Impact Model.
6.5.3 Conclusion

The first step to entering into a collaborative relationship as it relates to the MBA is re-establishing, with clarity, the purpose of the MBA. The inconsistent understanding of the purpose of the MBA results in differing expectations. As long as expectations are different, the relative views of the appreciable benefits of the MBA will continue to exist. Embracing a unified purpose will allow businesses and business schools to establish a shared goal. According to Bedwell et al. (2012), this is critical.

Furthermore, contracting is important in formalising the relationship, the responsibilities and the roles of each party. This process will minimise any unreasonable expectations.

6.6 Research question 5: What elements are required to maintain a collaborative relationship in relation to the MBA?

As defined by Winer and Ray (1994, p. 10), collaboration is “a process that gets people to work together in new ways.” They suggested that collaboration is a continuously evolving process that empowers people and systems to change.

The data reveals that once a collaborative relationship has been established, a lot of effort and time is required to maintain such a relationship. It further suggests that if the relationship cannot be maintained, then any interventions which might be attempted will be futile. In this regard, the data reveals two very distinct relationships: the first is a collaborative relationship between the business school and business; the second is a collaborative relationship between business schools themselves. The research suggests a strong emphasis on a partnership in which vested parties acknowledged their role in achieving the shared pre-determined goal.

6.6.1 Business school-to-business partnerships

The data suggests that a business school-to-business partnership is a mutually beneficial, collaborative relationship between business schools and organisations.

Business schools and business respondents alike demonstrated a desire for and a willingness to partner with each other on the MBA. The shared ability to do so successfully was made apparent by both parties relating the success of partnerships for their in-house programmes. The data suggests that this ‘iterative’ and evolving
relationship could be easily extended to the MBA programme. This confirms the views of Winer and Ray (1994) and Bedwell et al. (2012) who also suggested that collaborating was an evolving process.

Business school respondents felt that such a conversation has begun in some quarters; however, the urgency and transparency of this conversation leaves much to be desired. They called for both parties to partner for progress and establish a mutually beneficial relationship. This is true even if the benefits of such a ‘partnership’ would include the exchange of resources, expertise and knowledge.

Business respondents agreed with business schools that partnering was necessary for bridging the gaps in the MBA. They believed that business schools could be more engaged by involving managers of students in the MBA. They felt that the intention of this engagement would be to open a conversation pertaining to the MBA, including how to better support students on the MBA and how to take learning from the MBA back into the organisation. The data revealed that this conversation would also centre on the challenges of the MBA and how the strengths of each party could be leveraged to address these challenges.

The data reveals that this current absence of a collaborative partnering relationship surrounding the MBA explains why initiatives which have been implemented by either party have not yielded exemplary results. It does, however, demonstrate an acknowledgement and a willingness by both business schools and organisations to enter into a partnership to progress the impact and value of the MBA.

The results of this study confirm the views of O’Connor and Cordova (2010) who suggested that overlaps between work and school impact learning and if this gap could be breached it would make the content instruction of the classes much more relevant to work. The data of this study reveals that by partnering together, business schools and organisations can understand the needs of each other and work together to fulfil these needs.

6.6.2 Business school-to-business school partnership

The second relationship that the data suggests is a business school-to-business school partnership where business schools themselves partner with each other to strengthen
the impact of the MBA. This was a point raised by business schools themselves in accepting their own role in improving the impact of the MBA.

The data suggests that business schools have more demand for their MBA programme than they could meet, having to turn away hundreds of students each year. In light of this, some business schools suggest that they partner with each other to ensure that the quality standards and educational consistency of an MBA qualification be maintained. They were of the view that their vision or shared goal should be more along the lines of tackling the challenges of education inherent to this country and moving educational standards forward rather than being inwardly focussed. Collectively, business schools can achieve a whole lot more by leveraging off each other’s respective strengths. There was a call for a common forum or platform to allow for openness and transparency. Respondents also suggest that by sharing best practice with regard to teaching methods, they could further improve the impact of the MBA.

The views from respondents in this study confirms the views of Hidi and Renninger (2006) who suggested that educators had a role to play in maintaining students’ interest and that they should create an environment which fosters the curiosity of students. Further to this, the study also confirms the views of Rotgans and Schmidt (2011) who suggested that improving an educator’s cognitive congruence would indirectly impact their ability to maintain situational interest in class. The way in which this research confirms both Hidi and Renninger (2006) and Rotgans and Schmidt is that it suggests that by sharing resources, ideas and expertise in the MBA, business schools could improve the situational interest of students by improving the initiatives, the teaching methods and the level of expertise on the programme.

While this appears to be a noble and idealistic view, another business school cast significant doubt as to its propensity for entertaining such a conversation. Its ‘siló’ view was that it had a competitive advantage over other business schools and that it would want to maintain such an advantage. This reveals a clear a lack of desire for a shared goal and hence a lack of incentive to partner with another school. The data suggests that this could potentially be a result of the demand for the MBA far exceeding its supply; there is little incentive to tamper with the status quo. Therefore, yet again, common themes of willingness and shared goals emerge from the research which informs the development of the Collaborative Impact Model.
6.6.3 Alumni

Mael and Ashforth (1992) suggested that the alumni of an educational organisation were its financial backbone and that alumni are one of their most important stakeholders. *Finweek* and MBAconnect.net (2012) suggested that the relationship between alumni and business schools left something to be desired and that business schools had not properly leveraged their alumni. The results of this study, as discussed below, confirm exactly that.

Business school respondents confirmed this by suggesting that the extent to which alumni were involved in the MBA, post qualification, was nowhere near the desired levels. Business schools admitted that maintaining the interest and energy levels of alumni was a challenge and that while people often started with the best of intentions, this quickly faded as time progressed. The research highlighted that while some business schools considered their initiatives with alumni sufficient, there was no clear plan in terms of the extent to which this pivotal resource could or should be leveraged. Business schools believe that they are doing as much as they possibly can and that there is unfortunately a limited commitment from alumni for maintaining a relationship post MBA.

Business respondents, too, have viewed alumni as potential resources but yet which have been under-utilised. They suggested that alumni are familiar with the MBA programme and are key resources for maintaining a collaborative relationship as this was evidenced on their in-house programmes. Business recommends that alumni could ideally be the catalyst for closing the gap between the business school and businesses.

The data suggests the alumni relationship should begin long before students qualify and that at the inception of the MBA, students should be contracted and coached throughout the MBA to create a sense of belonging and long-lasting association. Again, key themes that emerge are commitment and energy and these inform the development of the Collaborative Impact Model.

6.6.4 Feedback

Price, Handley, Millar, and O’Donovan (2010) suggested a lack of clarity in the meaning of feedback, that essentially feedback was about putting things right through
taking corrective actions. Business schools had very little to say about feedback to business, virtually conceding that there was little feedback between the two parties. Business respondents felt aggrieved that they had not received enough feedback during the MBA process. They made calls for more frequent and transparent feedback, very much driven from the perspective that this feedback would be essential in aiding the development of their students on the MBA.

The data suggests that business and business schools are rarely in communication with each other, yet ironically, with in-house programmes for which they partner, feedback is continuous and frequent. It further suggests that feedback must be reciprocal and neither party should be blamed for poor feedback. Again, these results would suggest that if businesses and business schools can apply the same principles to the MBA, they can improve the feedback richness between each other and thus better aid the development of MBA students.

This research confirms the views of Price et al. (2010) in suggesting that feedback would aid in informing corrective actions where the MBA was lacking. The data suggests that more frequent and transparent feedback between business and business schools would assist both business and business schools better support students through the MBA process.

6.7 The Collaborative Impact Model

During the course of the interviews and the analysis of the data, what emerged were two very distinct constructs which were necessary for any learning intervention to be impactful. Figure 4 below presents the Collaborative Impact Model, a model born out of this research. The model was constructed through a careful understanding of the elements which made in-house initiatives so successful and applying a number of the recommendations made by business schools and businesses regarding the MBA. This model suggests the psychological states and relationship processes that are required for a relationship to be collaborative and impactful.

In the Collaborative Impact Model, the inner core communicates the relationship process while the outer shell communicates the psychological states that are required for an initiative to be successfully impactful. In order for collaboration to occur, it is essential for the elements of both layers to be functioning fully. Both layers are mutually
dependent on each other entering into collaboration and for the sustaining of such collaboration. The relationship process level will simply not be sustainable if the elements of the psychological layer—like willingness to engage, urgency, commitment, energy and shared accountability—are lacking. Likewise, despite parties attempting to collaborate, if key elements in the relationship process—like feedback and resources—are absent, despite having the best intentions and the energy and commitment to collaborate, collaborative initiatives will invariably fail. This model, while developed for the MBA, can be applied to any collaborative learning initiative to have the desired impact on the relevant parties.

**Figure 2: The Collaborative Impact Model**
6.7.1 The collaborative relationship process

The inner core is the process component of the Collaborative Impact Model. This inner core suggests how a collaborative relationship should be conducted in a learning environment like the MBA to extract the maximum benefits therewith. At each key level there is two-way interaction, suggesting that the entire process is interactive, iterative and evolving.

For a relationship to be collaborative, six important identified steps govern the physical actions of collaborating entities. Each of these steps relies on the others in order for the collaborative relationship to succeed. These steps reflect the logical flow of process; however, it should be noted that feedback can and should occur at any stage of the relationship. In fact, the likelihood of the relationship succeeding will depend on the frequency and the transparency of the feedback given to collaborating parties. This is very much in line with the views of Price et al. (2010) who suggested that feedback would aid in informing corrective actions where the MBA was lacking.

6.7.1.1 Purpose

The beginning of any collaborative relationship is to understand the purpose of the initiative and from that, derive the shared goal. This is critical to establish upfront, because, as suggested by Bedwell et al. (2012), if parties don’t have at least one shared goal, there is little incentive for these parties to collaborate.

6.7.1.2 Contract

Having established the purpose of the learning initiative, parties should then formalise their relationship through a contract which is mutually beneficial, as suggested by Peel and Boxall (2005). This contract should enumerate roles and responsibilities of each party involved in the collaborative relationship. The intention at this stage is to clarify the expectations of each party, both in terms of what they want to derive from the learning initiative but also what they expect of the other party. This step is vital as it is meant to communicate how collaborating entities manage themselves and each other.Contracting will highlight the importance of each party’s role in attaining the shared goals. Additionally, contracting will govern the relationship and if parties find that the contracting of their relationship is too onerous, they should revisit the purpose of the
learning initiative. Having formalised a contract, parties will need to be clear as to what is required of them and what steps they must prioritise to ensure that their part of the relationship is upheld.

This step in the process also supports the views of Thomson et al. (2009) who suggested that collaborating parties should interact through formal and informal negotiation and jointly create rules and structures to govern their relationships.

6.7.1.3 Resources

Having contracted, all parties must commit sufficient resources to the relationship process to ensure the achievement of the shared goal. Resources, all must understand, extend beyond financial resources and include the time and personal involvement of the CEO and executives, line managers, alumni, coaches and mentors.

From a business perspective, it is critical that CEO and executive time and involvement is afforded to the MBA, or any learning initiative for that matter. This view is supported by this research which revealed that the greater the CEO and executive involvement in a programme, the greater the impact on students and ultimately, on the organisations themselves. This recommendation follows the views of Siebert et al. (2001) and Kraimer et al. (2011) who suggested that executive sponsorship improves the likelihood of students returning on their investment for both the company and themselves.

This research suggested that alumni were an under-utilised resource and organisations and business schools alike should appeal to alumni to guide current students through the MBA programme. This must result from a deliberate plan to harvest the knowledge and experience of alumni, as this kind of guidance would have a beneficial impact on the learning and experience of current MBA students. This recommendation supports the views of Finweek and MBAconnect.net (2012) who also suggested and recommended that alumni be better leveraged.

Coaches and mentors are seen as critical components of an employee's developmental journey. They help guide, challenge and grow students and for that reason, both organisations and business schools should strive to pair students with suitable coaches and mentors during the MBA experience. Again, while this has been done in small pockets, a lot more can be done in this regard and again, there needs to
be a more deliberate plan. This follows the views of Cottrell (2009) who suggested that mentoring was a process where an older and wiser individual guides a more junior person by imparting wisdom, experience and advice. It also supports the views of Edwards (2003) who suggested that coaching helps people grow.

These are just some of the more important resources as identified by this research which are necessary for a learning intervention like the MBA to have the utmost impact. While exploring all the resources required and their relative importance is beyond the scope of this research, those that have been highlighted by this research were identified as the most critical.

6.7.1.4 Practical initiatives

Every learning programme, including the MBA, should have associated practical initiatives. The over-riding principle in this regard is that all that is learned in a graduate programme should be applied back at work and the work environment should facilitate this. This step supports the views of Donovan and Stewart-Smith (2010) and Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) who suggested that for a programme to be impactful, students need to be applying what learned in class back to work and the work environment needed to be conducive for students.

This requires all parties involved in the relationship to collaborate in implementing practical initiatives. There should be sufficient consensus as to the actual manner in which the application of skills is taken back to the workplace, be it via ‘action learning’ projects or business-related assignments or any other task or method deemed useful. The important requirement is that students apply what they have learned back at class to make their learning relevant and real. Businesses will have the opportunity to facilitate the growth of students and the development of practical solutions to key strategic issues facing the company. Business schools will be encouraged to remain relevant as they continually adapt their curriculum in view of the strategic issues and potential solutions to contemporary issues. This recommendation follows the views of Lysø et al. (2011) and Schilling and Klamma (2010) who both called for long term collaborative relationships.

These practical interventions also serve to bring business schools, students and organisations closer together by tackling real-life problems and creating win-win situations in this regard. This finding resonates with the research of Konkola et al.
(2007) who suggested that companies had a lot more to gain from these sorts of relationships, because while all parties would benefit from the union of theoretical and practical knowledge, the company would especially benefit from the generation of new ideas as this could potentially result in competitive advantages to the company.

### 6.7.1.5 Reflection

As suggested by Gosling & Mintzberg (2006), reflection is seen as a critical component for students to link school and work. They suggested that managers needed to take sufficient time to think about what they have learned and how it can be applied to their work. This research too suggests that all three parties, business schools, organisations and students, are too busy with their day-to-day activities to give the MBA sufficient time, attention and reflection for it to be useful to anyone.

This key component of the relationship process—reflection—will allow all three parties to sit back, absorb and more fully understand the implications of the preceding steps. By creating space and time to think about the purpose of the MBA, the contract, the availability and access to resources, and the practical interventions, the parties can deliberate about steps to improve the process and strengthen the relationship. Given that the collaborative relationship is evolving and iterative, reflection is key to moving the relationship forward and upward.

Reflection resonates as constant underlying theme throughout the literature review. This recommendation follows the views of various protagonists including Marquardt and Waddill (2004), Bensley et al. (2010) and Vazquez and Ruas (2012) who all view reflection as vitally important to the learning and collaboration processes. They suggest that reflection is an essential element to making learnings real and applicable.

### 6.7.1.6 Feedback

To close the loop, feedback is arguably one of the most important steps in ensuring that the collaborative relationship is sustained. Reflection, if given sufficient time and attention, will result in the collaborating entities realising what is working well with the relationship and the learning process as well and that which could potentially be improved. Feedback will ensure that all parties are aware of what the issues are and what correction actions need to be implemented to resolve the issues.
Feedback should be open and transparent and should be encouraged at any and all stages of the model. Furthermore, the frequency of feedback should be increased to ensure that all parties understand if their actions are conducive to achieving the shared goal or not. Ideally, feedback should either reinforce current behaviour or result in a change of behaviour or processes. Feedback contributes to an evolving relationship and over time is critical to sustaining such a relationship. This very aligns with the views of Price et al. who suggested that feedback was essential for informing corrective actions where a process or relationship was lacking.

6.7.2 The collaborative psychological states

This research identified five critical elements which related to the psyche of collaborating parties. These psychological states are effectively the glue that holds the collaborative relationship intact. Without this glue, the relationship or any attempted intervention, will invariably fail. These elements reside within the hearts and minds of individual and groups of individuals, and are intangible by nature. The absence of any of these elements will limit the process and result in a total process breakdown. This explains why, with regard to the MBA, many initiatives which attempt to bridge the gap between school and work, like contracting and enticing alumni to get involved in the MBA, have failed to yield the substantial results despite there being a process established to direct such interventions and relationships.

6.7.2.1 Willingness

All parties entering into a collaborative relationship should be willing participants. Choosing to be part of a relationship is critical in ensuring its sustainability. Over the short term, people can be coerced into a collaborative relationship; however, for there to be a true collaborative relationship, one that extends beyond immediate satisfaction, there must be a willingness to enter and remain in such a relationship. This is why it is critical for each party to extract from the relationship the value or benefit they are seeking, as this will incentivise them to enter into and maintain such a relationship. A relationship with win-win scenarios leads to increased willingness to work together to see shared goals accomplished. This resonates with self determination theory and two of the four dimensions of extrinsic motivation as identified by Roca and Gagne (2008) who suggested that there will be harmony with oneself if a conscious decision is made
to undertake an activity and that reasons for carrying out an activity may be external, as seeking to achieve an external reward.

6.7.2.2 Urgency

A sense of urgency is vital to ensure that benefits are realised within reasonable time frames as pre-determined by the collaborating parties. Often, a lack of urgency, or apathy, results in initiatives being prolonged yielding few or no results in the short or even medium term. Without results, people generally lose interest in the programme and again, this invariably leads to a breakdown of even the best intentioned processes. Urgency will ensure that sufficient importance is given to the collaborative initiatives and will yield results within a reasonable and encouraging time frame. This is a common theme throughout many of the successful in-house programmes and is critical for action.

6.7.2.3 Commitment

Commitment is essential for ensuring that the collaborative relationship is maintained and sustained. As parties enter into a collaborative initiative, they must commit to seeing it through to its implementation or completion. Commitment binds the entire process together and should ideally be established when parties are contracting.

Likewise, enlisting the commitment of alumni at the inception of the MBA, convincing them that their journey continues long after their qualification, convincing them of their responsibility to MBA students coming after them is important in ensuring that the MBA is a sustainable programme. Committed parties ensure that what needs to get done is done. Collaborating entities should acknowledge their commitment to the programme as well as their commitment to each other. This element concurs with the views of Macey and Schneider (2008) who included commitment in their definition of engagement.

6.7.2.4 Shared accountability

All parties—MBA students, organisations and business schools—should accept joint accountability with regard to the MBA as a learning intervention. Only by accepting that the limited impact of the MBA is a direct result of each of them, can parties move
forward firstly to direct themselves and also to direct their collaborating partners. They must accept that their fates are tied together and that if they succeed, they all succeed; however, if they fail, they all fail. This very much supports the views of Bedwell et al. (2012) who suggested that collaboration is reciprocal and that interdependence and sufficient contributions toward common goals are critical to achieving collaboration.

During interviews, respondents were quick to blame other parties and point out others’ shortcomings, while only a few respondents accepted their own role in combating the challenges facing the MBA. For true collaboration to occur, each party should look inwardly and accept their responsibility for making the MBA an increasing success. Each party should take steps to direct and correct its own actions to ensure that the programme has the desired impact. Furthermore, collaborating parties should respectfully and constructively hold the other parties accountable for their actions, generating innovative ideas and solutions rather than capitalising on weaknesses and errors as a disciplinary tool. Acknowledging shared accountability should bring collaborating parties closer together.

6.7.2.5 Energy

Finally, for a collaborative relationship to exist, the energy of all parties should be maintained at a level which ignites passion and progress. Numerous references are made in engagement theory which suggests that high energy levels are associated with greater engagement (Bakker et al., 2008; Leiter & Maslach, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008).

As demonstrated by this research, initially energy levels are high but far too often such levels quickly dwindle into nothingness. It is critical that collaborating parties assess their own energy levels as well as their partners’ energy levels and support each other in maintaining a suitable energy level. While it is beyond the scope of this study to determine exactly how energy levels should be maintained, quickly identifying dips and drops in energy levels should result in joint interventions which seek to uplift the group. Energy is the electricity which fuels the entire collaborative process.

6.7.3 Conclusion

In responding to the question regarding the elements required to maintain a collaborative relationship in relation to the MBA, several interesting points were raised.
The first was a call for a business school-to-business relationship. This is essentially a mutually beneficial partnership between business schools and organisations. Such a relationship would be evolving, and the promising point was that both entities displayed a willingness to enter into a partnership.

The second relationship was for a business school-to-business school relationship. There was a call for business schools to share ideas and resources in the MBA to make the programme more impactful to business. It also highlighted that there was no need for competition given that at present, demand for an MBA qualification exceeds supply.

The utilisation of alumni was seen by both business schools and business as a relatively untapped area of opportunity. Getting alumni on board, though, requires engagement right from the inception of the MBA and onward.

Finally, feedback was seen as an important and critical component to improving the impact of the MBA. Business, in particular, called for more frequent and transparent feedback.

During the course of the interviews and the analysis of the data, what emerged was the Collaborative Impact Model. The model was constructed through a careful understanding of the elements which made in-house initiatives so successful and applying a number of the recommendations made by business schools and businesses regarding the MBA. This model suggests the psychological states and relationship processes that are required for a relationship to be collaborative and impactful.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1.1 Summary of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore different ways in which collaboration between business schools and organisations could achieve maximum impact from an MBA programme for all invested in the MBA programme—business schools, students, and organisations. Collaboration to achieve the maximum output from an MBA programme was generally defined as organisations and business schools working together to ensure that all parties, including students, maximise their respective benefits from investing in an MBA. The study followed a two-pronged approach: 1) first by enlisting the views of businesses toward the MBA, towards collaboration concerning the MBA and how they might enter into a collaborative relationship with business schools, and then 2) secondly, how such a relationship could be maintained. These views were then confirmed by interviewing business schools for that same information. For the most part, both parties agreed on many of the questions that were presented, revealing a common view in terms of the MBA and how collaboration with each other can improve its impact.

The study initially confirmed the importance of an MBA to the business environment. It was important to establish if the MBA programme was still relevant to business and if so, what advantages it delivered.

Respondents unanimously agreed that the MBA provided students with broad exposure, the likes of which would be very difficult to obtain by any other avenues. Exposure to different ways of thinking, to different cultures and contexts and to different markets means that MBA students are in a position to make highly intelligent and informed business decisions. This kind of broad global exposure further helps people who are specialists transition into more broadly managerial and leadership roles.

Another success of the MBA was that it equipped students with the skills to manage complexities. The course is deliberately designed to challenge students, to displace them out of their comfort zones by imposing tight deadlines and voluminous work. This component instilled resilience in students and taught them successful coping mechanisms so that they might deal realistically and effectively with the challenges and demands of education and business and family.
Mature management requires critical thinking skills, the ability to assimilate copious amounts of information and discern quality information for making intelligent informed decisions based thereon. The MBA, according to respondents, undoubtedly instils in students essential critical thinking skills so that business reaps the benefits. Business schools felt that the MBA was important in creating a leadership pipeline for the country. Schools attempted to go beyond just teaching *about* leadership by developing students’ practical leadership skills as well. Business, likewise, regarded this as a key success of the MBA.

The MBA is widely considered a general management degree and this was regarded as yet another success of the MBA programme: the MBA provided students with a ‘toolkit’ with which to become general managers within an organisation by exposing students to various essential aspects of business. These fundamentals helped students transition into more senior management roles in business.

Knowledge transfer is an essential component of any learning intervention. This is precisely what an MBA gives a student: an increase in business knowledge resulting in more confidence, more self-awareness, more astute business sense, more informed decision-making.

And finally, the MBA teaches students how to work in teams, as assignments require that students engage with colleagues, teaching them how to manage themselves, their time, and to navigate among the personalities of others. Indeed, the MBA has several benefits for both the student and the organisation as improved decision-making leads to expansion and profitability for business.

The next step in this research was to explore the challenges faced by the MBA and what this meant for the reputation and existence of MBA programmes. While the results were not unexpected, they did reveal that many of the issues facing the MBA resulted from a lack of collaboration between business schools and organisations. It was not inconceivable that many of the challenges could be resolved if business schools and organisations worked together to resolve them. What was clear is that many of the interventions implemented by one or the other party were unsuccessful when initially implemented without support and collaboration.

The most critical challenges facing the MBA included business feeling that the MBA was too academic and therefore not practical enough. Business schools, on the other hand, suggested that the MBA was very practical as it gave students real-life case
studies and assignments, many of which could be related back to their own organisation. Clearly what was being done at school was not being taken back to work. Again, a lack of collaboration seemed to be the crux of the matter. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that there was a serious gap between business schools and organisations, both in terms of communication and application.

Another challenge facing the MBA is that the degree is rarely a hard and fast prerequisite for employment. This leads to the question: how can a degree which offers a student and an organisation, both directly and indirectly, so many benefits be seen merely as a value-add qualification rather than an essential qualification? This suggests a lack of understanding around the programme and what it is truly capable of delivering to business. Again, organisations and business schools were not on the same page as business did not see the benefits of the MBA accruing to them. This issue was further compounded by the numerous business schools offering an MBA programme. The number graduates on the market, coupled with the increasingly deteriorating quality of some programmes, resulted in businesses questioning the creditability of the degree, another generalisation which could be breached if accredited and reputable business schools partnered with business in delivering the right standard of education to students.

Given the past success of MBA graduates, both financially and personally, students often inherit inflated expectations pertaining to an MBA qualification. Both business schools and businesses agree that students' demands are often unreasonable as they are often demands prior to actual delivery of results for a business. These expectations of MBA students should be addressed upfront upon signing up for an MBA and should be reinforced throughout the MBA process. Both business and business schools have a role to play in communicating this message; however, currently, that message is not delivered consistently enough.

The research revealed that students are often left feeling a bit isolated during their MBA studies. This resulted in a growing gap between student and organisation which could eventually lead to the premature termination of the relationship. To bridge this gap, business schools and organisations should work together adequately to ensure that the transition from school to work is seamless and that the invisible walls erected between the two are demolished. By collaborating, the two parties can ensure that students practically apply what they learned at school to work as well as contribute to the educational environment at school by discussing what they experienced at work.
Ultimately, both organisations and business schools would like to see great deal more application of what was learned from school to work and vice versa. Business sees this practical element of the programme as critically important, not only for the direct benefits to them of having successfully solved their strategic issues, but also in terms of growing the student. Both business schools and organisations called for a ‘partnership’ entailing the sharing of knowledge and resources.

Commitment and engagement were critical to the implementation of any successful practical intervention. It is these practical interventions on in-house programmes where businesses collaborated with business schools, which gave business the perception that these programmes were so successful. Even more so, if the MBA programme can also result in practical implementation of skills learned, then it too will be more highly regarded as valuable and impactful to business. The key to this is, however, the partnering of business and business schools in these interventions. Done in isolation, the likelihood of success and sustainability diminishes, as the various unsuccessful interventions mentioned by the respondents illustrate.

In-house programmes revealed that the more the CEO and other top executives were involved in the programme, the greater the impact of such programme on the organisation. The CEO and executives discussed the direction of the company and the strategic challenges which the company faced. Students were then required to generate possible ideas for resolving these issues. The business school then facilitates and undergirds students in the generation of these ideas. Organisations benefit from new ideas, even when students merely confirm their own current thinking. Contrarily, though, executive and line management involvement was non-existent in the MBA. In order for the MBA to be truly impactful, the executives of a company must engage with MBA students and alumni and convey their own commitment to the students and the programme, as this sends a message to the rest of the organisations that the company cares about the growth and development of its talented employees.

Often ignored, coaching and mentorship was also regarded as a key element of successful in-house programmes. Coaches and mentors guide students, opening doors for students and encouraging their growth. It should be perhaps compulsory for students who attend an MBA to retain a coach or a mentor, not only to facilitate their personal and educational growth, but to help them integrate their studies with their work.
The results of the research prompted the researcher to enquire, despite all of its successes, why is the MBA still facing so many challenges? What is it that would be required, and what existed in in-house programmes, for businesses and business schools to collaborate for increased impact of the MBA? What were the underlying elements, perhaps not spoken of openly but only alluded to, that were necessary for organisations and business schools to willingly and excitedly enter into a mutually beneficial relationship and then sustain such a relationship?

All of these questions and the results of this study lead to the development of the Collaborative Impact Model. The model was constructed through a careful understanding of the elements which made in-house initiatives so successful and applying a number of the recommendations made by business schools and businesses regarding the MBA. This model suggests the psychological states and relationship processes that are required for a relationship to be collaborative and impactful.

In the Collaborative Impact Model, the inner core communicates the relationship process while the outer shell communicates the psychological states that are required for an initiative to be successfully impactful. In order for collaboration to occur, it is essential for the elements of both layers to be functioning fully. Both layers are mutually dependent on each other entering into collaboration and for the sustaining of such collaboration. The relationship process level will simply not be sustainable if the elements of the psychological layer—like willingness to engage, urgency, commitment, energy and shared accountability—are lacking. Likewise, despite parties attempting to collaborate, if key elements in the relationship process—like feedback and resources—are absent, despite having the best intentions and the energy and commitment to collaborate, collaborative initiatives will invariably fail. This model, while developed for the MBA, can be applied to any collaborative learning initiative to have the desired impact on the relevant parties.

### 7.1.2 Recommendations for stakeholders

Businesses should play a more active role in the lives of students during the course of their MBA studies. Their role is vital to ensuring that students are adequately supported through the process, committing support and time and attention, much more than just financial resources. Executive and line management involvement in providing direction and facilitating the growth of students would likely have a positive impact on the
learning of students as well as the growth of the business. Businesses should ideally be more in alignment with business schools in regard to the purpose and the values and the advantages stemming from the MBA, and foster relational closeness, similar to that which has been demonstrated for in-house programmes.

Business schools should play a more active role in engaging business in the MBA. By partnering with business they can educate business in terms of the purpose of the MBA and facilitate the application of skills back into the workplace. Additionally, business schools can play a critical role in managing the expectations of students by reviewing communications with students pertaining to the benefits of its programme.

There is also a large predominantly untapped resource in the form of alumni. Business schools should investigate different avenues for extracting value from alumni, maintaining the relationship well beyond graduation. Furthermore, business schools should partner with other business schools to maintain high educational standards and a positive reputation of the MBA. Their vision for the MBA should be a great deal more unified in terms of skills development of the country rather than an isolated ‘silo’ view as to how schools can be better or more competitive than other schools.

7.1.3 Implications for future studies

The results of this study raise several questions which could be considered for future research. The first is to understand the real reasons behind business ascribing such little value to an MBA, with many respondents remarking that an MBA was a value-add rather than a pre-requisite for employment, despite agreeing on the many successes and undeniable benefits of the MBA.

Secondly, additional research could potentially investigate resources, beyond financial, that are essential for businesses to strengthen the impact of the learning programme, in this case the MBA.

A third potential topic for study concerns ways to maintain energy levels of those engaged in a collaborative relationship.

Yet another research topic could investigate how to maintain enthusiasm and energy levels of MBA alumni in the years beyond their qualification. All of these topics would build on the current findings of this research.
7.1.4 Concluding views

This research has led to the development of the Collaborative Impact Model, which if applied, will facilitate the sustenance of a collaborative relationship between business schools and organisations. If the model is applied correctly and all its elements are in sync, the impact of any learning programme, particularly the MBA, will be significantly improved.

Only through collaboration can the challenges facing the MBA be diminished and the gaps between business schools and businesses be bridged, to the benefit of all MBA stakeholders.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

I am Ravindran Naicker. Gibs MBA research.

Purpose of study – The purpose of this study will be to explore the different ways in which collaborative learning can achieve the maximum output from an MBA programme for business schools, students, and organisations involved with an MBA programme.

Explain that the interview will be anonymous if necessary and explain how the data from the interview will be utilised in the research and obtain consent to proceed with the interview and data usage.

Explain data collection and analysis process.

Explain the number and type of respondents interviewed.

Demographic Information

Name.

Race.

Career history.

Academic qualification.

Open ended questions

What is your experience of an MBA?

How are students supported through an MBA?

What are your expectations in terms of deliverables from students, business schools and business?

What are the current short comings of the MBA?

What are views in terms of the benefits of an MBA?

How can the MBA be improved to have a positive impact of the MBA?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the ways in which business schools, students and business collaborate in an MBA?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which ways do you feel are most effective and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do business schools interact and support business in achieving their objectives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What feedback loop is there once students have graduated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can key stakeholders better collaborate to improve the impact of an MBA?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

Thank respondent participating in the research.

E-mail follow-up to thank respondent.

Afford respondent the opportunity to share relevant information post.

Scribe post interview notes

Note respondents body language i.e. folded arms, eye contact, posture etc.

Respondents emotional state (calm, positive, nervous etc.)

General impression.

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Interview guide and questionnaire adapted from Clark (2006b)
So I’m Ravi Naicker, right, and I’m a second year student at Gibs, and my thesis is on how collaborative learning between business schools, students, and organisations can improve the impact of the MBA. And I think where that comes from is that very often MBAs are painted as this bad picture because a lot of people in business felt that it doesn’t really add value and you have students who they funded leave often within the first or second year of having done their studies. And then there’s often… my research tells me there are instances where the business school is out of touch with what business really wants. And so I’m here to try and get a feel for how can we make this relationship better between the three parties so that we get benefits for all the three parties. So before we kick off, the conversation will be kept confidential. It’s voluntary, so you can withdraw at any time, and this is a consent form that I need you to complete to say that you’re comfortable with that.

Okay, so you want me to… 23rd? 24th?

I think it’s the 23rd.

Twenty-third of the eighth.

Okay, great. So in your career history, how long have you been in business?
C1 Gosh, I've just... I've been with... I've been since 1980, so that would be... that's working at a senior level, at - thanks, Ravi - at executive level for ten years.

RN Okay, so ten years at exec level, right. And your qualifications?

C1 MBA; HDip Ad Ed... Higher Diploma for Educators of Adults.

RN How do you spell that?

C1 HDip Ad Ed.

RN A D...

C1 E D.

RN E D. Okay, great.

C1 That's adult educators.

RN Okay, great.

C1 And... and BA... Bachelor of Arts.
RN: BA. Excellent. Okay, great. So I just want to unpack how we can make this relationship better, right, and from your perspective what do you think the success is of the MBA?

C1: Of any MBA programme?

RN: Yes, any MBA programme.

C1: Okay. I think that the… you know the subject matter does… while there is some… while there is some subject matter which is almost a traditional MBA, not all MBAs are alike. So in other words if you… there used to be a point in time that if you did an MBA at Wits or at UCT, the kind of topics that you would cover would be pretty standard, and you would typically, you know, not have electives, or possibly the opportunity to choose an elective was very limited. In the… in about 2000 UCT introduced what they call the Executive MBA which focused on a completely different approach, and so that’s why I’m saying that MBAs… you know one MBA is not necessarily the same as another, and if you look externally outside of the country, and particularly in America, I mean you can do an MBA with your major focus in marketing for argument’s sake, or something else. So perhaps your question is a little broad because it would really depend on what kind of MBA you’re talking about. I don’t think it’s necessarily… it’s not the same thing in every instance. But let me just, sort of, like, talk generally.

I think that the value of an MBA is very much related to individuals being exposed and prepared for the challenges that one finds particularly in a business and commerce environment at the level… at senior and executive level generally. And I think that it probably provides individuals who have specialist backgrounds, so let’s assume that you have an undergraduate degree in engineering, or any other field for that matter, it actually provides individuals with the broader business scope across areas. So in other words there would be a focus on IT; there would be a focus on strategic HR. Normally all of those components fall somewhere in the MBA and are focused on to a greater or
lesser degree. And I think that the value there obviously is that in what I was saying earlier, and that is that it is preparation for actually for leadership in a more general role in organisations. So in other words if you’re going to head up a business, or be the COO, CEO, whatever, you have to have an understanding of all the elements that are important in actually making the business successful or running it, or whatever the case might be.

RN What else would you say in a typical MBA? So let’s look at... let’s try and narrow it down, right. So if you add... if you’re looking at, say, Wits, UCT, so the Gibs Executive MBA, right, what would you see the benefits of that? Did you have an Executive MBA?

C1 Yes.

RN So what would you see as success having done the MBA yourself?

C1 Okay, so I can only speak for myself.

RN Yes.

C1 I can’t comment on any of the other programmes or, you know, sort of what I think the success or lack thereof of it is. I think that in my particular instance the Executive MBA at UCT was a major contributor in assisting me to... to be able to manage complexity and volumes of apparently unrelated information in a... more effectively. And I think that that was primarily because the underlying thread which was... or the foundation for that particular MBA, was systems thinking and complexity. So you know every topic that a traditional MBA would normally sort of include, or subject that would be included in a normal MBA, that the foundation was... it was underlain by systems theory and thinking methods etc. So I think there are two
components. There was obviously the knowledge component, particularly in the areas that I was not… you know, had not had exposure in previously - let’s say IT - I’ve not had direct exposure or work experience. It’s not my background. So there was the knowledge component which was very useful, although clearly I mean it looks at it at quite a high level, and you certainly don’t come out as an IT expert or a specialist at all, but it gives you adequate knowledge to be able to think and make decisions in the organisation, taking into consideration the other areas of the business.

RN Great.

C1 And I think that the other thing that, you know as I said I mentioned, so there’s the knowledge component, and then there is the actual… the discipline: the discipline of how do you… how do you… how do you take unrelated volumes of information, facts, whatever it is, and kind of synthesize that in a meaningful and structured way for the purposes of making decisions.

RN Okay. Is there anything else that you see as being a success for an MBA?

C1 Not that I can think of off-hand.

RN Okay. And then surely such a programme does have shortcomings, right. So in your experience what would you say is among the shortcomings or the failings of an MBA?

C1 Well, again it’s quite tricky, because your question is quite broad. You know if I had done an MBA at Gibs, don’t know whether the shortcomings would have been the same as if they had been at Wits. And I’m really not… you know I haven’t spent a lot of time recently updating myself on the content and value of different MBAs that are available at this point in time, so really difficult for me to comment on that.
RN   Okay. Do you employ MBAs at C1?

C1   Not specifically; no. The majority of people that we employ at C1 are people who are... 80% of our staff are operational, and we have a very small number of managers relative to that. So... and generally speaking opportunities turnover is very limited. So yes, there are people with MBAs in the management executive, but it is not a rule. And it’s not necessarily a requirement, and we just don’t have the vacancies or the opportunities.

RN   Okay. So then let’s talk about in general, right, and perhaps we don’t need to keep it specific to an MBA. So if you understand any context, even on your leadership programmes, you’ve got the business school that provides you with a service, i.e. the studies and the qualifications and whatnot. You’ve got business that has certain needs, i.e. we’ve got a shortage of skills; or we’ve got a shortage of leadership ability, and that sort of stuff. And then you’ve got the student themselves who actually needs to grow and whatnot. How would you say that you as C1 have achieved benefits for all three organisations?

C1   We’ve done leadership programmes with Gibs with our existing management, and I think that one of the largest... and in a sense I mean look, there were no exams and there wasn’t the kind of structure that you would normally find in an academic environment, or as much as rigor, but simply the concept, the exposure, the kind of topics that were covered, etc, I think the huge value from the organisation’s point of view was probably twofold: one being the degree to which the people acquired new knowledge, bearing in mind that most of these people that work, including managers, that work in this organisation are very operational, so in other words they come out of the operation. Aviation is not... you know it’s not really like a bank or... it is an industry or a... where you... literally people would have come out of an engineering function where they were aircraft mechanics or engineers, or alternatively they were graduates and become management of the engineering function. Or alternatively they are pilots – a large component of pilots – who don’t go through any MBA programmes, but they spend a lot of time studying and achieving the kind of, like, licensing that they need in
order to operate in the commercial environment. And of course they have their - what can we say - their recurrency check, so they literally are going through recurrency checks every six months. So it’s very rigorous from that perspective, but it’s not a high volume academic environment. So in other words we don’t have huge numbers of graduates here. The FD, for argument sake, obviously he has a CA. The CEO was an ex CA, etc. But it’s not necessarily a high number of graduates in this particular industry. But coming back to your question about what the value is. So I think that firstly the value was that people acquired knowledge and had the opportunity to think more broadly outside of everything that they know, and I think that that was hugely helpful. And then the third thing I think was the degree of learning and collaboration which in itself was a huge benefit for the organisation.

RN Talk to me about that. So when you say learning and collaboration, what was that about?

C1 It was to do with the way that people came from various different parts of the organisation, had a common goal, and through the study process as well as all the action-learning projects etc that they were involved in, achieved superior relationships where possibly the relationships had not been that great before. So it facilitated better functioning between functional areas based on the fact that people had a common understanding of what was required now in terms of their output. And I think secondly that through the relationships that were formed, there is far better functionality in terms of cooperation in the organisation.

RN So in terms of… so let’s go back to the first point, right, in terms of the common understanding: where did that come from, or how was that…?

C1 Well, this is the course approach.

RN So the course programme gave them the common…
The content, yes.

The content gave them a common interest to what was needed by business, right?

Correct, yes. And we were very instrumental in guiding Gibs on the content; what we wanted in it: strong leadership focus; leadership competencies.

Okay. So in this process you understood what business wanted, and then you basically met with Gibs and guided them in terms of this is what we’d like to achieve. Then…

It was obviously collaboration. I mean they also proposed…

So it was the other way round as well. So they proposed... What did they propose?

Well, clearly I mean they’ve got a course… you know, a standard course programme that they use in leadership development initiatives typically, so when they work with organisations, C1’s not the only organisation that they’ve worked with. So I mean they have a corporate section, so they would then tailor the management development programme, or whichever of the programmes the corporate has decided that they would like to implement, and then there is a tailoring of the content based on input from Gibs – what is standard; what is recommended – and also what the organisation wants to achieve.

Great. So you’ve got that situation there, right? And the guys go on the course; they develop the… obviously they understand it based on the content. And then the
relationships; tell me about the relationships. And I’m interested in knowing the
relationships or what types of relationships were they also. So was it student and
student or colleagues? Was there a relationship with the business school? How did that
relationship work? Or which relationships are you referring to here?

C1 I’m looking very much from our perspective as an organisation. I can’t comment
on the individual relationships that the students may or may not have formed or forged
with Gibs. What I do know is that there were strong relationships that were formed
between the people on the programme. So in other words our managers who attended
this programme, there were strong relationships that were formed between people in
syndicate groups, between people in the same programme, which have assisted us in
terms of getting things done in the organisation. Where previously possibly people
possibly didn’t know each other, I mean for argument’s sake you’ve got a manager in
Harare you’ve got a manager in Cape Town; you’ve got people that come from all over
the organisation - you’ve got people in sales – now suddenly these people were in a
common learning situation, or a common situation where they had a common set of
objectives, personal objectives as well, and where they collaborated to achieve that. So
in other words what I’m saying is that let’s assume that you and I don’t know each
other, but we work for the same organisation; you might have worked here for a long
time and I might have worked here for even longer. Until the point in time where we
actually are brought together by some sort of intervention – in this case a learning
intervention – where we are... there is a common purpose and we need to achieve it
together, as well as individually, and there is strong guidance right from the CEO in
terms of the direction that the group is taking; what is the end outcome? There is,
inevitably, after the programme a much better relationship between individuals. So,
Ravi... okay I’ve got a problem with this; let me call Ravi up; whereas before I might not
have done that.

RN Yes, that’s great.

C1 So call it networking; call it whatever you want, I don’t know what the right word
really would be in this particular instance, but I mean effectively people’s resources are
expanded because they can make use of other people for information, assistance, direction, guidance, help, whatever, and that ultimately is... you know, creates better business efficiency because people are actually working together a whole lot better.

RN That's great. And through this process how did... Actually before I go there, the action learning programmes that you had; what did that look like? How did that work?
So you said something about the guys worked in syndicates?

C1 Yes.

RN And obviously they had a common purpose. Would you tell them what the project was, or...?

C1 We had two approaches. The first group, the Exco got together and put together some burning topics or burning issues for the company. We found after the first group that the… that we didn’t believe that that worked so well, because I think that there was… or perhaps the question or the topic wasn’t adequately fleshed out. So in some instances despite the fact that there was a supervisor, possibly even the supervisor didn’t really understand what the original intent of the burning was, so that didn’t work so well. So we turned it on its head and said... invited them to come forward with topics which reflected the burning issues for the organisation. And that worked a little bit more effectively.

RN So you invited the students to come forward?

C1 The students; correct.

RN And just before we move on, the supervisor, was that an internal person?
C1 Yes. It would have been an Exco member.

RN Exco member. Yes, so there was quite strong senior leadership involvement?

C1 Yes.

RN Okay. So in the second one they came forward and they presented topics to you?

C1 Yes, and we would then... we would then... we vetted those topics. We said look, we don't think that that’s... this one is not important; that one is important: try and focus on this or try and focus on that. And look, I think it was a combination of we just learnt how to do it better the second time round as well.

RN Okay, that's great. So that... I assume that the second time was a lot more successful, then?

C1 Yes. It was more successful.

RN And some of your key learnings there from the first time to the second?

C1 Mine, or the organisation’s?

RN The organisation's, I mean, in general. Just some of the key learning. So what this transition from... i.e., this is a list of things that you intend to investigate a person,
and the second time round where it seemed like more an iterative process where the
students came forward and I’d like to do these things, that these are strategic things.

C1 It was iterative from our perspective. So in other words let’s take human
resources executive and my team that were working on this programme. Obviously you
put a programme together and this is how it’s going to work. You’ve got a plan: this is
the methodology; this is how we make certain decisions; those are the things that we’re
going to do. And obviously you have debriefs, or things don’t go well, and in the
process of the debriefing or the analysis of what did and didn’t go well, you make
decisions on that how to do it differently. So the next time you have the opportunity to
do it, you change it, and say okay, fine, let’s try this; maybe this will work better. So for
us we had the benefit of actually running two consecutive groups of people. You know
it was roughly the… gosh, all told it was probably about 70 or 80 people through two
programmes which lasted 12 months each. They overlapped. So yes, hopefully one
does learn to do things better.

RN And then how did the business school support you through this process?

C1 When you ask how the business school supported us, well, I mean they
provided the lecturers.

RN So obviously they provided the course.

C1 The content.

RN The course content, right.

C1 Yes.
RN Now what sort of feedback did you get during the process, because I mean it seemed like it was quite a long process.

C1 We had regular meetings with the business school, and regular interactions with... We had an account manager that was EEEE, and her senior who was at one stage IIII. But you know we had regular meetings with them at intervals actually to assess, you know, where we were and what was working. Every time there was module: what worked; what didn’t work. It was just constant interaction.

RN And so that was on the programme as a whole. Did you get any student specific information like…?

C1 Yes, of course.

RN Okay. So what did that entail?

C1 Well, it would be anything from informal feedback- you know, people sitting round a table talking - complaints, and then of course on course evaluations. So every time there is a programme, there is an evaluation that the students are asked to complete.

RN So it’s the students’ feedback as well?

C1 Yes.

RN And so then in terms of the students, how did the university support the students themselves, apart from providing them just a lecture and the course?
Okay. Well, there was a coach that was assigned to assist the… particularly with action learning with the projects, with the presentations, with the development of the research, the… you know, so there was guidance from that perspective. The actual presentation: how to deliver the presentation finally; and the actual… the document. I would hope the kind of normal kind of support that you would expect from a university, you know, where people are actually attending lectures full-time is slightly different in a correspondence situation, but I mean I would expect nothing less than this.

Sure.

I don’t think… I don’t think it’s anything unusual. I think that that’s what has to happen.

Yes. I mean this works… I mean this clearly works for you, right, having the coach and having the current set-up for leadership development. Now if you can take… what do you think in terms of if we take some of the principles here, and apply them to an MBA, do you think it can work? I mean in particular, what’s absent in the MBA is there is no coach. So there is no coach; there is no feedback.

In the Gibs MBA?

Yes. So it depends. In some of the courses there is, but I mean in general there isn’t this person helping you do that, and then there isn’t this regular feedback loop to the organisation who’s funded an MBA, or where there’s a student attending an MBA. Do you think some of this feedback can help?

Look, I think it would be incredibly helpful. When I was at UCT, there was very… you were actually assigned a coach, a business coach, and that person generally speaking was a person who was active in business. Not necessarily in your
company. You were assigned a coach that you actually had to... I think you had to see them four times a year.

RN Did that work for you?

C1 It was… it was… I would say it was helpful. It wasn’t… it would not have been adequate as a stand-alone, but then you also had to pick a coach in your organisation. And when I say a coach it would be really somebody that you felt was a mentor actually, effectively, more than a coach. So you had to have a mentor. There was an external mentor, and an internal mentor. Okay? So that was the facility that we had in UCT. And then, of course, your syndicate groups which provide support, which for me I think was probably the most critical was the support and the… yes, the support, the knowledge of the members of the syndicate group, who, remember, all come from very nice diverse backgrounds. So I came from an airline. One guy was from a firm of auditors. Another chap was from the real estate business. Another woman was with… she was from an IT audit side with Deloitte, etc. So you know you got such a broad group of people and that collaboration and kind of the access to assistance from that particular group – and I’m talking about support, not solely in terms of kind of emotion support, but it becomes that on occasion as well – but really in terms of okay, well, let’s talk about the problem, you know, or I’ve got… I’m really having this problem, you know; what do you think? Well, have you tried this, etc, so that opportunity to exchange ideas in the syndicate group, I think, was one of the most powerful support mechanisms. And then I think having the coach, the two coaches kind of created a bit of formality to it as well, because you know you’re obliged to go and see these people at certain points in time and gets a little bit of a sign-off from them, and so on, so that also created some structure. And then I’m just thinking that there were also programme… there were specific programme managers that were always consistently there. So while, for argument sake, there were… you know you would be exposed to various different visiting lecturers, there was somebody that was in charge of the programme, and those two programme managers effectively were your contact… point of contact with the university, or for that particular programme. So there was really a circle of support actually, if I think about it.
Sure. That's good.

Yes.

Can I ask you something about the coach, right, and the mentor? What would you think of alumni being mentors for new students?

Oh, yes. That was a concept that they used.

Was it?

Yes. So in other words the external business coach or mentor was an alumni [sic] of the MBA programme at UCT.

Great. So then finally is there anything that you can suggest that business schools, organisations, students can do to improve the impact of the MBA, and of learning in general? I mean I’m talking about the MBA specifically. But if there’s something that you’re aware of that they can do better; what do you think?

Again it’s a very general question. I mean the thing is that each, you know, institution will have different issues and some of those might be logistical, they might be course content, it might be lecturers. You know I can’t comment on that. But I do think that involvement - involvement from both the business school with the students, and that extends beyond, you know, arriving at lectures and doing the lectures, the lecturer goes off in one direction and the students off in another - but the involvement of the business school with the students in the form of these kinds of structures that I was speaking about, that the people that are dedicated to the course programme, those are the people that you go and talk to if you have issues with a lecturer, with any part of the
programme kind of holistically. They supervise the programme. They’re there all the time when you… It wouldn’t work for part-time courses, but if it is a residential course it does work: that person is there. If you’ve got issues you go and talk to them. You phone them up when you’re not there, etc. So creating that kind of circle of support, inside and outside of the university, not necessarily employees of the university, so it could in fact be people out of the organisation, it could be people that are previous alumni, but I think that that is really what… where the success resides. Because in a sense what happens is that the student isn’t just left in a kind of a vacuum grappling with, you know, obviously very often quite a sort of a tough situation, because I mean a lot of them work as well. So you’ve got the practical pressures of trying to sort of, like, run your life in a business environment as well as… it just… I think that the chances of success are far greater.

Oh, another thing I want to mention there. They actually adopted a very holistic approach at UCT, at the Graduate School of Business. Even the spouses of the students were involved, not on a regular, regular basis, but you know sort of like twice a year - it was a two-year part-time programme – but twice a year. They would actually fly them… You know they would come down to Cape Town and they would actually take them through the programme, so almost an orientation in order to enable those people to support their other half.

RN It’s a really good point; a very, very good point.

C1 Because I think that that’s another area. I mean if I just think of, you know, some of the difficulties that one or two of my fellow students faced was pressure from the family, particularly from the husband or the wife, because it is very time-consuming and literally almost every single spare minute that you have outside of work is spent on studying. So there’s very little time over that period, for that two-year period, and you have to have a very understanding and supportive other half, and if you don’t… I mean I know that there were one or two marriages that didn’t last, or certainly got into deep trouble. So yes.
RN Great. So is there anything else you want to say, C1?

C1 No, not really. I don’t know whether I’ve been able to, sort of, like, deal with what it was that you were looking for.

RN But I think that a lot of your comments weren’t specifically around the MBA, a lot of the principles that you spoke to can definitely inform how we actually do the MBA better and create a bigger impact. Because these mini projects that you set up, and these mini leadership courses have principles like the action learning, like the common purpose, like the direction, if you can get that upfront and then get more interaction with the business, I think that this could potentially help the MBA.

C1 Well, look. Our executives were very, very, very involved. Our CEO was… he came to literally every session. So every time there was a new module, he could come there. Even if it was five minutes just to say hi to everybody, how are things going, or pop in for coffee, or something like that. And I think that if you speak to… if you speak to JJJ and to BBB, one of the things that they will probably remark on is the degree to which the CEOs and the entire executive were really involved and visible.

RN Great point. So thank you so much for your time, C1. I really appreciate it.

C1 It’s a pleasure. You know as I said, I’m sorry I cannot comment on the Gibs MBA. I didn’t… I didn’t study at Gibs myself.

RN No, that’s fine. That’s fine.
I can comment very specifically on the UCT MBA, or the EMBA, which I really thought was fantastic. But it had very similar principles to what I’m talking about here that’s been a success.

That’s great. I will be continuing [?] with some of the business schools as well, so maybe I’ll get some very good feedback from them as well.

Yes.

So thank you for your time.

It’s a great pleasure.
APPENDIX C: TRANSCRIPTS OF COMPANY 2 (C2)

Speaker key

RN Ravindran Naicker
C2A Respondent 1
C2B Respondent 2

RN Okay, great. So, my name is Ravindran Naicker, as you are aware, and my research, so I am basically a second year student at Gordon Institute of Business Science, finishing off my thesis, and my research is basically looking at how business schools, students and organisations collaborate, or can collaborate to make the MBA a better experience and to have more impact, and where this comes from is basically because of lot of students leave after a year or two of having started their MBA, they leave organisations. There's lots of rumour out there or there's corridor talk that, you know, the MBA doesn't add any value, that it effectively, you know, because the funding organisation never ever sees that benefit, to a large extent, and then they feel that business schools aren't quite in touch with what business wants, and so I'm here to try and understand from your perspective of business and obviously from C2B's perspective as a student who went through the process, how we can make this a better process, how we can make this, the MBA experience, better for all three parties to collaborate.

C2A I actually have no idea how I'm going to be helping you with that, because, you know, we were just talking earlier, I mean, that is, that is a very difficult concept and what C2B and I were discussing a little bit earlier was just the whole concept around doing an MBA and the real reason for a person enrolling into an MBA, because in my, in my opinion, the individual needs to understand what they want to do with their MBA; just to go and do it to, you know, put something additional on your CV doesn't add any value. Well, let me, let me qualify that statement; it doesn't add any value in our particular environment, because I think you deal with a lot of highly qualified individuals and, you know, if you've put in all the years of study for instance to get your CA, you
know, a lot of guys would then like to go and do their CFA once again, depending on
what they want to do with it; what is it, what is the next career goal or the next sort of
milestone step for them in terms of what they want to achieve? And, you know, C2B
and I were talking earlier about the MBA versus the, what was the other one?

C2B The entrepreneurial.

C2A The entrepreneurial

C2B Oh, the entrepreneurship.

C2A The entrepreneurship one, the MBL we were talking about as well, and I'm not
convinced that everybody going into it actually knows exactly what they're going to get,
because, you know, you need to know that so that you can know if it's going to meet
your needs as a student, and you were saying earlier about, you know, obviously
organisations who fund MBAs.

RN Before we go on, we've got a consent statement that I need you guys to sign
which basically gives me permission to use the information that we get from the
interview. It's totally voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without any penalties
and it will be confidential, so your names won't be disclosed at all.

C2A Sure.

RN Okay, so that's for you and that's for you, C2B.

C2B Cool.
Can I borrow your pen? Is this now...?

As a participant. You sign as a participant.

Okay.

And then, just a quick one, your academic qualification, C2A?

CA.

And C2B?

BCom.

Okay, great, so. So, let's start, right, and we'll unpack what you've just said now, because I think, I think you can add some value and maybe it's not specific to the MBA, but other initiatives that you've done that we could use on the MBA programme.

Right, yes.

So, I mean, just in general, what do you think are the successes of the MBA? I'm sure you've worked with a couple of people who've done their MBAs or you've employed a couple of...?

Well, I think that's the thing for me, and, I mean, that's maybe that's your story?
C2B: Ja. You know, I think, for me, you know, Rav, when I was looking at this, I just highlighted five key points in terms of what the successes of an MBA are and once again, it's depending, and what I would say, look at the Gibs entrepreneurship one, all right, are you wanting to get individuals that are entrepreneurially minded or would you want individuals that have got the broad, you know, MBA? And specifically what I identified is, in order for, and this is my opinion, in order for an MBA to be successful within the South African context, maybe more of an entrepreneurship focus; from a general perspective, I just think that, you know, an MBA gives an individual a broad knowledge of business, all right, it gives knowledge of factors, external or internal, that will and can affect how the business operates or the business world specifically; it will enable the participant to develop their critical analysis thinking skills, and I think that is very, that is very, very important, so that when you're looking at a picture, you're not just looking at, you know, the number of strokes the painter used, but to delve in a little bit deeper, all right, and give a broader overview, delving in deeper in terms of what that, you know, so that critical thinking is very, very important; and then, teamwork. I think one of the successes is teamwork where you have obviously assignments that you have to do together as a team and yes, some people might have, you know, different priorities, but you learn to work together and manage, you know, any issues that you might have together as a team, and at times, just, there's a global perspective that is brought into it, so not only, so it breaks down that silo thinking, so even South Africa at a micro level, but we're part of a bigger global group. And I know that in the time that I was there for the MBA it allowed us to be able to look, you know, outside our borders, in terms of what is actually happening and how those models, you know, can be used or can relate to South Africa. So, from a success perspective, those, that's what I think, and as I said, if you're looking at the entrepreneurship one, it's just more, the key skills that one needs to have in order to be able to run their own business.

C2A: I think just, you know, what I said earlier as well, I will always support someone who comes to me and says to me that they want to enrol for an MBA if they know what they want to do with it. I don't think it's just something that you can, as I say, do for the
sake of doing it. You really need to know what you're going to achieve with it so that
you are able to almost have a business case ready around what you want to do.

RN  Okay. So that's interesting point, right. This business case, so as a matter of
entrance should be a given, shouldn't it? What would it contain?

C2A  It needs to contain where it fits in, in your career path, you know, so you must
be very clear exactly what it is that you're going to get out of the MBA. I don't think a
high level overview is adequate, you need to know what you're going to get yourself
into, because these are professional people who are going to invest a lot of time,
generally after hours, and cost, into a programme; you need to know exactly what's
going to be in there, and how that fits with what you're trying to get out of your career,
or what you're trying to achieve as the next step in your career.

C2B  I think also, C2A, just to add to that, is that from, let's say, you know, C2
funding, for example, it's got to be aligned with also what C2 wants to, you know, there
must be value add, you know, at the end of the day, so...

C2A  Well, C2 won't fund it if you can't demonstrate that this is going to achieve or,
you know, do something different, to be able to achieve a certain business objective.

RN  Okay.

C2B  Because typically what happens is, you know, individuals find themselves being
accepted onto an MBA programme, but in terms of their career path and their stepping
stone, they've learnt all these skills, but they're not going to be able to implement them
immediately, so, you know, was it the right decision from a business case perspective
instead of the individual?
And from a timing perspective, and then find out that, well, you're going to have to wait for three, four years before you can actually, by that time, that knowledge that you've...

A lot has changed.

You know, a lot has changed.

Ja, you're right.

So I think there's a timing aspect to it.

It's an interesting point. I've heard that before in other interviews as well, in terms of the stage of someone's career, and whether it's relevant or not.

Ja, definitely.

Because then, you're starting to touch on some of the failings of an MBA or some of the shortcomings of an MBA. C2B, your views?

I think leadership focus.

So what are, how does leadership focus fail in the MBA?
C2B So, I think, for me, is that it's a shortcoming in terms of it's not adequately addressed. So it's okay to, and this is what we discussed as well, is that, you know, it's okay to have that business administrative sense, but an MBA should be straight in terms of, what are your leadership qualifications or credibility that you actually need to be able to, you know, to implement this knowledge that you have? So it's one thing to understand the value chain and the processes, but there's a leadership element to it, you know, coaching of individuals, you know, being able to motivate...

RN Tell me more about coaching?

C2B Well, you know, I think for me is that it's, one of your important resources is people, as an organisation, but we tend to look at the numbers, you know, quite a lot, and if you can coach individuals and manage individuals, you know, effectively, you'll, in my experience, you know, on the [unclear] perspective is that you can have the numbers figured out as much as you like, but if you've got people that are not motivated and you can't coach them properly, and if you can't, you know, show them the bigger picture, you're not going to, you're not going to succeed in any way. So, business is driven by people, you need to coach them, this is how things are done. Coaching induction, taking them through a proper, you know, on-boarding process and engaging with them from start to finish, you know, is very, very important.

C2A Absolutely.

RN And this, the MBA, obviously, in your experience, hasn't delivered?

C2B For me, it hasn't delivered, not only, I think there are personal issues there, all right, but from the way the course was structured somewhat also, you know, was one of the factors that attributed to me, you know, deregistering, all right?
RN  What was challenging about the structure?

C2B  I think, for me, it was, I was lacking, I would have preferred to have that entrepreneurship side, all right? Critically looking at, example, the marketing lecture that we had, and I know that you can't please everybody in terms of how the programme is conducted, but for me, it's to do a literate review, from a marketing base, and maybe it was in preparation for the thesis that individual gave me at a later stage, but it should have been more around, go and critically analyse your business's marketing plan and, you know, break it down and have a look at the working parts, and I think that would have been more learnings from them.

RN  So if I understand you correctly, it's basically too theoretical versus practical?

C2B  It was too theoretical, you know, versus, ja, the practicality side of things. And also, for me, from a [unclear] perspective was, the practicality was there, but coming into a theoretical base, I had already, even though I couldn't put the words to some of the price discrimination, just to take economics, for example, but the practicality was there and...

C2A  So if someone wasn't in your position, where would they find their practical?

C2B  Where would they find, you know, the practical example, whereas for me the full time entrepreneurship would have been more, because you put together a business plan and you present and you get given, you get coached on how to solve, how to solve the business plan and make it more beneficial.

C2A  Especially if you are going to, you know, get people to prepare their own business case to even start the MBA, you know, how do they then... That's the other thing that I was thinking about as well, is you need that business case initially, but I
think where it sometimes falls down is, you don't get status updates, because, you
know, you may agree that in a particular instance you want to assist this person to
develop certain skills, you agree on the MBA process, off you go, and when do you
hear, so what is happening, how is this adding to your performance, your development
and that type of thing, it's always... And that's where the coaching comes in as well,
you know, how do you make sure that message gets delivered? Because I don't think
we hear that message very often.

RN  Ja. Who would be doing this coaching? So, someone comes to you, presents a
business case, it makes perfect business sense, it's going to give this person a wide
range of skills, leadership skills or whatever, right, and we'll probably get to that later in
some of the other questions, but I just want you to think about how we can use your
idea in terms of your initial business case and how do we manage that throughout the
process so that the, so that firstly, you as an organisation, you're comfortable that
having sent this person on the course, they're actually learning something and are
being supported to facilitate that back into the organisation; that person then is fulfilling
his views in terms of his career or his or her career, or what they want to achieve, and
that's still on track, and, I mean, C2B can tell you, during the MBA process, it's a very
difficult process, there's many times when you get derailed, so what sort of support do
we give back; and the other point is then, how does the university know that there's a
business case and we must deliver on that business case, but ultimately see if you are
tied together for the next two or three years?

C2A  So do you have a supervisor when you're doing your MBA?

C2B  So, from a Gibs perspective?

C2A  From a Gibs perspective.

C2B  I think you, for a, Warren Beatty, I mean, that was more from a
RN No, that was just an introduction, so that was Dave Beaty, wasn't it?

C2B Rav, for me, in terms of answering that, I'd look at, so here you go, performance management, or, sorry, setting your goals, go to your supervisor and saying, I'm interested in doing my MBA, you and your boss then have a look and, or your performance manager, have a look at the timing, is it really correct, the business case of it? What is it that you hope to achieve out of this and the costing involved, and I know that in most cases most organisations have a work back strategy, so fine, we will foot the bill, however, you may not leave within the next five years. So you establish that and an internal contract gets signed, which the individual then has to adhere to. Should you leave before then, you have to pay back this. So, it's not really that the university needs to know, the mere fact that the individual's actually applying for that, you've got the go-ahead from business because the business is paying this; yes, there will be, you've got other functions that you need to perform at work, but however, in terms of the policies that we have, these are the times when you can take study leave, so, I mean, that for me is set in stone. And you yourself, as an individual, know that it is going to be a rigorous process and I do have clients or other obligations that I have, that I have to meet. I think it's a given that the university or institute that you're with, if you are a sponsored individual, that the mere fact that you're actually joining this programme means that it's going to add value to the organisation. Would you agree with me on that one?

C2A Ja.

RN I want to ask a question, right, moving onto the next question; how do we ensure that we achieve benefits for everybody and everyone's on the same page? So you've got a, you've got a sort of a tripartite situation, you've got the organisation, right? And you've just approved a business case, and you've sat down and you've got the contracts and so all the formal stuff's done, right, so that's right upfront; then you've got the business school and then you've got the student, okay? Now, throughout the process, how would you ensure that, from an organisation perspective, right, because you can only talk for yourself, how would you ensure that firstly, that this student is on
track in terms of what they're learning, and brings back, as they learn, into your organisation? So you don't wait for a two year period until his MBA's finished and then come back and say, okay, great, I'm now, I can do whatever I can. How do you ensure that if I've been on a course on leadership, let's take a simple course, like Leading through Storytelling, how do I ensure that some of the skills that I learnt there have came back here, and how do you ensure that what they're learning stays relevant here? How would you do that?

C2A I would say that I would like to have a plan from the individual showing me exactly what it is they're learning and when they're learning it and that would be part of the business case already, and what I would like to get then, I would like to get status updates from the business school, via the student, obviously, and, in my mind, if I can see okay, they're now doing a module on XYZ, these are the two main outcomes they're focussing on. I would then like to see, okay, well, the business school are saying to me, this individual completed the module and they thought, you know, everything went absolutely dandy, I want to then be in a position to get feedback from the different people that that student is working for, get performance feedback, and say to them, okay, you know what, this person, six weeks ago they achieved the following things for the business school, you've worked with this individual now, over the past six weeks, was this person able to demonstrate any of those outcomes that they, per the records, per the records from the business school, that they have now learnt this new skill?

RN So that's a really good idea, and how would you support this as a business? So how would the, so you're HR, right, and you've got the guys in line and you've got that person's manager who's agreed the business case, how would, what would you like to see from that individual to support the student, and vice versa? So they've been on a...

C2A Well, you've got an existing performance development process in place anyway, so if it is someone who's on a special programme like an MBA, for instance, you may need to have a couple of extra conversations during the time that the person's doing the MBA, but I don't think that you can expect, you know, you can place heavy
additional responsibility on the performance manager; the student is the one who
should be taking the responsibility for making sure the feedback is given, and the
student is the one who should be able to say to the performance manager, you know,
this was expected of me, these are the new skills and this is what I’ve done, either at a
client or in a project and, you know, with his team or whatever, this is where I’ve been
able to demonstrate it.

RN So it’s almost, it’s almost, if I can summarise, i.e. developing a new contract
based on the outcomes of the MBA, so basically, these are the things you said you
were going to learn, how you applied what you’ve learnt to business and that basically
would then go in as part of the contract so that you have constant sort of feedback and
you have constant input back into business.

C2A Yes.

RN Sounds good. And what would you say, or how would you suggest the business
school support this process? So you’ve mentioned there that you’d like to get status
updates via the students, right?

C2A Ja. I think that goes back to the whole comment around coaching and I suppose
it will be varying degrees of that, but you would basically need like a supervising person
at the business school who’s able to actually provide such a status report. You don’t
want a detailed, you know, I don’t want a 50 page thesis on every module this person
completes; I don’t have the time to read it. I want a basic, they’ve done this module,
these are the two main things, this is what we think the person… Yes, they achieved it,
no, they didn’t. You know, one or two comments, Bob’s your uncle. You don’t need a
massive feedback form because no-one’s going to look at it.

RN Absolutely, ja.
Because, I think what also tends to happen is that we only look at those individuals that are struggling, that's when you actually give out those reports. What about those individuals that are actually doing well? So, regardless that the institution would also have to say, as, you know, C2A stated, quarterly reports of, this is what this person or, you know, after each module, C2B has really done well, and that is fed back through either the student or an email to, who's your performance manager, and once you get this feedback saying, doing really well, you know, 65% in this or whatever it is, and they're the key skills that they should be able to demonstrate. So, not only for individuals that are doing badly, but also for individuals that are performing.

No, absolutely. Well, I would expect that people who get accepted for an MBA would certainly be individuals who are doing well.

Ja.

That sounds good. That's actually very good. And, I mean, summarily, right, I think we've touched on all of these questions. In terms of this relationship, what can, what can each one of these do better that they're not doing now? I'm sure you've got relationships with other, with business schools, right, in a capacity where they provide you with leadership programmes or they provide you with input in terms of training and development. Can you tell me what's successful about those relationships?

Look, we mainly work with Gibs, and...

Firstly, does that relationship work for you?

Absolutely. I honestly think if you can get that structure that we've just spoken about, because there you've got communication going between all three parties, because you need to have a clear idea of what the outcomes are that you can expect,
you need to then get the individual involved, obviously doing it, going through the
learning process, you need to get the feedback from the business school; yes, in theory
this person should now be able to demonstrate these things, and then you need the
performance manager to say, oh, my goodness, what do you know, we actually saw it
happening in the workplace, and you're able to say, fantastic, you know, I can see a
return on my investment.

RN What would you do in the instance where a person's been on a module but
don't demonstrated it? But they've had the opportunities to? Have or have not.

C2A Well, you'd generally need to follow I would imagine the same process you do
with any non-performance issues in terms of, you know, giving the person the
feedback, because there might be a difference in the perceptions, you know, the
individual may feel that they did actually deliver what they were supposed to. The
discussion around well, what are the expectations? Are we 100% clear that what you
see the expectations to be is what it is that we're actually expecting? So you have to
give them another opportunity to demonstrate it. But I do believe once you've really
clarified the expectations, you've given them a second opportunity, then, you know,
then you've got to question, well, you know, where did the process fail?

RN Okay. In the model that you've just suggested, right, we've got, so clarifying the
expectations a second time, right, would there be a clarification of, or would there be in
that original contracting phase, would you set the expectations down there?

C2A Must.

RN Okay.

C2B Because you'd link, you'd link it to the outputs at the beginning.
C2A Yes, definitely.

RN Great. Well, let me just check here... Okay, that's actually about, just about time. Look, I think it's been very useful chatting to you; I definitely think that this, the model that you've just given me gives me a lot of insight in terms of how we get this relationship really going and close the gap between the three organisations. I think, I think for me, it's probably going to end up being wider than just the MBA, it's adult learning in any context, where, like you suggested, you set the contract upfront, you set the objectives and you monitor it through the process, and if that happened then you've a regular feedback, then perhaps that will lead to collaboration. Do you agree?

C2A Ja.

C2B Ja.

C2A That's what we do with our normal training at C2, so...

RN And that's what you do, is that in-house training?

C2A Ja.

RN Okay.

C2B Just to check from your side, is the purpose of this, do you find that with the Gibs MBA, does it disconnect between that? Business, Gibs and the student?
What my initial research suggests is that there is a disconnect between business, in general. So it's not necessarily aligned to the Gibs, it's MBA as a whole and we find, what I'm finding more and more often is that people are becoming more and more sceptical of the MBA because there is a disconnect between the three, there's no feedback.

I agree with that.

There's no feedback.

Ja.

All right, great. Well, thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate it.
APPENDIX D: TRANSCRIPTS OF COMPANY 3 (C3)

Speaker key

RN Ravindran Naicker
C3 Company 3

RN Great. So, I'm Ravindran Naicker, I am a second year student or final year student at the University of Pretoria, or Gibs, and my topic is understanding how collaboration can help business school students and business better improve or have a bigger impact of the MBA, because I think largely, to a large extent, where this has come from is, the corridor speak in business is that, you know, the MBA has got a really bad perception, MBAs, we fund them and they leave within one or two years, right? And then on the students' side, they never get to apply what they...

C3 What they've learnt.

RN What they can, in their current organisation, so they look for things elsewhere; and then there's the view that the business schools aren't really relevant and aren't teaching what's relevant to business.

C3 Yes, absolutely.

RN And so I want to pull that together and understand how we can do that.

C3 Okay, cool.
RN: Great. So, I mean, the questions, just before we move on, C3, your current title is?

C3: I'm the Executive for Global HR at C3.

RN: And your qualifications?

C3: I've a diploma.

RN: Okay, great. So, effectively, the interview will be anonymous, so I won't be using any names. In terms of the data collection process, I'm going to have 15 interviews; ten more business practitioners like yourself, five with the heads of the various business schools, just to get their views. I'll probably at some stage have a focus group with students. And so I think, I think, just in general, what do you think the successes of the MBA are?

C3: Just, before we go into that, obviously the comments I will make are a lot of my own personal comments. I have gathered some feedback from some of our HR directors as well, as well as our strategy guy, just to understand, to try and give you a bit of perspective from a C3 and from people, the profile of us that I've asked, are people that have been in business for a very long time, so you're looking at 20 years plus. So, the more mature, if I can put it that way, feedback. I haven't gathered feedback from our younger generation, so just, so that it might be a little bit skewed, I don't want it to be skewed, but it might be skewed. In terms of the successes of the MBA, some of the things that we believe an MBA does very well for the students is obviously understanding business concepts, it gives its students excellent ability to do that. It also, we think it assists the students for the ability to cope under pressure and work under a heavy workload, particularly if they are currently working full time and studying part time. Also, we believe it makes individuals think creatively, and obviously having to meet deadlines and complete assignments. I think the networking and team
dynamics of the MBA students helps in terms of future business relationships. It does
mature students to a larger extent, because you're not just at a university, you're
obviously at business school and you're interacting with business people, not fellow
undergraduate students. It gives you an opportunity to contextualise and consolidate
your work experience. We believe it gives you the enhanced ability to write reports and
assignments; it obviously improves your self-knowledge and it gives you structure to
your thought processes.

RN  Okay. That pretty much sums up what...

C3  Okay? That's what we think is good of the MBA. Do you want me to carry on in
terms of what is the failing?

RN  Yes, go for it, go for it.

C3  Some of the negativity you have already mentioned; in the, and one of the
comments I had from one of the HR directors is, they don't believe the MBA has the
standing as it used to in the old days, and why we say that, sometimes, maybe it's a
perception, but we believe it's too easy to be accepted on the course; there used to be
a minimum requirement of work experience prior to acceptance and just from our
experience, we don't see that longer work experience coming in; you've got more and
more younger students going in, who we believe have the intellectual ability, but they
don't have what we call the railroad tracks, they haven't been down the path yet, they
haven't had the chance to work, to experience things. And as I said, it's coming from
the older generation, but that's our perception.

RN  So, in terms of that, right, that the students don't have enough experience,
what, how does that devalue the value of the MBA?
Because, what we have found is that the students are doing the MBA for self-purposes, the business has not sent them on it, because we believe they're too young at that point in time without the experience. So they're doing it for self-purposes. The negativity that comes out of that is that when they come out, like you've said before, they have higher expectations and demand things, but yet they haven't actually proven it, that they can do it, if I can put it that way. It's...

That's an interesting point. So they haven't proven it, right?

They haven't proven that they have the ability to deliver on certain elements, yet their demands and expectations because they now have this Master's, is, whether it's in remuneration, whether it's in positions, they expect to move quicker and they expect to be, well, they are probably more marketable, but, well, they haven't delivered something in the business for us, as yet, if that's...

How does that differ to someone who's got experience who's been in an MBA? So what does having that experience plus the MBA give you over a student who...?

Because I think what they can then do is, it's not purely an academic solution that they present to the business; they understand the realities of what works and what doesn't work in business.

Okay. So it's a lot more practical in...

Yes. It can work, it's not just an academic solution.

Okay. That's a great point.
Some of the other failings, depending on, I think because of this age limit, you can sometimes have a lack of maturity of the individuals on the programme, so you might have certain individuals who are a lot more experienced, a lot older, and then you have the youngsters, so we just saying, we just think that that has its own dynamics, that has to be sorted out. I think you have MBAs and you have MBAs, and sometimes we say it's too prolific and a lack of qualification credibility because this institute offers an MBA and that institute offers an MBA, and what are the credible MBAs?

What would you, what would you or your team view as a credible MBA?

We're the old school, so it's your traditional business school, so whether it's a Gibbs; if it's a business school, business school from the Cape, you know, those are, some of these, the credible ones are the ones that are proven in South Africa for us, but where you have those that are online to the UK or the US, not credible to us. The ones where we have relationships with the institutions as well, we actually see it in practice. One of the other failings of the MBA is, sometimes it can be too academic and conceptual and obviously coming out of that, we call them arrogant graduates with inflated expectations...

That a good quotation. I'm going to quote you on that.

Thanks.

Arrogant graduates... ?

We call them arrogant graduates with inflated expectations.
RN Great. So, in terms of that, right, so it’s too academic and conceptual, so you get these graduates with inflated expectations; go on, go on...

C3 What we tend to find then, what we prefer, is what we call an in-house programme that we would develop with the business school, so take for example, at that level, an executive development programme, where it becomes real for the business, and the student is getting the academic and the conceptual thinking, but, for example, we do very much the action learning projects, and it is relevant to our business.

RN Okay, so, tell me about this, tell me about these actions, I mean, projects. So, how does it work?

C3 Okay. If we just talk the programme, for example, if we do it through Wits or through Gibs, even our leadership development programmes, we sit down with the advisors at Gibs, at the business school, and we decide on the modules that we want covered, so whether you’re talking about...

RN How do you know, how do you know what modules you want to cover?

C3 Because we look at where we have a need in our business, so where we have a lack of expertise. So, if it’s in financial skills, marketing skills, world class customer strategies, whatever it might be, and then on the advice of Gibs, in terms of looking at the number of credits, etc, they will advise that these are the modules that build up credits, so we talk to them about how we want it structured. So they will then obviously allocate lecturers and assign, whether it’s business people or not, to those lecturers, who will then conduct those lectures to our students. One of the elements is what we call an Action Learning Project where our strategy teams identify, depending on the number of people that we have, six to seven key strategic projects for C3.
Okay. So, who comprises this team?

The... Are you talking about the ones that decide on the project?

The strategy teams, ja.

It's our board. Our board and our strategy guys decide. So each of the... And our board is divisional CEOs, so they look in their own business, what is a key project that they need to be researched, okay? Then we divvy up our delegates into teams and they are mixed teams, mixed from our different divisions, etc, and they get allocated a project, they get a project sponsor...

Who typically would be the sponsor?

That could be the head of the department that that project would fall under. It's usually a high level person.

So it's probably the CEO or head of the department?

It could be the CEO, it could be the strategy guy, it could be, if it's a marketing one, it could be the marketing director, whatever it is. And then they have to go and research and do all the research behind everything and then come up with the business case and proposal, which they then present to our Exco. And then those projects usually get implemented, or if further research is required after the course, it gets tasked to the divisional strategy person to follow up. So it's more meaningful to us.
RN So now in terms of this entire process, right, so you've got the initial feedback
with the business school, so you meet with business, you have your initial feedback
where you say, these are my needs, come back with a programme. They come back
with a programme, they send the guys on the programme, you then consolidate that
programme into an action project...

C3 Yes. There's a number of, there's usually six at a time that are running in that,
it's not just one project, it's six. Because we usually have about, on the EDP, about 20
to 25 and on the LDP about 40 to 45.

RN Excellent. So, on these learning projects that you've got in place, right, you've
got a senior person sponsoring this and giving the guys guidance; they go away, they
do their research, they present their proposals, or their options, the viable ones get
implemented, or if there's more research then they go away and do that, right?

C3 Yes.

RN At this stage, there, is there any then feedback to Gibs or is there any further
involvement on Gibs beyond the, or whichever university, beyond the initial
programme?

C3 What we do, is we actually sit in, so if I'm the project manager, together with my
admin assistant, we sit through the entire programme, we listen to the lecturers, we see
the quality, we monitor the feedback, we see where the hiccups are happening, and if
we believe a certain lecturer is not suitable for our business, in a review process with
Gibs afterwards, we give them the feedback and we amend it for the following year.
We're very involved with Gibs on that. I'm probably the, I think I've attended more
programmes and don't have the qualification, because we sit in on all of them. And, if
it's an EDP and we do an international leg, I, as project manager, go with on the
international leg, we do the business visits, whatever it is, we go to the international business school, we get lecturers there, etc. etc. So...

RN  Okay. That's sounds really good. And, I mean that basically, so this system basically talks to my point three in terms of how you've achieved benefits for students, for your business and obviously for the business school with the feedback, right?

C3  Absolutely, yes.

RN  Let me understand; through this process, how has the business school supported you and the students?

C3  When you say how have they supported us, in terms of, obviously they are, they're not rigid, they're very flexible, in what we call our in-house programmes, so they will give advice, they will give best practice and they will then tailor the actual course content to our needs, which has been great. So it has to be that close working relationship, don't give us an inflexible, this is the programme, it's generic, it doesn't mean anything to us. If I can just come in on this, what we do is, before each lecture, so say the lecture is on finance, okay, just for want of a better thing, we always have our internal expert talk first on what does C3 do in finance? So, what is the strategy of C3 finance, who do we, who do we do our, how do we do, how do we raise money, you know, bonds, etc, where are we located, what international best practices do we follow? So we give our own version and then the lecturer comes in and talks the more generic type thing. We do it on all our subjects, so if you talk customer strategies, we'll have one of our CEOs from say, UUU, come and talk about their experience on customer satisfaction, something like that. Then you'll have the lecturer of E-card or whatever coming and talking on generic customer strategies.

RN  So let me ask you, in terms of this process, right, which I think is a really good process, do you guys fund MBAs?
We do fund individual MBAs, but it's on an individual basis and as a, I can't say it's a norm, because we would prefer our guys to do an EDP or an LDP, which is more meaningful to us, so it has to be, the MBA would have to offer something that our guys couldn't get through the EDP, which is very few and far between, because, as I said, it's more an individual need. The individual wants an MBA. Why does the individual want an MBA? Or maybe there's not an opportunity for them to go on the EDP at that particular point in time because it's restricted and we only do it every two years. Or they've come in, we've recruited them and they were doing their MBA; but it is on a select basis and only at a senior type level.

I would say selected senior, or where it is agreed, because of the costs associated with it, it's, if you do two MBAs a year, it's a lot.

So, on average you've got two MBAs a year?

Two to three. Not a lot, because a lot of them funded themselves. Maybe I need to go back to the beginning. Our organisation is not, and I don't want to say it doesn't require MBAs, but because we are distributors of leading brands, you are very limited in terms of new business opportunities, so for example, if you're in C3 equipment, DDDD holds the franchise rights. It then selects who can be the dealer to sell DDDD, but then allocated to us, it says, you can sell DDDD in South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi, and gives us territory. We can't then go and sell a Comanche to competition, so we are limited, and I call it, in terms of expanding the brand possibilities. Now, most of our, most of businesses, take motor retail, they have the original suppliers, so it's BMW, Mercedes, Toyota, Audi, etc, those, what do you call them? OEMs, dictate where and how you sell and what you sell at and what you do with the business. HHHH, also, is controlled by HHHH and it says you can do XYZ. Equipment, DDDD, they tell us what you can and can't do. The only area where we have freedom to expand our brands, expand our footprint, we don't have a principal who dictates, is on
our logistic side and that's where... So, the need for an MBA is not as a key element. It
helps, it helps with the thinking and it helps with the broader thing, but if you're
restricted and DDDD says you do that and BMW says you do that, we have to do that.
We have to just look at smarter ways of doing things.

RN Absolutely. So, in terms of, so you bring it back to the MBA, right, the principles,
do you find the two people in an MBA?

C3 I don't have those records, but there's not a hell of a lot.

RN The principle of, if you could have input into the curriculum of the MBA right at
the beginning, and then for those two people having action learning programmes
throughout the MBA...

C3 Or their thesis, whatever it is.

RN Or, well, I don't know about the thesis, because that's a, that's a... The
challenge with the thesis is, it can't be a business problem, but the skills that you learn
in the thesis and the skills that you learn throughout, there's no reason why you can't
implement those during or after the MBA. Now, if you, I'm just trying to catch whether
you would be open to the idea of having input firstly into the MBA programme right at
the inception, then have an action learning programme; those people you've funded
and obviously anybody else who is on the MBA, but you've obviously got to give them
time off, you've got to do all that sort of stuff. So if you get together a group of five
people doing an MBA, right, and you did a similar thing here where they have to deliver
an output, would that work for you?

C3 It could work for us. I would have to look at the cost effectiveness of it, because
if it's going to deliver the same end result as an EDP does, I would just look at the cost
effective... But it would help, it would definitely help. Even when you come to your thesis and I know you say it can't be business related, but maybe a good thing for us is ex-patriots, so do something relevant on ex-patriots that could help us as a side thing, instead of this generic thesis on whatever, which adds bugger all value to us as a business.

RN No, I get exactly what you're saying. I get exactly what you're saying. So, input into thesis. Now, in terms of delivering value, right, these people that go out, and as you say, it's very individualistic and it's basically that person, that person drives it. Is there any feedback?

C3 In terms of?

RN So, do you as a business get any feedback in terms of this person's progress in terms of whether they're achieving the objectives, whether they're more effective at work?

C3 No.

RN So there's no feedback, right?

C3 No.

RN And how would, how would feedback work? Would it help you in any way?

C3 If we've sponsored someone to do an MBA I would expect feedback, I would expect to know the attending lecturers, their progress; I would expect to know how
they're doing on the relevant... I would also need to have sessions with the individual to understand from their line manager, are they meeting business expectations, as well? Because it is quite difficult and what we have found is that they start ducking and diving, unfortunately, on the work side, in order to complete the assignments or whatever because they haven't planned correctly. And what we've got to guard against is favouritism towards those students; we have policies in place for the number of study days, leave, etc, and if you start then doing special treatment to an MBA student versus a CA, a person who's doing a CA, you're going to have unfair labour practices in terms of for us. So it's, it is a tricky one, but we do tend to find that sometimes the students, depending on their maturity, it does affect their ability to deliver their outputs at work.

RN Okay. So would that suggest that the more mature students are able to cope with it?

C3 I think what happens is, the more mature students have learnt how to manage multiple things at the same time; often they are in a more senior position where they can allocate certain duties to others. I think if it's somebody just into junior management or middle management, they are doing a lot of the things themselves. So it's a bit of a balancing act, but it's the same with the EDP and the LDP that we run, they have to balance, but we don't want, we don't want it to be seen as favouritism towards MBA students, that we're now going to give you, if we normally give 12 days, now we're going to give you those 30 days, and then if they're having to attend lectures, how do we... ? Because it is, it has a big impact on when they attend lectures; if some of them are doing it in the evening, some of them are doing it during the day, then they're taking two weeks off for this block and two weeks off for that block, it does impact on the business.

RN For sure. For sure. That feedback, you mentioned that feedback, how would you, or, in what form would you like that feedback, and from whom?
C3 I would presume from the lecturers, or in a written format, like a report, you know, a report would be good to say okay, this person's done these modules, they've achieved these results; attendance, diligence, attitude. What we don't often find is, when we run the programme ourselves, we see the interactions between delegates and we can address if there's problems on those interactions. If this person is representing us as an MBA student and they're not living by our code of conduct and our values, we've got to know about that.

RN Excellent. And then finally, what do you think business schools, organisations and students, can do to improve the impact of the MBA?

C3 Okay. I think, essentially, obviously the relationships between business to consulting the curriculum and course content is important. We would prefer that the lecturers are experienced individuals from the business sector and not pure academics, okay. It just complements the theoretical side of things. We would prefer to have mentors for those students from business.

RN So, where would these mentors come from? Would you like either the university or business to have a mentor?

C3 I think business should be able to mentor, somebody who has been down the railroad line, who knows and can assist the students.

RN Right. What impact do you think a mentor would have?

C3 I think it just keeps them level headed, you know, in terms of wild ideas and, you're not chucking it out, but more so just guiding them and keeping them realistic.
RN Good point.

C3 I think, I think also have, allow the students to have access to other large organisations, senior employees or mentors, just to get a different perspective as well. So, not just the C3 perspective, but if there is an agreement with Gibs that our C3 employee could also, you know, have access to other senior people just to get a different perspective. I think it's important that we need to balance the expectations of the students with reality in the workplace and it's important for us that the exclusivity and integrity of the qualification is maintained.

RN Just before we move on; so to balance the expectations of the students with the realities of business?

C3 Yes. You know, just somebody will, and I've had experience before; okay, I've now got an MBA, I now, for example, should be paid X, but I'm doing that job, but I can't pay you X because you're doing that job, and I pay you for the job that you're doing, I don't pay you for your qualification unless it's an inherent requirement in that job. And it's just tempering those sort of things.

RN Sure. I assume that, based on what you said, it keeps the person level headed. The mentor in this scenario would have a big input into managing those expectations.

C3 Absolutely. Yes.

RN What role would the business school play to manage those expectations?

C3 I think they also need to have a handle on what's going on in business. You know, I've seen it before, where international business schools say, well, they do
research and say, okay, MBA graduates now from our business school can look at salaries between X and Y, and yes, maybe some of them have been appointed into very high level positions, but it's not the norm. So it's more business school, get a grip on what, where do your MBA graduates end up, right, just as they graduate; do some research. Do they move, don't they move, how many of your graduates have moved within the past two years, three years; has salary changes happened, you know, just give the guys a real understanding of what happens in the business environment.

RN In terms of the mentors, what would you think of students who've finished the MBA, as being, obviously outside companies, as being mentors for current students?

C3 I think that would help, absolutely, because they've been through it, they know, they can talk from the experience.

RN And what else? What else do you think they can do better to work together?

C3 I think just, just to sum it up, to make it more business orientated as opposed to purely academic, but more practical.

RN What can, what should students be doing better in this regard? So you've funded two people on the MBA per se; what can they do better?

C3 I think they should be communicating more with their line person and/or their HR person, whoever is the person that has agreed to put them on the MBA. I think they need to also then transfer some of their learnings to colleagues and others and that could be in, like for example, in their team meetings, just say, oh, by the way, this is what we've learned and maybe be an easier way of doing this is we could do XYZ in the team, and bringing some of their academic learnings and implementing it practically in their own teams.
RN Excellent. Is there anything else, C3, from your side?

C3 No. I think, I think if we can work together and make it more practical, and keep it exclusive.

RN Ah, yes, that was the other point.

C3 Churning out hundreds and hundreds of MBA graduates, it's not doing the businesses any good and it's not doing the students any good.

RN Absolutely. So, thank you so much for your feedback.

C3 It's pleasure.

RN There's some really valuable insights that you've given.

C3 Okay, good.

RN And I really appreciate your time.

C3 No, pleasure. Thanks. Ja, Ravi, I think we're a very, we're a very practical organisation, we.
As I’ve explained right through, effectively I’m trying to get the situation where we can have a model that helps business schools provide a curriculum that’s more relevant for business, and helps supports students, and at the same time, business feeds back to business schools, to give them what’s relevant. So that’s from the business school perspective.

From a student perspective, a student wants to be supported, so how do we support the students, in terms of transferring their learning from school to work, and to make an impact quicker than after two years? So, through the process, understanding that process.

Okay, I don’t know if I can help you, but I haven’t done an MBA, so obviously I haven’t done an MBA, but I’ve got a Doctorate in Psychology, and we’re working with the MBA students.

Let’s go there.

We’re working with some MBAs but not closely, though we are working closely with Gibs on our executive and senior programme, but that’s not an MBA, that we’re doing there. That is a business focused short courses, training that they’re giving us.

Do you employ MBAs?

We don’t go out and employ, look for MBAs. There’s a number of people in the organisation who are busy doing MBAs, and who have done MBAs. There are a number of those people, and are busy or have been doing MBAs, but we don’t put a requirement on, to say we want to employ MBA students. We don’t go look for MBA students. People who are here, doing MBAs, do that because they want to enrich
themselves, they want to get more information, more knowledge, more competence, business understanding and so forth.

And, we don’t increase their salary afterwards, so you know, there’s nothing like that here. It’s just...people go and do MBAs.

RN We’ll come back to that part, because I think some of the business learning things that you’ve got in place, we could probably use some of those principles in terms of transferring the learning back to the MBA, or what not, in terms of relationships.

Let’s start at the top, so, what do you think, in your experience in terms of MBA or the people that you’ve employed, or your experience, what do you think the success of the MBA is?

C4 MBA gives you a proper understanding of the business landscape, and challenges of the day, in other words, the present. They also give you a wider view of the business world, in other words, it’s the opposite of isolation. It is openness, understanding what goes on in different parts of the world. It gives you a strategic understanding of the global economic issues and powers.

And, it gives you, on a personal basis, it also gives those individuals access to other businesses and contacts, business contacts in their immediate, local environment where they operate, so they form friendships, they form contacts of the other logistics company on the western side of Jo’burg, type of thing, or they have now this contact with insurance or with glass manufacturers, or motor dealership, so it gives you a wide contact, group of contacts, so that’s what it does.

To my view, it does not necessarily increase management competency.

RN Would you see that as a failing, leading to my second question, is that one of the failings of the MBA, or is that not its purpose?

C4 Actually the question is not so easy, because what it gives you, or also gives you, to carry on with that, what it also gives you, it gives you a toolkit to manage, to be a general manager, meaning it gives you a skill in analysing financial statements, if
that's not your background, you can start doing that. It gives you an understanding of
the whole human resource, recruitment, selection process. And, there’s a number of
other things that it gives you, that I don’t have all the topics.

So, whether the person applies that toolkit or not will depend on his personality, so we
have not seen a person coming back from that has got better margins, making better
profits, that hasn’t happened. That’s a personality thing.

An MBA is a three years, it doesn’t, it grows people. There’s personality growth, most
definitely, but it doesn’t change your personality to be something that, or someone that
you haven’t been.

RN   I see what you’re saying.

C4   If you’re not a go getter, if you’re a bit of a reactive person, and so on, and
you’re not a good business person, then you’re not going to be a good business person
after your MBA. So, an MBA can’t grow a limb, it can’t grow neurons, it realise certain
potential that you have. If you haven’t got that, you’re not going to change.

The other thing is you find people who are very inclined to deal with stuff in an
academic way, to deal with...they like to look at stuff from a scientific, academic
perspective. They will be good MBA students, because they like the academic
environment, and they can write nice reports and dissertations and whatever.

Those people, I’m not saying all, but those people who like to deal with the business
world or the world in terms of that academic orientation are not necessarily good
business people.

So, they are not going to be good business people after they’ve done their MBA.

RN   Basically, in terms of that point, which is a really good point, so these people
who are stuck in the theoretic realm or academic realm, lack practical applicability in
business, if I’m understanding you correctly?

C4   You can’t say they lack it, but it’s not their style of preference.
Not their style of preference.

Nobody lacks nothing, you understand? You’ve got more of stuff and less of stuff, and you’ve got a certain preference, how you deal with business, how you deal with people, that’s your typical behaviour. Typical behaviour is behaviour that comes with little effort. It’s your normal behaviour, if you don’t think you’re being watched, that’s what you normally do, so if that’s your typical style, that’s going to be your typical style. The MBA is not going to change you, to be this high flying entrepreneur.

Sure.

If you’re not an entrepreneur, if you don’t like taking business risks, then you’re not going to like it after your MBA, because an MBA doesn’t change your personality, but it grows a person, meaning it grows certain strong points, potential points that you have.

What else would you see, or what would you see as other failings of the MBA?

That’s not a failing of the MBA that we spoke about.

Yes, this is a...

An MBA, I don’t think...

How would you class this point, this is more...its purpose?

No, the fact of the matter is, you’ve got to understand what the purpose of an MBA is. If you see that as the purpose, personality growth, giving you a toolbox to manage, then it’s not a failure. The MBA hasn’t got a failure. If you as a person see an MBA as a way to change your personality, and make you an MD of a company instantly, then it’s going to be a failure, but failure is not on the MBA side. The failure is on the expectation of the individual side.

Sure.
So, I can't say MBAs have got failures. As you know, so it's all the expectation of the individual. How the MBAs are sold to the individuals, I don't know, how it's sold. In other words, an MBA marketing, the market that can make huge claims, I don't know that. So, I can't talk about that.

Let me ask you the question then, in curbing the expectations, or in managing the expectations of what the MBA gives you as a student and as a business, how would you suggest that that be managed?

I think that there must be a realistic marketing or presentation of the purpose, and the unique contribution of an MBA.

And, this is on the part of the business school?

Yes, obviously, now I know, you see, business schools can make huge claims, because they might not be aligned to a reputable tertiary institutions. Like, Gibs, Wits, University of Stellenbosch, those are reputable business schools, they are aligned to reputable institutions, such as universities of Pretoria, of Wits, of Stellenbosch, or Jo'burg...you know? So, those, I can't talk about that. I think they're pitching correctly but I don't know how they pitch. I don't think they will be unethical in how they pitch, but there are business schools, you can find, go onto the email, internet now and you can probably find 20 business schools in Jo'burg.

Yes.

Anybody can sell anything, and I don't know, so I don't know how they pitch, how they sell, so I can't talk about them. My dealings are with Gibs, and to an extent, Wits, but that's people I've dealt with, and to an extent, the old, not old...UNISA School for Business Leadership. So, I've dealt with people from there, and from Stellenbosch, obviously. So, if you talk business schools, it's not a single, it's not a simple concept. It's too wide, it's like talking cars. What car are you talking about? I'm talking about places like Gibs, which is reputable, you know?
So, what are you talking about, if you talk business schools?

RN  I’m talking about in general, a business school is any school that offers an MBA, and you’ve drawn a distinction here between one that’s reputable, i.e. linked to a longstanding university or someone who has a reputable history. Versus the business schools who actually offer almost over the counter MBAs?

C4  Yes.

RN  Over the internet or wherever, so I think that’s the distinction that you’ve drawn here, which is very interesting, and it’s a point that I’ll make a note of. So then, in terms of business schools, you’ve talked about your dealings with Gibs, Wits, Stellenbosch and these things, how have you achieved benefits for the business school, your business, and let’s say, your students, and maybe not necessarily the MBA but you’ve said you run some programmes?

C4  Yes, if we don’t talk MBA, we’ve received quite good benefits from our dealing with Gibs. We’re running an executive programme, and a senior programme. These programmes are about, consist about on average about eight days per programme. The people do an action learning assignment on top of that.

We have designed the programme, I specifically was involved in designing the programme with Gibs and with our executive directors of the business, of AAAA, so we obtained the needs from the businesses, executive directors. I discussed that with Gibs, and we came with a draft curriculum, that draft I’ve tested with the executives again, and then we have finalised the two curricula and one of the executive programme, and we revamp that every year.

So, we get feedback from Gibs, we get feedback from our students, and in terms of those programmes, we think that we are quite close to our business requirements.

RN  Do you go through this process then, i.e. so when you refine, so you’ve been to this process, it’s been approved. The following year, Intech says, I think you should do these ten things, you choose maybe two or three things there, then you retest it with the...
C4 Yes, several things, yes.

RN It’s almost a feedback loop there?

C4 There’s definitely one, and then...

RN And, if business needs change, how do you cater for that?

C4 We just talk to Gibs, and we say, this coming programme, senior programmes for example, let’s look at the curriculum, what have you got? This, this, this, okay I want you to put something for us there, take that out, whatever and then they say, okay, we’ve got this, with TTTT at Gibs, and then with RRRR, who is he? RRRR, that’s actually where we started, I started with him and with TTTT, so we’ve put...and they’re very...so, we keep them focused on our needs because we design the curriculum with them, in regard to our needs.

And, there is benefits. There are benefits there.

RN What sort of benefits there?

C4 It gives the people a toolbox of management, those other stuff. It leads to personal growth, it leads to...for us, we got a situation where we are developing an AAAA brand and an AAAA awareness amongst our senior executive managers. We also identify, it helps us to identify our high potential people, see how they perform on that programme.

So, that’s the benefits we’ve got, and that’s in-house obviously. Remember, we don’t share with outside people, but in-house, we are so big, and we’ve got so many divisions, that we can benefit to that.

RN What would you think, so...if you have experts, let’s take the logistics department, you’re an expert at logistics, and delivery of that logistics? Now, in the MBA, there’s various courses like operations management, where it’s...they teach you areas of logistics, and I think certain areas of your business can be valuable there.
In terms of helping design that curriculum, would you be interested, in terms of MBA now, would you be interested in providing input into that block? Would it add any value to you?

C4 No, we don’t go for technical knowledge of the specific divisions. Have you heard about Hersey and Blanchard?

RN No, I haven’t.

C4 You haven’t, how old are you?

RN 32.

C4 You must go and see the work of Hersey and Blanchard. I’m busy drawing you something. If you take that, that is supervisory management. We’re going up in the organisation, that’s non-management, that is ground working people. There is middle management, there is senior middle management, this is first line management. There’s top management and this is the whole thing, there’s senior management.

If you take that, I’ll just get some colours. If the capability or competencies of a person, what we’re talking about, look at that triangle, and we call that technical, professional, technical capabilities or competencies. And, you look at that triangle, and we call that strategic or conceptual capabilities. That’s that, so the higher you go in an organisation, the smaller your technical competencies.

RN Yes.

C4 I’m going to actually even complete the picture for you. This is your people or human capability. So, if we now look at that, so remember, there’s our cut off, and there’s our cut off. So, the higher you go in organisations, the less important technical capability gets, the more important your strategic and conceptual capability. Your human, let’s call it leadership human capability stays important, as you go throughout the organisation. It’s constant, you see that?
Now, Hersey and Blanchard actually in a very long time ago, 1982, or something there, they came up with this model, so if you look at the business school, where do we pitch? So, you ask me about logistics, we don’t go logistics, technical. If you go into the motor industry, this thing looks different than from the logistics industry, you understand that?

RN Yes, that’s right.

C4 But, there are certain things that stays the same, your human leadership and then strategic, conceptual. And so, what do we teach, how do I build my curriculum if I talk to Gibs? I tell them, forget that pink, we’re not interested in that. We’re looking at this, you see this portion? So, we break this down in certain things, where we cover the strategic, conceptual and human.

Now, in this, we’re also covering financial stuff, but that is financial management on this level. It’s not accounting. An accountant would have a different technical, an accountant would sit there, he’s got an accountant thing. If you’re an operations guy in the logistics, you must know operations, you must know how to operate, and that’s the part of your technical, so if we go here, we don’t teach them that.

You know, we’re not teaching, because we’ve got motor people, logistics, insurance, we’ve got everybody so we don’t focus on the people. You can take that with you.

RN Thank you for that. That actually makes a lot of sense, we’ve been through that model, I remember it, now that you mention it. It definitely makes sense.

In concluding, just two questions quickly. How does Gibs support and interact with you and the students on your programmes?

C4 No, they communicate constantly with them. They provide learning coaches which deal with those people, so the action learning assignments are communicated to those people, assistance from the Gibs side, for our students to do, to study the action learning, to put together their presentation and their work, their actual small dissertation or whatever. The coaches deal with the people directly, so our people are divided in teams, and the teams are assigned to learning coaches, and those coaches are on a constant, continuous basis, meet with the students, and give them guidance and so
forth, and then what we have. We also have a panel, our own panel, that evaluates the people. It’s consisting of our directors and so on, but...

RN That evaluates your students?

C4 Yes, and the action learning and so forth, but Gibs would also provide assistance in that regard, and they would orientate and coach our panel, and actually, we are quite happy with the support that the students get. Now, they don’t... support when the students get back to the work environment, that’s not from their side. It’s not necessary, they are in the work environment, and...

RN Where does that support come from?

C4 It comes from executive members, because the executives have been on our executive programme, so senior people are now on that programme, and that support comes from the executive people. Also, we have in the organisation, we’ve got action learning sponsors, it’s called. So, the sponsors are people who take responsibility, the sponsors have been through the programme, they’re senior. Actually, on an executive level and so on. So, the senior managers would then form groups, and they would go to their sponsor and the sponsor, these are now people from AAAA assist them with the assignment and direct them and so forth.

RN This obviously has a direct benefit because they are implementing little...

C4 Yes, they are, they are doing implementing, they’re researching implementable projects for us in the organisation.

RN That’s excellent, and finally, what do you think business schools, organisations and students together can do to improve the impact of an MBA or a similar type of programme?

C4 I can’t answer that. I’m sorry, because there are so many business schools, I can’t say. I think they must just be, deliver more to the demands of business, or industry. In other words, the business environment, the landscape, business landscape, the business demands. They must be realistic, but I think Gibs are there.
I’m certainly not unhappy with Gibs. I really don’t, I know also Stellenbosch is very good, Wits is good. Those, I’ve got no problem with, but I haven’t really dealt with the other non-reputable business schools.

That’s an interesting point. Is there anything else you want to add?

No, that’s good.

I really want to thank you for your time.

It’s a pleasure.

And, I look forward to, as soon as I’m done with this, I’ll give you a copy of it, and then you can see some interesting things in there.

That would be interesting. Thanks very much.
So as you know I'm Ravi Naicker, right, and I am trying to understand as part of my research how collaborate learning and collaboration basically between business schools, organisations, and students, can help improve the impact of the MBA. So just to let you... I need obviously your consent to conduct this interview, just to let you know that you can withdraw at any time you want to. If you have any concerns, you can contact myself or VVVV, and everything or all the information will be kept confidential. Okay, so do I have your consent?

Absolutely, yes.

Okay, great. So just to understand what's your background, C5?

I was MD of KKKK Business School, so I come from a business school environment. I was the director of education at FFFF, and then I was a strategy consultant for three years. And my academic background is an industrial sociologist with an MBA as well.

Okay, great. So let's understand firstly, right, so what do you believe are the successes of the MBA?
C5 I think that the breadth that a good MBA could offer a student, because there's obviously a number of people who don't come from traditional business backgrounds. And when they then go into management in leadership positions, an MBA is able to bridge that gap between being a technical expert, and what is required of you as a leader or manager within an organisation, both public and private.

RN And what else do you think are the successes of the MBA?

C5 I think that what an MBA potentially does is gives the student the ability to work across different disciplines. So often a good MBA is around who sits in the MBA, so access to different perspective, and therefore processes, team projects, and team work for me is one of the differentiators. And then certainly I wouldn't say academic faculty, but faculty overall over on around being able to bring different perspectives to the table where the students would otherwise not be able to meet business leaders, and school leaders. I think those are the three most important ones. And then obviously it is also around best practice potentially, good MBAs are able to bring some best practice, and getting students to work in understanding this way.

RN Okay, excellent. And leading on from the successes, what would you suggest then are the failures of the MBAs today?

C5 I think some of those who haven't changed over time. It's still around the fact that when MBAs become too theoretical, when they become too academic and it becomes hugely problematic. Also where MBAs make use of faculty that are actual not practitioners, so research-based academic institutions have got a challenge. Whereas institutions that is able to bring real business expertise, be it public or private sector to the table, entrepreneurs, and really people that practice. That is the difference between as good MBA, you know, and not a good MBA.
I think that is a challenge that we made, I think still... and it doesn't go away, but there is often not integration between the different subjects in an MBA. And that remains a problem because business doesn't work like that. We don't have a perspective on finance, and a perspective on marketing, and a perspective on strategy, and in practice those three things live together. So the second failing is around the lack of integration.

And the third thing is around an MBA that lives only in a business school versus an MBA that takes into account what happens in economy, what are the core issues that business people face, and how traditional is the way of teaching. Because I think the reality is that theoretical MBAs fail specifically because adults don't learn in classes.

RN So that's an interesting point, right, in terms of adults not learning in classes. What would you put forward as some of the most effective ways in your experience to get adults to learn?

C5 Well the reality is that if we're looking at where does learning happen, and irrespective of whether it is totally academic or not, 70% of learning happens on the job and although... MBAs obviously try and inculcate, you know, that take learning back into the organisation. In practice what it means in learning divisions within organisations, is they are at a huge advantage because they're embedded within the business.

And the second issue is around, you know, mentoring and coaching, and mentoring, and how often we use internal mentors for leaders in an organisation. And it is challenging from a coaching and mentoring perspective where you are running these processes within a business school, and how do you get people that understand the dynamics within organisations to coach and mentor. So you need quite as high level of individual that is able to mentor successfully really within an MBA.
The third is around the actual theoretical knowledge needed to practice. So simply there is some information that you need to understand in finance before you can practice, and that is true for any other discipline as well. So in that 70%, how you work through best practice visits, how you work through emergence, how you work through, you know, networking, how you work practically sort of much more of a blended approach is an actual fact, you know, how you dialogue case studies rather than, you know, getting people to read a city page case study, which is not necessarily the best way. But that would be my perspective.

RN And then how have you in the past, I mean, you ran KKKK, and you've had a couple of really senior positions, how have you… or what have you done to ensure that there's benefits achieved for all three parties, that's the students, the business school, and the organisation? What have you done specifically?

C5 I think first and foremost when you're working with corporate clients, and you're actually contracting them as an organisation rather than just as an individual, it does make a difference, because, you know, if you've got, for example, 25 students from Nedbank, it is a sensible approach to actually understand the organisation in a much better way.

The second thing is around business sponsorship, and how actively a business school should be engaging, not only the learner, but also the organisation.

And then thirdly, the practical relevance of projects done by MBA students, because the reality is back in the boardroom the only thing I'm interested in is does it make a difference in my business, what are the metrics around it, and how am I going to implement it?

So the reality is that if business schools are able to engage… and then the fourth thing is around what relevance can the business school have for me as an organisation,
because clearly I would be much more interested in connecting with a business school
where I'm getting business advice, rather than a business school that, you know, takes
hundreds of hours from an employee's time with actual no real tangible benefit other
than what the employee, be it he or she, is doing better.

So it's a significant partnering shift in the role of the business school.

RN So partnering shift, right, so let me try and understand what you just said. So
let's say there's an organisation and it's dealing with an organisation on an
organisational basis rather than an individual. So let's say you've got a larger
organisation with let's say 20 or however many students, looking at the needs of that
business, and ensuring that those students then deliver back to the business, and
some of those initiatives would be projects. And it's about the business school being
very close to the organisation and giving feedback, and helping through this actual…
helping through the implementation of some of these projects in terms of coaching the
individual, providing them with the support. So that ultimately what was contracted for
at the beginning is what's delivered at the end through an MBA.

C5 Absolutely. Yes. So it's not around inviting the business for finger suppers
when, you know, at the end of the first year. It is around how you actively engage with
that business, as an example, you would have been taught Nicola Klein, I assume.

RN Yes, I have.

C5 So Nicola's expertise in strategic branding puts her in a very good position
given where each of the banks are at the moment to work with students with projects in
collaboration with business sponsors within the bank, rather than students doing
slightly inane projects around things that don't in actual fact have business value. So
the closer the business school is to the business with the employees doing the actual
programme, the easier it is to facilitate some of those conversations.
Okay, so you've talked through. I get the value that would be added to business if we achieve some of these projects, and some of these sponsored projects, as you said. Because then it basically talks directly to the strategy of the bank, and it talks to exactly the outcomes that the bank wants to achieve if it's a bank, or what not, right? What benefits would there be to the student in this instance?

Oh, yes. A very, very important benefit because fundamentally you know that some organisations, some students have challenging organisations, because the reality of an MBA is the fact that there is time commitment to it. There's commitment to access, in other words, you know, the type of research, the type of projects, the type of processes that you need to do in your MBA, it is in actual fact facilitated if you have access to organisational information, access to business sponsors, and brand ambassadors, within the organisation. So there's huge benefit for the employee to have a business school partner then differently.

Would you say…? I mean, effectively, right, if a business supports a student to this extent by giving them access and helping them to do, and helping them implement, strategic projects, there's obviously quite significant upside for the students. Now in terms of the student and their access and time, I get that... will there probably be better transfer of learning from school to work?

Yes. Sorry, I didn't hear the last part of the question, apologies.

So will there better transfer of learning from school to work if they're implementing projects at work, based on what they learned at the MBA?

Yes and the other way round as well. Remember that if you're working with faculty, it is clearly impossible for faculty to have a keen understanding of all businesses, and business areas, right. So what the organisation then inevitably does
is actually also drive the learning for the business school, and for faculty within the
business school. So it ends up being quite a win-win situation.

RN That's brilliant. So that's excellent, so basically there's almost three-way
feedback loop here?

C5 Yes.

RN In that, you know, having contracted and partnered upfront, students are getting
to apply what they learned in the MBA, and then faulty, who's also close to these
projects, and these implementations, then learn and take it back to the business
schools. And then obviously they can then update their curriculum going forward I
suppose.

C5 Yes, absolutely. And I think that that's often where there is a mismatch
between fundamentally how well the faculty is schooled in what the business
challenges are faced by organisations. So often what you have a sense of is what
faculty is teaching may not be as updated. So, you know, in banking we've had
automatic changes in the last two to three years, within most good, you know, within
most banks.

So the whole thing around faculty saying, yes, but you know 15 years ago, you know, I
was a business banker in EEEE, really just doesn't work. So it is also around ensuring
that it is not the student that is faced with faculty that is in actual fact not understanding
the current business realities, and often what happens a student is teaching faculty in
essence in class. So those conversations that surround, you know, you don't
understand my business, because these are the challenges we now face, you know,
and, and, and, could certainly be less challenging if faculty is looped into some
organisation.
RN  That sounds great. What other means of collaboration do you think we could…
or business schools and organisations, and even students… so let me go back to your mentoring point, right. Would alumni make good mentors in your opinion?

C5  Yes.

RN  And how would that be facilitated, how would you suggest that be facilitated?

Let me tell you…

C5  We are actually in this instant we are… we should be learning from our American colleagues, because the way in which American business schools contract both from a financial perspective, from an emotional perspective, with the alumni, is not something that I have seen in South Africa. So we have a lot to learn from that, okay.

We don't leverage our alumni in South Africa the way in which it is done in the States. The pride at which… because before I took over the business school, I did some international benchmarking around, you know, what is out there that is different from a sort of a more traditional approach to MBAs. And what struck me, and I spent some time at the University of Michigan, what struck me was the level, not only the sort of level of faculty which we all believe is… we take for granted, but the level of guest speaking, and alumni associations, and how American institutions track where their alumni is placed, so they have an enormous emphasis on sort of a lifelong alumni contract.

And we never do that, in South Africa you get phoned by your university, you know, that they want to… they either want money from you, or they want some inane do for you to come and attend. In America it's around your responsibility once you've graduated from a business school in what you will be giving back to that business school. And clearly obviously often it is money as well, but how alumni stays involved in a lot of business schools in America. We do have some lessons to learn.
RN So in terms of contracting, right, in positioning the MBA upfront, typically a business school should then, or it would be idea, if they positioned that this is a lifelong contract that we enter into, and these are our expectations upfront before someone undertakes the MBA. Would that be the right time to do it?

C5 I think so, and also the reality is after only when would you then can contract is if the previous alumni's in the room, and, you know, Americans are maybe a bit over the top with things, but in some ways it's around, you know, handing over the banner of the next level and generation of leadership, and students from one alumni to another.

So I do believe that that will be quite, you know, that will be quite impactful. And also the fact that, you know, when I was at the business school, one of the things that I always did was we had a guest speaker programme, and it was 15 MBA bursaries that we awarded every year for the 15 guest speakers we invited. And at that naming convention of that bursary would be the person's name. So, you know, we would have QQQQ, SSSS, we would have [unclear]. And fundamentally what you're doing is you're building brand ambassadors within an organisation for your business school irrespective of them actually having been part of your alumni. So I mean those are ways in which you can do it.

RN And then coming back to students, right, so we understand what business can do to support students, so we understand what business schools can do to actually connect more with businesses. What can students do better?

C5 I think the reality is that often what happens is that students sometimes see an MBA as an individual learning journey, and in some ways it is, I mean we all know that. But often what does not happen is that the students may not be making the connections back into the organisation proactively enough as well. So, you know, give those a great guest speaker programme. When it is successful it is around how students make sure that they have the right people from the organisation in the room when they have great guest speaker events.
Or the way in which, as an example, every year you have McKinsey, McKinsey does as
lot of business reports, sometimes even before it's out in the marketplace. Why don't
the students engage with the business to in actual fact show the business what they
are learning, what the framework is, how do they connect the dots for the organisation.
And I think that that's not something that often students do proactively enough, it's as if
sometimes they sort of wait for the business school to take the first step. And I think it
is a partnership rather than, well, you know, the business school needs to invite my
boss, it's around actively engaging and making the dots between what I'm learning as a
student, and how it will be relevant for my organisation, and how I bring my
organisation into the room when we have these conversations.

RN That's great. So, C5, in closing if I you could make this as perfect as it could
be, right, so what do you think these three parties can do better further in terms of what
you've suggested? Is there anything else that you think that they could and should be
doing?

C5 No, I think if I had to give one to each party, I think business schools need to be
business relevant, and practical and appropriate in their approach. I think the
organisation needs to be involved in that relationship, so it needs to have practical and
relevant ROI as well. And the third thing that the student needs to actively make those
links, so that on the one side they have brand ambassadors in their business, and on
the other side they have the practical information needed to do the right projects within
an MBA, and to actually make it business relevant, rather than doing projects that does
not have business value. So to connect those dots. Yes.

RN That's great. That sounds great. Okay, so thank you so much for your time,
C5, I really appreciate it. It's been really good chatting to you, I think you've given me a
lot of insight and information. And it's quite good to hear that the message seems to be
quite consistent in terms of what the three parties need to do to actually get a
(collaborate relationship.)
C5  Great stuff, I hope it was valuable.

RN  Yes, it was actually very valuable. I'm just going to take you off speaker now.
APPENDIX G: TRANSCRIPTS OF COMPANY 6 (C6)

Speaker key

RN Ravindran Naicker
C6A Respondent 1
C6B Respondent 2

RN Thank you, C6A and C6B, for joining me today. Let me give you a brief. My research is basically covering how collaboration between business schools, organisations, and students, can improve the impact of the MBA. And a lot of what I've found to my research is that that process doesn't work very well. And I'm trying to figure out how do we get this process working.

So just in brief, to start with you, C6A, your career history.

C6A I have been in learning and development roles my whole life, either as a consultant with training companies, or as an L&D manager in corporate.

RN And then your academic qualification?

C6A I have honours in psychology, and HDipEdAd, higher diploma for educators of adults from [unclear].

RN Excellent, I know these. And yourself, C6B?
I have been in C6 more than 25 years, I've come out the line, and I've been HR now about three, three or four years, yes.

And I'm in this skills development facilitator role for about a year and a half now. Qualifications, I have an ODETDP.

RN OD?

ETDP.

Occupationally directed…

RN ETDP?

Occupationally directed education training and development practitioner. ODETDP.

Excellent, great. So let's start.

Plus you are busy with the next one.

No, but you're also a registered moderator in SETA, and all that stuff.
Yes.

Because that's quite important.

So I'm registered with ETD SETA, and BANKSETA as a registered assessor and moderator.

Okay, excellent. So let's start with the MBA, right. My focus is predominantly the MBA, and adult learning, okay. Let's focus on the MBA, right. What do you believe are the successes of the MBA, based on the experiences that you've had with people that have attended the MBA, that you've funded, you know, that sort of stuff? Tell us what do you think the successes are?

I actually don't think the successes have been great, I don't believe. Personally I think the MBA is becoming very much like the BCom was five years ago, and I don't think we always see the academic learning applied in the business environment. So it becomes more or less an academic exercise and the fact that you've got an MBA, more than that we don't very often see the application.

Tell me more about that in terms of what are you experiencing?

Well we don't, I mean we're not hearing anything. I mean, if we look at people that have applied for bursaries with an MBA, we're not hearing major strides in changing business, or influencing business, to do things differently whether it's a process, whether it's products, whether it's strategy. We're not seeing or hearing anything that's wow.

Okay.
And that would maybe tie in with a perception, and I think it is a perception, that people do MBAs for themselves, and for their CVs, rather than seeing it as a business value add for their current roles. I'm saying that's a perception rather than my perception, or reality.

Is that a general perception across the organisation?

If I chat with other learning and development practitioners that would be a fairly general perception is that MBAs are for the benefit of the individual and his or her marketability, rather than there be a direct expectation of payback to organisations.

While we're on that point of expectations, what is your expectation, or what is your experience of the expectations of the MBA students?

How MBAs expect their organisations to support them?

Yes.

MBAs are quite rare in C6, so I can talk for Exco's expectation, Exco's view of a person applying for an MBA is that that's a good thing, because they're wanting... so Exco's perception of an MBA is that it does provide a broader view of general management. So they see value in that.

However, MBAs were singled out by Exco to ask for the 50% contribution from the person themselves, A, because of the cost, and B, because that would truly demonstrate that someone was committed. So there is a wide spread acceptance that
MBAs are a lot of work, and very demanding for the individual, and that in itself is almost… if someone passes an MBA, it's demonstration that they've got backbone. So I think again that's a perceptual issue that if somebody's enrolled in an MBA, paid for half of it, that they are made of good stuff.

RN That sounds good.

C6A So it's not about the content so much, as about what it says about the person.

RN And then, you touched on it briefly, what do you think are the failings of an MBA?

C6B Explain?

RN Well you said it's very… you know, it becomes a very academic exercise, so the business doesn't really see any practical applications or benefit from it directly. Again, you've touched on the point that it becomes, it's a more personal journey, rather than meeting a business need. So I'm interested in unpacking a bit more of why hasn't the MBA produced what you as a business would want.

C6A And maybe I'm behind the times, because I've seen particularly with you, but I'm not speaking to you personally, two engagements with business around MBA. The one was the work you did on the talent, the other is now, this piece. And that's been the first time of any of our MBA people that I've seen MBA assignments, or work, directly linking to the business.

But bearing in mind that I'm in a support function, so it could be that MBA students are engaging with the business around their thesis, that's with a THE, not SHE. So it could
be that the MBAs are engaging with their business around the MBA thesis. But in
terms of looping that into the formal learning functions in an organisation to either
disseminate that, or create a formal expectation of the students, that hasn't happened.
So when you say the collaboration between business schools and business, I'm saying
there isn't any, not formalised in the way that there is in a learnership space. It's
extremely poor between the learning provider, the organisation, and the learner.

RN So tell me about that, what's different, tell me about that piece there. How do
you work together?

C6A In a learnership environment?

RN In a learnership environment.

C6B I think predominantly it's based more on a partnership as opposed to a
business arrangement. And it's always done with workplace application in mind. So if
people need to do assignments, or they need to submit portfolios of evidence, it always
has to link directly into a workplace application. That's the evidence they provide.

So at the beginning of a learnership, everything is linked to business application, and I
think that's where it differs from the MBA. There isn't a requirement that C6 get
involved and have a say in terms of a research project, for example. So the person
could research anything and maybe some of the research projects have absolutely
nothing to do with our business environment. They could go…

C6A Or maybe they do, but we don't know.
C6B Well it's possible, we're just not involved. And maybe that's where the business schools could collaborate with business. You know, Exco may have a particular research project that they want undertaking, and it would be idea that one of the MBA students maybe pick up on that research.

RN So you make a very interesting point. Based on this requirement, right, so if Exco came up, and I'm just bouncing an idea off you, if Exco came up with a list of research topics that they'd like researched. And then having said that, you know that you've got a couple of MBAs at C6, and if you created, i.e., a workplace application/action learning project based on those topics that Exco, those broad topics Exco, would that add value?

C6A Hugely.

RN To the business.

C6A Hugely.

C6B Massive, massive.

C6A And I just want to make a link back to your… because you said it's more of a partnership than a business arrangement backing learnerships, but there is a formal three-way contract. So it is way more formal in terms of the business's involvement. So the business has to commit to providing coaching, and line management support, line management supervision almost.

C6B And involvement, yes. And they sign them off for each individual.
RN Who would typically sign that off?

C6B The line manager, if we're talking learnerships, the line managers sign off all their submissions.

RN So, in an MBA, if you've got five or 10 people on the MBA, if you had that same level of commitment, so one, the line manager commits to, as you said, to supporting individual to providing the coaching, and what not. What would the individual have to commit to, and what would the business school have to commit to?

C6A The individual would have to commit to doing projects that are work related, and to taking responsibility for communicating those internally.

RN So would that be then, i.e., if I'd learned a module on accounting, or if I'd learned a module on leadership, I would then come back and come up with a project to demonstrate that I've learned a certain…

C6A Or possibly just have a conversation, so it wouldn't have to a project in each module, unless each module… because most of your modules have exams, rather than projects.

RN Exam and assignments, yes.

C6A Okay. So that those assignments would have to be co-signed by the SME in the area, because I think most line managers would have a heart attack if we asked them to sign off an MBA's project on an area outside of their discipline.
C6B You know what maybe a good idea, much like we did with the LDP, we had the...

C6A PDF type role?

C6B Yes. And I mean that would be something that would suit the MBA learners.

RN So the PDF is effectively a mentor, right?

C6A No, they're not. So let's be very precise about our terminology here. A mentor tells you what to do, so a mentor shares their own wise experience with you. A coach helps you come to your own realisations around your skills and development requirements. So coaching is a much more interactive, you've got the answers, let me help you get to them.

A PDF is a kind of combination, that's why we gave it a whole new name, personal development facilitator. The role of the PDF in the LDP is not to be a subject matter expert, is to keep you honest with regard to your own learning process. So the PDF's role is to say you've got assignments due, let me see what you've done. Not to critique the content, although some of them are able to, but it's not an expectation. So it pulls in your wisdom around how you can use the stuff you're given in the organisation, how you could improve your visibility.

So there's an aspect of mentorship and guidance, but the coaching in terms of questioning and grilling people to come to their own realisations is around their own learning contract. So I don't impose any of my expectations, I'm outside of the line manager relationship, that's important, and ideally I'm outside of your function as well, as I can't fall into the trap of getting into job content. I'm there to say what are you
doing to apply your learning in your environment. Not to tell you how to do it, I'm there
to force you to do yourself.

C6B "Which you would actually…"

C6A "It's a very subtle role, and I'm not sure what your experience of your PDF was."

C6B "It's quite important because if you look at a PDF at poor staff at a lower level,
they would have to be a lot more involved in terms of holding hands. But if you're
looking at MBA students, and exactly what C6A said, they need to do the stuff for
themselves, so there's no coaching in the sense let me give you, feed you, and help
you. So I think at that level the PDF in my mind would be actually a good idea."

RN "So ideally, I mean based on what you've said, the PDF at a level of an MBA
would obviously be a very senior person in the organisation, and their role would be to
almost open you up to applying what you've learned in the organisation."

C6A "Yes, they would be the catalyst or the Jiminy Cricket conscience just saying,
okay, so you've done finance, so? And maybe that ties to the other approach, which
would be to more formally say, every assignment around a particular discipline would
get a once over from an SME in that discipline, and be countersigned, and that would
have to be the organisations commitment."

So if you've done a finance assignment, Andrew would take a look at it, or Michael
would take a look at it, and add a comment and sign if off. Because then at least
there's a seed that says, we've got some embedded knowledge, someone's done a bit
of thinking about this area, hooked right into this project or that project. Because I
mean, this is an unfair example because he's funded himself, but PPPP's I think
finishing this year as well. And I've not heard PPPP's name being mentioned, well
look, PPPP's done his MBA, or doing his MBA, maybe he's got a view on this. Maybe
it happens in the office space, please accept that we're coming from a support function.
Are you interviewing line as well?

RN Yes.

C6A In your project. Okay. It'll be interesting to see if they experience it differently.

RN I mean effectively I've interviewed a lot of the L&D HR type of people, yes. I've
had one or two line people who've actually done the MBA and are now heading up a
HR space and what not. I think the views are very common, the lack of collaboration is
clear. What you've come up with, a PDF, is almost a unique approach to it, i.e., yes,
people have mentioned mentors, and what not, but this is a different approach, and I
think this is quite useful.

C6A In terms of defining it, quite subtly differently.

RN Yes. And it's getting it… and it's doing these things like getting an SME to sign
off on the…

C6A Assignments.

RN Assignments, very interesting view.

C6A And I think that the idea that we go back to the Exco and their list of hot topics,
it talks to at one stage ZZZZ flagged with YYYY that it would be nice to have a mini-
Exco. And I think it was something he did at a cocktail party the night before, sort of
thing, and it was like, okay, we need a mini-Exco the next day. But a different version
of that and something that we might be… that we will be proposing in the LDP space is
the organisational swat team.

So you've got the guys who are currently doing MBAs, or who are MBAs, and those hot
topics that aren't like the more pressing than can wait for your research topic, like we
need a swat team now, then you haul in your MBA guys to drive into it.

So let's move on, right. In terms of, so you haven't really achieved any benefits
of the MBA, right, for all key parties, but in your learnership programmes you have.

Well except for the individual, remember the individual gets the benefit of the
MBA is the general perception.

Sure. And I'm looking at all three.

The business school.

Exactly. So I mean your learnership you would have partnered with a business
school type organisation.

Provider.

A provider, service provider. You would have the student, and you would have
the bank, right. So basically you've alluded to the fact that the bank gets back these…
the bank puts out these things and they get back actual projects, or actual programmes
that happen within the bank. Your PDF…
Well what you get is not necessarily action in projects, but you get people who have demonstrated workplace based learning, so you are getting enhanced skills in their job environment.

Yes, because you're taking the theoretical and you're actually applying it in the business.

So, for example, our ODETDP learners, which is everybody in PD has now gone through that, or is in the process of it. They have to do a design and developer training programme, so out of this year's crop I'm getting eight training programmes.

Okay, excellent.

So that's how we've done it differently. We've given them, we made the decision that we would give them topics…

These are the workshops we need developed.

Yes, and we've made it part and parcel of the qualification they're busy with now. So they have to design and develop. And we want to implement.

So you get the programmes or the ideas and you can implement that.

Yes, so we're going to get a product from each of them, but, yes, we'll probably need to do more work on. But we're getting eight different workshops developed, because their module is called design and developer workshop.
And they're all in [unclear], they have to be [unclear] assessments, and then all we would basically do is register.

And then the student obviously gets the… gets to take their theoretic knowledge and apply it to a programme.

They have to, yes.

Right, so they would learn through that process. And then what about your service provider?

They get the bucks.

Do they get anything else in terms of…

I think they get to maintain their accreditation and their reputation with SETA.

Yes, but also in the same token, I mean every group of people is different, so whatever the experience is for the individuals on the programme, that's the feedback we give to the provider, and they often, if it's in terms of their content, or the structure of their programme, they would very often make changes.

So they get to stay current. Excuse me, but it is a commercial enterprise for them, so it is around reputational and financial gain.
RN Great. How does the... so currently in terms of the MBA, how does the business school support you and the students?

C6B They don't.

C6A They don't. I don't know about the students, but they certainly don't...

C6B Just from our perspective, we just pay.

C6A And an interesting example of that, not specifically MBA, but business a school, is the BANKSETA funded international executive development programme, IEDP, which is a BANKSETA, this partnership, but business school. We as the business phoned to get feedback on how our participants are doing, and how we could support them. And the business school told us they cannot give us any information whatsoever, because this is something they're doing for BANKSETA. So that was quite interesting, and we were quite pissed off.

C6B No.

C6A Because we weren't paying, it was a BANKSETA funded thing, and I mean it was coming from a positive intent, which was how can we support the guys.

RN So then what sort of feedback would you like to get from the business school in terms of the MBAs? Or what sort of collaboration would you see happening there?

C6A Well the content in terms of projects that the business school would be open to that, I think that a kind of progress report.
C6B Yes. And that's not just, I mean look we get the results for the guys that have
got bursaries but, you know, there's people that are probably doing MBAs, PPPP for
example, who's not funded by C6, but it would be nice to actually get that feedback…

C6A A twice a year report that says how can we support, how are our SMEs doing in
terms of the feedback they perceive to. So a three-way feedback meeting that says,
are our SMEs/PDFs, whoever has contracted to support MBAs, doing, and how are our
students doing.

RN In terms of the school itself, right, and I'm just talking about…

C6A Any business school?

RN Yes, in terms of any business school, right, in terms of being open to ideas,
would you be open so then you've got a certain project, or you've got certain things that
you want done, right. Now there's a difference between consulting, versus active
learning, okay. But obviously your students would do the assignments, whoever, or do
the project. They come up with ideas, obviously they'd have some input, they would
like to get some input from the business school in terms of guiding those students'
progress, i.e., the expert whoever is teaching them. Would you then be open to having
some of those implemented successful stories be used as case studies?

C6A Absolutely.

RN To the business school.

C6A Yes.
RN Okay. So the case studies, would you open to doing presentations for the class for the benefit of MBAs?

C6A Yes, because I think that's the other possible collaboration and I know it happens. It doesn't happen in the MBA space, it happens in other spaces, where for example the ADP, XXXX's accelerated development programme, which UCT is running now at the business school there, the CEOs spend a day with them, but this is an in-house programme. So the CEOs each collectively spend a day with the ADP students, and then ZZZZ, for example, presented part of, and at least signed off, the customer service module for ADP.

So having your senior executives come and talk at an MBA programme I think it should be something that organisations could commit to, in the same way that having a Steve Bluen, the rock star of HR, come and share knowledge with us would be great, other than paying, [unclear], breakfasting, which is the way I heard it.

RN So that's interesting.

ME So it's not in sharing, if you like.

RN Mind you, Steve was one of my lecturers.

C6A Do you think he's an HR rock star?

RN Absolutely. But great, so finally, what else can we do as business schools, organisations, and students, to make this relationship better? You've said quite a lot of things that if we put together…
Could be powerful.

Could be very powerful, yes. What else do you think we can do?

Have you chatted to DDDD, by the way, about hers?

DDDD

Yes.

No.

The MBA at Stellenbosch.

No, not yet.

I think, you know, just from our experience with the bursaries, it's very much just as financial arrangement. And ideally, and maybe that's where it's different with the learnerships. When you're contracting with the providers, you put in certain provisos in your agreements, and maybe it's something we should look at with the business schools, where there's something in a contract that requires them to provide progress reports to I don't know what else. But you would kind of formalise it in a contract, and maybe that's why we're getting a lot of successes with the providers bar the fact that they're in it for the money as well.

So are the business schools.
And also because we have regular meetings with them, and the business schools kind of seem out there somewhere and we see an invoice.

In terms of this formalisation of the contract, right, it is moving it away from an individualistic...

No, but maybe not a contract, but maybe it's something like a memorandum of understanding, or you know, something along those lines where we can take it to the next level so that we're all on the same page, and we collaborate.

So we almost need to make a distinction between which of these will be a valid expectation when the organisation is funding the MBA. Is that the basis of your scope? Or is it any MBA student?

I would think it would be any MBA students.

Because maybe it's worth making that distinction, that if PPPP chooses to do an MBA, and pay for it himself, then do we as an organisation have any right to expect a return on that?

Now do you give the individual time off?

He gets a proper study leave in the same way, the study leave policy applies, absolutely.

Whatever's policy applies to everyone.
C6A There's no special MBA study leave thing in C6.

RN Is that not a commitment already on behalf of the organisation?

C6A What, that we get study leave?

RN The fact that you get study leave, and you give a whole lot of other things during the process. I mean, an individual doing an MBA, there's a lot of time commitments, there's lots of mental commitments, and you as the organisation are required to support that, aren't you?

C6A Okay.

RN Whether it's a financial [unclear] or not.

C6A But the taking the step further to the kinds of memos of understanding, or tripartite agreement, or meetings, would be more so if the organisation were actually funding.

RN Yes, absolutely.

C6A All or part of MBA. I wanted to say something about... oh, I think what's puzzling is the huge disparity in fees. When we did that piece of research, it was... and one understands that an MBA is not an MBA, is not an MBA. But an MBA from Regenesis cost R30,000, and the person will put MBA behind their name, they're not going to say, brackets Regenesis, close brackets, versus I think Gibs is the most expensive.
Yes, they are.

By far.

They are.

So what is the rationale, what is the justification, because at the end of the day if somebody comes to me with say an MBA, and the job requirement says we require an MBA.

We don't stipulate and from...

And we're not saying an MBA from Gibs. So we haven't in C6 taken it into a space which says we will only fund MBAs from X or Y institution, we've kind of put the 50/50 in place which would steer people to an MBA that wasn't hugely expensive. But some of my colleagues in other organisations have, so RNB does Duke, or Gibs I think, those two. So it's to bring it into line, and I'm talking the mainstream varsities, I'm not really talking your Degrees R Us colleges. But UCT, [unclear], Stellenbosch, whatever, why is there such a difference in how they structure the fees, and in actually the fees themselves?

Okay, so that would be something that would relate back to the...

Yes, but if that were more transparent...

Transparency, yes, I suppose.
Then one would develop a level of comfort that an MBA has the same substance.

And they're equally credible.

And I mean one realises that people are building their brains, but the business schools are also running a business, that they're building brains around it. But there isn't a perceived... if we say businesses don't really see as much application as they would like, we would also not see a difference in application between a Stellenbosch MBA student, and a Gibs MBA student, so why are we paying twice as much there. And that's why we had to bring in the cap of the maximum R35,000 for our MBA students, the 50/50 original just blanket approach suggested by Exco actually had flaws because of the huge disparity.

What would your views be then if you were seeing a lot more application of what was being learned back into business? What you look at the cap?

Then I think I'd look at it that they weren't.

And ultimately the cap came in place because you weren't seeing that application.

And also because it was perceived to be just so expensive.

Okay, sure. So ultimately if you were seeing the value, you wouldn't question the costs?
C6A Exactly right. And I think the other thing to maybe mention is that in our role profiling exercise now, I think only seven role profiles have MBA as a preferred qualification.

RN Okay.

C6A We haven't had a single role profile where MBA is a required qualification. So MBAs seem to be positioned as icing on the top.

C6B Nice to have, but not a have to have.

C6A Whereas we have got in some of the roles a requirement for Masters.

RN Okay, great.

C6A So that's quite interesting.

RN Is there anything else that you want to add to the conversation? Okay. Great, thank you for your time, I appreciate it. When we've done we'll get you a copy of the research.

C6A Thank you. Fascinating. When do you have to have this all in by?

RN November 7th.
Okay.
RN Ravindran Naicker

C7 Company 7

RN So hi, C7. Basically I'm Ravi Naicker, right, and my thesis is going to be based around how collaboration between business schools, students, and organisations, can optimise the impact of the MBA. And effectively we're just going to go through a couple of questions, it's a 30-minute interview, and you can pull out any time you want to. And your feedback will be valued, and will be kept confidential.

So I think the first question that I'd like to unpack is what do you think are the successes of the MBA specifically?

Do you mean in terms of the outcomes of the MBA students?

Yes.

For me I think it would be the ability of the MBA students to be able to practically apply what they have learned in real life situations. I think there'll be a mix there in terms of the knowledge that they acquire, their understanding of business, and business practices and processes. But also practice during the MBA to actually apply that in case, you know, in a kind of practical way. So putting together some work that they do, I suppose, in assimilation format or working on a real case together.
And then thirdly I think also understanding themselves, getting to understand themselves better as a person who would be integrating into a leadership environment, sorry, into a work environment, and what their impact would be of teams, and just better self-awareness. So it's the knowledge that they gain, practical experience that they gain, and then their self-awareness as well.

RN Now it's interesting that you mention practical experience, right. A lot of the people that I've interviewed said that MBAs tend to fair too much on the academic side rather than the practical side. What are your views on that?

C7 Well I can't say from experience that I have worked with enough MBA people or managed teams of MBA people to be able to compare their outlook. So I can't speak from experience there, but just generally in learning and development I think it's really important in a business environment for learning to be able to be made practical. And, yes, academia is not going to, you know, it's a good foundation, but I think if the MBA students can try their hand at practicing some skills, I think it would do them well.

RN I think we'll pick up on that later on when we come to my other questions, right. What do you think are the failings or shortcomings of MBAs?

C7 Well just what you've said, I think it could be, again I'm not referring to the Gibs one, or any, but I think if an MBA was too academic, or if it had too much of a specific focus, not looking at all the general areas that the people have to cover, I think that could be, that could be a failing. Or not keeping pace, I think a very difficult thing must be keeping pace with the changes in business. I mean, I think... I was at university a very long time ago, but you know, the business world is changing so quickly, I think it needs to be that the academic institutions need to be very closely aligned with what's happening in the business world to keep everything fresh, especially with changes in technology.
How would you... on that point, right, keeping things fresh, there's trends, and then there's fads. And how would you suggest a business school distinguish between a trend and a fad?

I would expect the heads of the departments to be sort of knowledgeable enough and have enough experience looking at the history of things to be able to identify trends versus fads. But some of these things are just really difficult for anybody. I think again referring to technology, which is... that we're very familiar here at C7.

A college of mine shared an email from a leading IT CTO a number of years ago talking about email which was this new thing, and saying exactly that this would be a fad, and that people should not try and think... you know, try and keep it out of the workplace because it will distract people. And similarly this has happened where things like various social media tools, companies closed their... down their firewalls and said, don't use these social media tools, Facebook for example, in the company, it's just going to take you away from business. And they had no understanding of that point of the business application of that thing, and it isn't actually a fad. Then even some of the top people get things wrong, and think things will be a long lasting new trend, and it is a fad.

So I think it's a difficult thing for anybody to get right, but I think if the business school is... the leaders of each of their departments are doing their research and looking at what's been, you know, what's happened at the past, and applying what they know to whatever new things they see, they will just have to make a judgement call.

In making that judgement call, what role would business have?

I think the closer the business school is to its business partners and clients, the closer, the better information the business can share with what they fitting into their
strategy, or what they would be looking to take on. And at that... I think sometimes there maybe cases where in the business school you may find that the lecturers or heads of, you know, of various areas, may have more time to be looking at research and finding out what's going on in the world. I think that's not necessarily the business people are always going to have the right answers. I think it depends who you're talking to, and I know in this business sometimes we're so engaged in, you know, specific teams maybe so engaged in projects, they might not be being able to spend the time doing the research and seeing new things coming. And it takes certain people in the business to be saying, come on everyone, look where this is going, and leading the business forward at different times.

But that can be happening in a business school where you've got people who are full time looking at the world, and studying, and you've got assignments that you can set for students. They can also be picking up things and sharing them back into their business clients.

RN Just in general then, you don't have enough insight into the MBA itself, but how are you achieving benefits, because I'm sure that you've been involved in developing programmes with business schools for C7. How would you ensure that there's benefits, or how have you been supported through the process? Actually, let me rephrase that. How have you ensured that there's benefits for all three parties in developing your programmes?

C7 All three parties being the students, the company, and the business school?

RN Yes, absolutely.

C7 Well the programme that I've been involved in here is as I said is an executive level development programme. And so we've been looking at the benefits for the executives and obviously those flow through to benefits for the company. In terms of
benefits that would come back to Gibs, or the business school, I can't see how the programme might have been designed, except to give them work, you know, to employ them to do that.

So, yes, it was, the programme was designed to bring the executives together to provide them with knowledge, similarly around what I was speaking about earlier. And designed to expose them outside of C7 to some other business thinkers. We had other leaders and CEOs come in to expose them more to our own CEOs, and our own group executives, sorry, to challenge them with real life strategic project that they had to work on. And that's where I'm talking about the practical things as well.

So they had things that they were learning but practical things to work on. And not only did that then make them apply what they were learning to a challenge, it helped the business because they came with outcomes at the end of the week, they come with their outcomes to say this is what we propose for the business. But while they're working in teams on that project, it also gives the facilitators an opportunity to teach them some self-awareness about how they work in teams, and help them take some learning back into the business about their role in teams, and how teams work well together, and that sort of thing.

And in addition, they had… in our group development programme, each individual gets one to one self-awareness assessment and coaching with site psychologists and action learning experts.

RN Where would the, or where do you get these, who are these action learning experts and psychologists?

C7 Well it's… our group leadership development programme involves a consortium, so it's usually ourselves, Gibs, the designer is actually sort of a, what do
you call it, like a fellow of Gibs, and works on a number of programmes with us, so she knows our company very well.

Then we bring in a guy called Brian... and her name is Laura Milan. Then we bring in Brian Jacobson, who's an action learning expert in South Africa, and he has a team of action learning facilitators. And then we also bring in an assessment team, what do we call them? We've used in the past, Joint Prosperity, also through Laura Milan, who then have a speciality in delivering assessments, which I understand Gibs doesn't have. And they're all trained psychologists and they review the assessments, and then they provide psychologists to sit and give the one to one feedback. So it's this big consortium of people involved.

But Gibs brings not only their own lecturers, and their own cadre of knowledge input, but they also use international fellows, and in particular in the past we've used Marshall Goldsmith on leadership, who is usually VC'd in from the States, or some other international. Because it's a very international group of executives who come together, we want to include... extend the scope beyond just South African lecturers, although they are of exceptional quality, we like to bring in some overseas people as well.

RN At what stage would the assessments be done?

C7 Before hand.

RN So before the programme?

C7 Yes. So the assessments are done beforehand as a prerequisite and they have to be completed at least 10 days before the start to give the team of psychologists time to review, to analyse, to produce the reports, and prepare. And then each psychologist
takes about five people that they know that they're going to be working with one to one
during the week.

RN And how does, how do you support the students through this process, the
executives who attend the course?

C7 How do we support them? So to prepare... yes?

RN What sort of... when I say support obviously you've got the psychologist giving
their feedback, and who they are, in terms of implementing some of the ideas or action
learning project that come back, in terms of supporting their growth and their learning.
Just a general feel in terms of what, if I was an executive attending one of these
courses, what support and progress would I see during the course, and after the
course?

C7 Well that's a good question because ideally what we'd like with the action
learning is for that to be... extend long beyond the course, and for us to get everybody
together again and continue the action. I think that is the ideal model. However given
the costs, opportunity cost of getting these guys out of their senior, senior positions,
and the physical cost of flying them all together again in the world, we don't get them
together again. So this week is literally just a week, and we close it off at the end of the
week.

However, what happens once they've presented their projects to the group exec, and
our group executive takes this programme incredibly seriously. Every team has two
executive sponsors who meet with the team, they help prepare the challenge for that
team, so there are five teams. They help prepare the challenge, they meet with the
team twice during that week. Again they are physically dispersed, so for those who
can't be here, we will VC those executives in from wherever they are in the world, so
that they meet with them. And then they're available for any questions they have
during the week.

Then the entire group executive gets together for the last morning for the
presentations. So everyone, overseas being VC'd in to one room. And all the five
presentations are given and then the COO and CEO, the group COO and CEO, then
make a decision there and then. The whole executive can question, the whole panel
can question the team, and then a decision is made there and then what will happen
with that proposal from that strategic challenge. And it might be that nothing needs to
happen, and that has happened in the case where they say, actually what you've done
is just verified some thinking we've had in the group exec. Or they might say, you've
made certain recommendations that are for implementation and we'd like to select
these particular recommendations and implement, and you will implement them. We
would like you to, or we'd like you to go away and select a team and then hand over to
to a team to implement this.

So there will be some involvement with the teams ongoing. And what we have set up
then is there's a sort of a six-week feedback point, and then maybe another three
month feedback point, and then maybe a feedback point at the end of the year, to say
where each of the teams are, and what has happened with that project, even if the
project is signed off, nothing's going forward, then we say what's going on.

But in our future programmes we'd like to make that process even more robust,
because people have said they felt it's been an incredible week, so far we've run four of
these, only so far, but we've had excellent feedback where we've felt that we've been
able to improve on them each year. And from the feedback, but the one thing that
they've said is it's been... they've been on such a high and it's been such an amazing
week, but how do they... how do we carry that forward. And so we have started to use
the alumni of previous courses, bringing them back, and use those alumni as buddies
into the teams, helping the teams prepare for the presentations that they give to the
group executives, or just being involved. And in our next course that we'd like to do is
have all of previous alumni over all the years get together for a drink one night as part of the course, or something similar.

So, yes, so our support of them I suppose really has just been providing them with lots of info about what's going to be happening, why they've been selected for the programme. During the programme they've a facilitator that takes through every single step, explains why, what all the pieces of this multi-faceted programme are, and what they're going to be doing. They get their one on one coaching, and then after that they have these few touch points. And one of the touch points we introduced in the last programme was that their action learning coach actually gets together with them at some point. In fact, sorry, I think we designed that for the next programme, so of the feedback that's come out from the last one, we've said we want to get that action learning coach back together with the team to say how's your project gone since we've... since you've carried on?

RN So taking what you've just said back to the MBA, right. If I took exactly the same principle, so if the CEO or executive of a bank, or a business, or a company, were to... so they fund five to 10 students a year, right. If they were to determine that these are strategic projects, or have the students present what the strategic project is before the MBA or during the MBA. They were to be involved and ask those students to effectively implement action learning activities based on what they've learned on the MBA, right. Do you think that would work? What's your views on that?

C7 So if I'm understanding, so there are, is it typical for there to be a specific company sponsoring the person through their MBA, is that typical? Because it would be a big, it would really impact where that person is headed, and how involved they are with the company.

RN So let's not limit it to someone being funded. So you've got a student, irrespective of whether they funded it or not, and where they're going. Like how many will make an investment to the extent that they're going to afford this person time off at
some stage, they're going to be invested, or vested, in this person's growth. Because I
think that's the overriding principle that I'm talking from, or the point that I'm talking from
is the company is interested in this person's growth. So if someone who wants to do
an MBA for personal reasons, and has funded it on their own and what not, I'm not
really looking at that at this point, I'm looking more at, yes, we've funded it, or we've
given you time off, or we've had some input…

C7 Into the fact that you're doing this MBA.

RN Exactly, yes. And we see you as the current or a future leader.

C7 Why I think that's important is because the strategic project may involved
confidential information and access in the business that if the MBA could be set up that
every single student is connected to a company and has a project in that specific
company for a reason, then that would be great. But I would imagine there might be
students who know. I'm not sure how that would work. But another difference, big
difference, is the level, the level of entrenchment in the company. These leaders and
this executive programme of ours know the company incredibly well, and over a long
time, understand implicitly, so we don't just start off at a base, they understand a whole
lot of things. And it's more about getting them to think cross functionally or getting
leaders who really only focus on a region to think about the whole global organisation,
and mixing up regions and functions together to tackle business issues.

However, I still think there are ways, okay, so at MBA level you might not be asking the
student to tackle your toughest strategic issue. There might just be some smaller
issue, or something that the student would be able to manage with the understanding
that they have, that they could give them a bit of information that they need, and get
them to work on it.
I think that would be incredibly, incredibly valuable. I don't think we can ever underestimate the value of that research of the people that they meet during that research. I have a cousin who did a leadership development programme at SAB Miller, where they also did this action learning, and he is in finance but in his action learning team had a person from marketing, a person from HR, a person from... head of a bottling plant, whatever, who he'd never have to directly deal with. And even just making these relationships with these people, hearing their views on their different departments, and how decisions that he made affected their department, was so eye-opening to him that for ever after whenever he needed to work with this specific area, he had a much better understanding plus now he also had these contacts that he could just pick up the phone and talk to them and say, look I've got this specific issue, who in your department can help me?

So at an MBA level I think for the student to be able to be exposed in a real life situation, to the real life issues, and having to deal with people, and having to see what it's like on the ground, I just think you can't put a price on that.

RN That's really valuable feedback actually. And then further on your other point, you guys used alumni to basically support your current students, right?

C7 Yes.

RN What would you think of MBA alumni supporting, mentoring, coaching?

C7 Absolutely.

RN The current students?
Absolutely. Again invaluable. I would say every MBA student should have an alumni buddy, because that person has been through the process, and they can save them so much time and pain by saying, by just these small tips that they have. And even silly things like one of the things our buddies helped our guys with is that actual physical presentation that they have to do is in a specific boardroom that we have that is not ideally big enough for the number of people who have to go in at this particular issue. But it’s the best set up for the VCs, and it’s able to have the right sound, and the camera, and people VC-ing in from Australia, and America at the same time. And able to be filmed, because we were filing them initially.

And the first guys who presented in that set up rally struggled with the practicalities of where they stood and how the sound worked, and how to address the people on the VC as well as the people in the room. And in fact the very first team I think got marked down, and had a lot more stress about it than the others.

So in the second year when we did that similar format, the buddies helped the guys and said, look this is what you need practically, and remember how you present it, and you know… there were just so many things that really helped them that our exec couldn’t believe there difference in quality for them as the exec panel in the second year. Whereas I don’t think the guys were… it wasn’t all males, the candidates, the participants, weren’t necessarily a lot cleverer or much higher cadre but they just had been so much better prepared that the execs were much more impressed with their findings and their proposals.

Also in the content of what they came back with. There was this idea of don’t let the execs be leaving saying so what, it has to be, be brave, be punchy, get your ideas out there, try and be different, understand that these execs would have thought of a lot of these things before, push the boundaries, and they helped them really grasp those things. Which, yes, it’s good for the learner to learn that the first time round, but if there’s more that they can learn, why not have a buddy come and help them get over those initial obstacles, and go even further.
Absolutely, absolutely. I guess the next question is how did the business school support you through this process?

The business school, well I mean they just designed the whole programme. I guess Laura at the helm designed the whole programme and put it together in a really fantastic way. So it was, yes, it was the business school's design, and we worked in tandem.

Sorry, how did they, on that point, I think you were getting to it.

So in every area that we worked in it was a partnership. So where we looked at the strategic issues, the business school came and said, these are the strategic issues, sorry, our executives came and said, this is what's keeping us awake at night, and then the partner of the business school, being Brian Isakson on the action learning side said, right, this is how you frame the action learning best. These are the kind of questions you need to put to your team, this is how you guide your team. And they helped us to help our executives be the best sponsors that they could be.

When we looked at assessments, we come and said, well this is the outcome we want to get from the assessments, Laura helped us in partnership then, the psychologists, they said okay, well these are the assessments that are going to work. And that's what you need to do. Similarly with the knowledge pieces, we said this is the kind of outcomes we want out of our whole programme, and they said what are you... what's the business focus. And then the lecturers were selected by Laura and then each lecturer had opportunity to discuss with our group execs to say this is what I'm presenting on, but I need to drill down more about specific issues in your company, am I pitching this at the right level, how much detail must I go into. Not so much Nick Binedell, I think he has his own, you know, I think the way he looks at the past and the future and bringing them together, and then he has that whole sort of world view, he sort of sets the context. I think that's over and above the company. But he still bring it
into the company context. But some of the other lecturers really went into a lot of detail and tailored their pieces very much for our business.

RN In terms of that, could a number of major businesses get together, would they be open to getting together and you as C7 would be you be open to inputting into the MBA? In terms of current, so not specifically giving away a strategic advantages or what not, but in terms of general business needs. I'm sure there's a bunch of generic things, would you be keen to do that, would that make any difference to the quality of MBAs that we're producing?

C7 You know what would be interesting for me to see is I could talk to my colleagues about how many MBAs we bring into the business. And then have a look there, I think our business would always, we're always thin on resource, so maybe say, okay, well how much if you're going to say we'd need someone to commit all these hours, reviewing material, providing feedback, we're always so thin on resources. I know our business, you know, what we'll want to see, okay, what are the benefits for us, are we bringing MBAs out of these business group ourselves. But certainly if it's something where there are business benefits for us, we would like to give input to it.

RN It sounds great. And finally I think what do you think business schools, organisations, and students can do better to improve that learning process?

C7 I think going back to what I was saying before, I think practical, you know, exercises are a real way of embedding the learning process. I think also passing on the knowledge to be able to know something well enough to teach it to somebody else, I think is knowing it the best. So if business schools, if students in business schools somehow were able to incorporate teaching back what they've learned to other people in the business school, or people outside the business school, I think that would really help them embed their learning, and make it very real.
RN Excellent. Well is there anything else from your side, C7?

C7 No, I think that's it.

RN Thank you so much for your time, I appreciate it.

C7 Okay, thanks, Ravi.
APPENDIX I: TRANSCRIPTS OF COMPANY 8 (C8)

Speaker key

RN Ravindran Naicker
C8 Company 8

RN Hi C8, its Ravi Naicker calling. How are you?
C8 Hi Ravi. I’m all right and yourself?
RN I’m good thanks. I just called your office and I just saw your email so...
C8 Yes, I actually meant to send it with a new number this morning but I forgot because I was busy on a call.
RN No, no problem. Let me introduce myself, so I’m in my second year of MBA and doing my thesis and I’m conducting research which will explore the different ways in which collaborative learning can achieve maximum output from an MBA program for business school students and organisations involved in the program. The interview will, is expected to last about 30 minutes and will help us understand how business school students and organisations can work together to ensure that all parties maximise their respective benefits from the MBA, right? Your participation is totally voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All the data will be kept confidential and if you have any concerns you can contact myself or VVVV who’s my supervisor. So that’s basically a content statement. Are you comfortable to proceed with the interview?

C8 No, that’s fine.
RN Okay, great.

C8 I don’t know if you’re aware, I did make VVVV aware and I’ve got the email trail I sent to you as well that at C8 we haven’t been that involved in sponsoring, financially sponsoring MBA studies by employees. They tend to do it on their own so I’ve obviously got limited responses that I can give from an organisation perspective but I’ll see what I can do.

RN And I think that’s one of the key aspects that I’m looking at as well is that I’m looking at organisations that not only sponsor but those that don’t and try to unpack whether there’s any value for you at all or not and if so, what is that value and whether there are things that could be done by either the business school or business or by the students themselves which actually adds value to your business. Now I understand, I saw the email and I understand you’ve, what, you’ve only sponsored two out of, two MBAs in the past three or four years so I agree...

C8 Yes, we’ve basically sponsored one person who completed their MBA over three years. He completed that at the end of last year and we’ve just sponsored the second person now who’s going to be starting next year for the next three years as well.

RN And I think then maybe there is some value in that so let’s try and unpack that and see because it seems like your business is sponsoring even if it’s one person or two people at a time. I suppose you’d want to get some value out of it, right?

C8 Yes, it’s a particular business unit within the organisation that’s sponsoring based on, you know, requests and then of course part of the retention plan specifically for that particular person that they identify for the period, yes.
Okay, so let’s start off generally, C8. What do you think are the successes of an MBA?

Look, I mean there’s no doubt and I’d like to think most people, when they decide to study an MBA because... it’s quite time consuming and it needs considerable commitment. I know people who have studied who had to put their social lives on hold to focus and finish it on time and then redirect their energies back to their work/life balance, so it’s a serious commitment. A lot of people that I know who’ve studied or made that commitment and that decision to pursue it, it’s because it gives them a broader perspective on things. I mean, it addresses so many different aspects of an organisation from strategy, leadership, marketing, HR etc that it does really give people a broad understanding of how a business is run from different perspectives. So there’s no doubt that there’s a lot of value in terms of that. Those who have come out of it have come out a lot more confident, with that broader knowledge, able to see exactly where they want to take their career next. And of course it’s typically used in terms of the labour market to leverage for much better opportunities as well because of what the candidate or delegate, the value that they get out of that two or three year process, especially I think with the international models, to travel to one or two countries overseas and to look at best practices and benchmarking as well. You know, that’s really valuable. I can’t see how a person would gain that type of knowledge and exposure in any other way.

Yes. Is there anything else that you think an MBA gives either an organisation or a student?

Look, I’m not sure about what it gives to the organisation to be honest. Like I said, I haven’t seen the benefits of it because unfortunately there’s a person that we did sponsor last year who completed last year and has since left. So the benefits I’ve seen have been for the individual, their career, their knowledge, their exposure. They come out a completely... well, not completely but they come out a different person to a large extent out of that experience. Where an organisation benefits I think, and it benefits a lot if it sponsors the MBA and that’s why I’m reluctant to comment coming from an
organisation that doesn’t really sponsor a lot of MBA studies, but where an organisation
does sponsor and sponsors a few, I think there’s a twofold benefit to it. On the one
hand the organisation gets more involved because there’s a financial investment. They
get more involved with the student or the employee’s progress, they get involved in
terms of trying to influence and get involved as much as possible to ensure the success
of that particular student or number of students that they’ve sponsored. While at the
same time what I’ve seen in previous companies where we’ve done this is that the
students or the employee’s loyalty goes a long way as well because there is no doubt
that an employee who has their company or their organisation investing financially in
their MBA, because it’s known to be a very expensive investment, will have, to a very
large extent, will have loyalty towards that organisation. I think there isn’t a stronger
message that you could possibly send when you want to retain what you consider to be
talent than investing in something like an MBA study for them. It really sends a strong
message and a very clear message that they are key talent within the organisation and
the organisation takes great pride in helping them leverage their learning and taking
their career to the next level so to speak.

And it’s not always about also keeping the employee within the organisation in terms of
the next step; it’s sometimes just helping them be more marketable outside. I know it
sounds odd because you would want to get the investment back but what we’ve
realised, especially in the IT industry, is that sometimes letting some of our key talent
go out there into the industry, working with other companies, even our competitors,
they tend to be able to compare obviously C8 to the other companies, what they get
better at C8 compared to other organisations they join and more often than not we
actually have, two or three years down line, employees wanting to come back and
rejoin C8. That’s interesting. It’s not like other industries I’ve worked in. I think it could
be quite unique to the IT industry but there’s a lot of people that I’ve found in the two
years I’ve been at C8 who are wanting to come back after leaving for a couple of years.

So you make a really interesting point, right? Just sponsoring the MBA isn’t
enough to create that loyalty, like you’ve just seen with this person that’s left. So the
more a company’s involved and vested in that individual’s progress, the more likely that
they will see benefits and create some sort of loyalty in that individual. Am I reading that correctly?

C8 Yes. I mean, it’s not a guarantee of course but yes, it’s likely that there would be the loyalty aspect. And the loyalty is long term as well so even if the person doesn’t stay straightaway, because they become more marketable and of course they get targeted by other organisations, there is that, I suppose they’ll always realise that C8 as an organisation invested so much that even though they weren’t able to give them what they were looking for immediately after completing their MBA, either better opportunities or better salary package, whatever they might be looking for, they will still remember that investment to the extent that they would want to come back at some stage. And that’s obviously a value add when you get somebody coming back after two or three years of exposure in a similar type of market and the same industry. They bring back even better knowledge than if they’d stayed with you for two or three years anyway.

RN C8, there’s this one thing that I didn’t touch on just at the beginning; your career history or your current title?

C8 I’m in HR so I’m the Country HR Director for C8 for South Africa.

RN And then your academic background?

C8 Mostly HR so I’ve got a BA in Industrial Psychology, I’ve got a Masters Diploma in HR Management equivalent to Honours and I’ve got an exam I haven’t completed yet, so still one last module outstanding, a Diploma in Company Direction which is mainly for directors with the Institute of Directors.
Okay, great. Thank you for that. Okay, so I mean, you’ve touched on briefly as well, so we’ve talked about the successes and you’ve elaborated a bit. Tell me more about the failings of an MBA and... I mean you’ve touched on briefly that someone that you’ve just sponsored has left recently. Tell me, what do you think are the failings of an MBA?

Look, I think there’s a lot of hype around an MBA and I think to a certain extent it does give a bit of false expectation of an employee. You know, it just gives a false sense of if you get an MBA the world is your oyster, so to speak. An MBA doesn’t necessarily guarantee that you’re going to get onto that next level in your career that you’ve been struggling to achieve for example or that your career suddenly is going to be accelerated to a point that you are successful over a shorter period than you would have been without the MBA. So it does, I find that it creates a certain sense of expectation, very high expectation for the individual and certainly for the organisation that’s involved; it puts them under pressure to do something almost as a miracle for that MBA graduate once they’ve completed. I think it’s very important that the organisation and the individual, and to a certain extent the business school can take part in this as well, to say it’s a growth, personal growth that needs to be focused on by the individual but definitely not to expect miracles to happen because now you suddenly have this MBA qualification. It’s not meant to be that now suddenly there’s a magic wand that just gives you your every wish as far as your career is concerned.

That makes sense. That definitely makes sense and you’ve also addressed how we think. So at what stage of this MBA relationship, I’m going to call it, would the expectations need to be addressed and how would it need to be addressed in your view?

I think they need to address it upfront. I think even before a person decides to go ahead and pursue their MBA they need to understand that yes, it’s going to be a great opportunity, yes they need to sacrifice some things because it’s a serious commitment but it could be that they make this commitment on their social life and their personal life etc for two, three years and there’s also that additional challenge of
finishing your thesis that some people don’t even get, you know, they get through the first three years and they don’t finish their thesis. I’ve seen many people with incomplete MBAs because of that aspect as well so they need to be aware of the challenge of being able to do that because that largely is probably the most difficult in doing an MBA. As a whole it’s difficult. So knowing all of that and also knowing that you could be committing and making sacrifices and going through all these difficulties over a period of two or three years and there’s no guarantee that it is actually going to make a big difference to your career, although it will make a big difference to your personal growth if nothing else. So if that is, the pros and cons are weighed up upfront before the decision is made then the person knows what they’re getting themselves into and that there aren’t any false expectations and there’s a more realistic understanding of the outcomes after that process as well.

RN So in terms of what you just said, the MBA should be positioned as more a personal growth experience than a career transition experience or a money experience where you’re going to get paid a lot more or where you’re going to become an executive or something like that, but rather positioned as you’re going to get personal growth through this experience.

C8 Yes. I think that is more realistic because if you do get the career transition and the acceleration to a better position, if you happen to get to another level at that point etc, that’s the cherry on top. That’s not a guarantee. Some people manage to get that and some people don’t unfortunately.

RN And what, who would take responsibility or what role would each of the three... Okay, let’s think about it, right; so there are three parties here. There’s the business school, what role would the business school play, what role would the organisation play and what role would the student play in terms of managing this expectation or doing this upfront, sort of getting an upfront understanding of what the MBA is about?
Yes, I think the business school plays a role at the later point. The upfront discussion would be between the student and the organisation because there would be an expectation from the student that, you know, once I get this MBA the organisation will offer me that dream career, so to speak, or another miracle within a shorter period of time than it would have. And the organisation, knowing its own limitations, and I have to emphasise particularly with multinationals, at a local level we don’t have much of an influence over that as well because some of the roles report into other country managers. So even as a country management team locally, we might put a succession plan in place, we might look at career paths, start tracking certain individuals where there’s talent or previously disadvantaged individuals into BEE and transformation etc, so we might have all these wonderful plans and this particular individual who’s going to study an MBA knows that they’re part of that talent pool and that we’ve got plans for him but if they don’t, especially if they don’t report into an in-country manager but they report to an out of country manager who stays in another country out there, that in itself could have a different outcome in terms of the way it will play out.

And then secondly, because a lot of these decisions are taken by corporate and it flows down to the country, some things might change, and we’ve experienced that with C8 recently. That came to mind quickly now. Some things flow down that we just need to implement it, decisions that we just need to implement and you can’t influence much and that has an impact on trends. So the organisation and the employee needs to have a very clear discussion around, even if plans are in place, there would be certain things or there might be certain decisions that are taken that influence those plans and change those plans to an extent that what is promised at the beginning, even if there is some promise of a career opportunity, might change as well over time, especially because an MBA takes two to three years. The cycle in IT changes very, very quickly. So that’s the initial discussion between organisation and the employee.

The business school then needs to partner with the organisation in understanding that message also upfront and just reiterating part of that message at appropriate times throughout the period of study as well, and of course trying to assist the employee as much as possible in terms of taking what their expectations are and making them a bit more realistic throughout the study as well.
So when you say it the other way, and that leads to my next question, right; how do business schools interact and support organisations and students through achieving their objectives? So the students and the organisation have had their upfront discussion in terms of the contracting, you know, this is what we’re likely to achieve, this is what we can give you, this is what you can expect. Students say this is the kind of support I’d like, the organisation gives back whatever. How does the business school then actually make that practical and support the organisation and the student through that?

So it can’t be just a relationship between the business school and the student, okay, and the organisation has a hands-off approach. So the business school also needs to have a relationship with the organisation. So the business school understands the student’s expectations and what it is that he can offer to the student in relation to these expectations but the business school also needs to partner with the organisation and understand what it is that the organisation can offer to the student and the limitations of what we can offer to the student so that that also gets incorporated into the reality of what they deliver in the learning for the student as well. So the business school almost needs to have a relationship with the student and with the organisation because the relationships are slightly different in terms of expectations. Because even the student and the organisation might have that upfront discussion; it doesn’t take away the fact that there will still be that expectation gap between the student and the organisation and the business school needs to be the third party that understands that and tries to help facilitate closing that gap between the organisation and the student in the reality of delivering the material during the period of study.

And then in terms of then supporting those expectations, once the expectations have been established, how would the business school ensure that what is being taught is relevant and how would the organisation ensure that what has been taught gets implemented back through to the organisation?

I think that’s a challenge the business school will have because they’re not dealing with just one organisation. They’re dealing with many organisations and there
would be the challenge that the different organisations might have different aims. So they would need to find the common factor across the various organisations that they can deliver on and then they have the challenge of, for those organisations that have unique differences in what they want for their students or their employees, to get out of it how they would then incorporate it in such a way that each individual still gets individual expectations that are met as well. So there’s a lot of flexibility that the business schools would need to practice then because there will be things that are relevant for certain students in relation to the organisation and others that might not be. But then it still comes back to the student having the responsibility to get what is relevant to them and not expect that everything will be relevant because it addresses different perspectives from that point on. Is that making sense to you?

RN Yes, it definitely makes sense. I think it definitely makes sense in that ultimately the responsibility still lies with the students but there could be several factors which are common across organisations. And I think to a large extent if the curriculum of the MBA was to cater for those factors, and then for a select few, if there were specific items, those could be catered for separately. But if a student got something that’s common, I suppose the business school would be a lot relevant to a lot more companies that it may be at present.

C8 Yes, certainly. And I know there is more of a trend now to partnerships that organisations and business schools enter into one on one for taking a group of employees, which is similar to what we did with Wits [?] for our talent program – that’s how I got to meet VVVV as well – where we take a group of employees that we’d like to invest in at a certain level within the organisation, at a certain level of learning intervention, approach a business school to say right, we know you’ve got an MBA, we know you’ve got an MBP, you know, whatever the formal training courses that you have; however, as C8 we’ve identified this particular gap that those formal learning interventions don’t address and we’d like to design something with you guys, partner with you, customise it specifically for C8 for this talent group of employees, let’s see how it works out. So those unique needs can be addressed that way as well, at least that’s how we’ve done it so far.
RN Through that program how have you ensured that there are benefits for all three parties?

C8 Are you talking about now the customised program?

RN Yes.

C8 Well, we obviously would have known the individuals over a period of time, we know their performance, we know their career plans, we know we have them in our succession plans and we know, because we know them well enough, we know what the gaps are for them to get to the level of leadership because it’s multi-leadership focused, the level of leadership that we want them to get to. And they’re on a different level within the leadership hierarchy within the organisation. So it’s a question of saying okay, for this level or this group of employees who are at this level within the organisation, to get to this next leadership level this is what they need and this is what they’re missing. So we make that one module on the program for example and so on because it just so happens that we’ve got middle managers, junior managers as well as potential managers, so people who are not even managers but potentially can be such that they’re managers at junior or middle management very quickly over a short period of time. So it’s having an understanding of the target audience, an understanding of the gaps and understanding of what the jobs that we’re trying to track them into require in relation to the gaps they have and then customising the different modules and the program over a period of time to cater for closing those gaps as well.

RN How did the benefits of that program feed back into C8?

C8 Well, part of that program is that, it’s actually split into three quarters, three months for a block that they need to attend as lectures. It’s three or four days in a three quarter cycle or period. So it’s a program with three blocks of three to four days each per quarter that they need to attend. Between those blocks that they attend, block
studies, then they've got assignments and those assignment topics are directly related to the business gaps that we've identified within C8. So it has to be, even if it's a syndicate group, and they divide them into syndicate groups as well, so it's about 35 people at one point in time so they're divided into syndicate groups of about, I think it's six groups of six each. And basically if they want to, because the country management team decide on topics upfront that ideally they'd like the syndicate groups to address. However, if they want to change or don't want to take any of the topics that are recommended and come up with a new one, which has also happened with one or two groups, it has to be relevant and it has to be something that they can come up with a solution that can be implemented back into the business operationally. So the assignment topic has to be relevant, they need to come up with and it has to be a problem that we're experiencing because the aim is for them to come up with a solution to that problem, but something that's practical enough that once they present it at their graduation ceremony, you know, each group will present the solutions based on whatever problems they've identified, the intention is the problem must be practical enough that the country management team listening to the presentation can pick one or two of those solutions and actually implement them back into the day to day operation of the organisation as well.

RN Excellent. So, I mean, in this way the student learns and the organisation gets a benefit. What about the business school, what benefit do they get from this process?

C8 Well, I suppose depending on how good the solutions are they can always use some of these as case studies, especially if we implement the solutions and they actually work, you know. They can use them as case studies for further, similar types of programs that they have with other organisations as well who might be experiencing similar types of challenges.

RN And then finally, what can business schools, organisations and students do to improve the impact of the MBA?
You know that’s a tough one because I was just thinking about it. We’ve had meetings around this whole issue around job creation etc because at the end of the day I think it needs to contribute towards the whole government initiative around job creation. We found not so long ago that there weren’t too many women sitting on executive boards in this day and age or not as many as there could be. How do we address that gap, how does an MBA possibly contribute to more female students being prepared for that in the reality of the situation? How many, if you look at BEE or employment equity etc, you know, how many disabled people could also be fast tracked to some of those positions? But to look at some of the unique talent that we have within the productive context and look at what has been developed in job creation, there’s BEE, there’s representation of women, disabled people etc, etc and look at how do we then close that gap, if an MBA supports that and how to fast track people to become more ready for certain positions. And we know we’re missing certain representation at that level so how does the business school then increase their ratio of intake of those particular individuals, targeting them, even PDI, previously disadvantaged individuals on a broader scale? How do they then increase the intake and target specifically those students that can fulfil or close that gap at a country level and partner with the business to understand what their specific gaps are and their targets are, but the business school can then help them achieve as well? I don’t think there has been too much of a slant towards that.

That’s a very interesting view. I haven’t heard that before and it certainly does provide quite a lot of opportunities. Is there anything else that you think the three can do together to ensure that this program is a better program?

Look, I mean, I think it still comes back to the reality of what it is that a student can do with that MBA once they’ve got it because I think the worst that could happen, and that could be one of the failings that you asked about earlier, is for students to feel like it was a waste of time to have spent two or three years trying to get this qualification and they’re not going anywhere with it. As much as you might have had the discussion to say, look, let’s focus on your personal growth and learning, I know that’s a bit of a naive approach as well because human beings are such that if they’re going to invest so much time, energy and effort into something, it’s really that they still
want to get something worthwhile out of it and personal growth just won’t be enough. So there will still need to be that collaboration between the three parties as to how a student can still get what they want from the organisation based on what is the content of the curriculum that we’re referring to that the business school offers.

And there, I think it’s not so much the organisation giving feedback to the business schools as to what it is that they can offer but possibly the business school giving the organisation some guidance, some ideas as to what it is that they can do to improve and better cater for the students’ expectations as well. Because business schools deal with so many different organisations and of course some organisations do this better than others, those that are struggling, I think the business school can provide guidance based on the learning or the information they get from the better performing organisations that are doing, you know, closing the gaps better. And I know some organisations might see that as competitive input because it helps them to retain and to acquire talent from other organisations better than some but there needs to be collaboration that the business schools are allowed by these organisations to just share a bit of this knowledge. Because at the end of the day, as I said, it will be just creating more opportunities for more people around, you know, transformation, around job creation etc. At the end of the day it can’t be organisations being too internally focused on the competitive advantage aspect but what is it that the country needs as well at the end of the day.

RN Would, going back to the expectations thing quickly; would alumni of an MBA taking on current students as mentors help with the expectations and help manage the expectations?

C8 I would be very careful about that. You know, the whole mentor/mentee matching is never easy because you’re dealing with dynamic human beings as well who are constantly changing in terms of what it is they want etc. And of course the mentors are always a bit of a challenge to try and keep interested and keep committed to the whole program. Even a 12 month mentorship program is always a challenge. The mentees are usually the ones who are more available than mentors as well. But if I
was to use that, and just thinking of it from an HR perspective within an organisation, if I was to look at something like that, my approach would be firstly screening the mentors quite closely as a first stage because remember that some people don't complete their MBA. So I know by the nature of alumni, typically it's to be somebody who's graduated but, you know, I don't know what the criteria would be for something like that. But I would make sure that the mentors are, for example, people who have completed, people who have taken out huge learnings out of that process and people who have seen the benefits, even after it's completed, the benefits of having gone through that process and completing. So I would screen out people who haven't completed in terms of their thesis, people who have completed but they think it was a waste of time and are a bit disillusioned, because there's a lot of that as well, a bit disillusioned after the process and so on so that there is the right influence from a mentor to a mentee in that matching exercise as well.

RN Great. Well, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. I think you've given me some really valuable insights, C8.

C8 Yes, I hope it was useful because, like I said, you know, I haven't, with C8 for the past two years at least, haven't really been that involved with MBA students as such, just maybe one or two recently.
APPENDIX J: TRANSCRIPTS OF COMPANY 9 (C9)

Speaker key

RN Ravindran Naicker
C9 C9

C9 Hello?

RN Hi C9, this is Ravi, how are you?

C9 How’s it, Ravi. Sorry, I could hear you but I don’t think you could hear me?

RN No, I couldn’t, actually.

C9 Good, at last.

RN Great, let me...just before we begin, I need to read you a consent statement, so just to get your approval, before we begin. So, basically I’m conducting research which will explore the different ways in which collaborative learning can achieve the maximum output from an MBA programme, for business schools, students and organisations involved in the MBA. Our interview is expected to last about 30 minutes, and will help us better understand how business schools, students and organisations can work together to ensure that all parties maximise their respective benefits, from the MBA. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All the data will be kept confidential and no names will be disclosed or anything of that sort. And, if you have any concerns, you can just contact me or my supervisor, VVVV, who you obviously know, so are you good with that?
RN I’m going to be recording the conversation, because it will go into my transcripts, but your name and stuff won’t be disclosed, in terms of the interview itself.

C9 That’s fine, no problem.

RN Great. So, where shall we begin? Let me just introduce myself. I’m a final year MBA student at Gibs, and I’ve just explained to you, in terms of what my study is about, because I think...

C9 Are you full time, Ravi, or part time?

RN I’m part time. And, basically I’m just going through the data collecting process, where I’m interviewing people or practitioners who are in business, who can add value to the research, to try and close the gap between business and business schools, because what you find is people normally leave. Students normally leave within the first or second year of doing their MBA programme, so I want to help companies harness that power better, and then I want students to obviously benefit from it, and the business school.

C9 Group Human Resources Director.

RN HR Director, and you’re at C9, right?
C9, yes.

RN And, your academic qualifications?

There’s a few, Masters Degree in psychology, and I have a Harvard qualification, the Senior Executive Programme, and then I have a degree in clinical organisational psychology from INSEAD in France, and plus a few other programmes, but they’re probably not important.

RN C9, tell me, what do you believe are the successes of the MBA?

Of the MBA? Well, let me talk from an HR Director view, because we hire MBAs and we interview a lot of MBAs, and I think the value is it really is relative to where the person is in their career. We get MBAs who are very young, without experience, and we find they’re useless to us. They just don’t have the frame of reference in which to apply the skills that they’ve learned on the MBA, they’re still caught in a very theoretical model.

And, so in the interviews, you ask them, what do you want to be? And, they say, I want to do strategy and I want to…they clearly don’t understand what strategy is or haven’t had the experience of putting strategies together, as opposed to the person who has business experience, and has worked with real problems, and had to solve problems, and we find that the MBA becomes more a facilitative tool, as it were, for solving what problems they have encountered in experience, so that person is much more valuable to us, because then the MBA has truly been put to use.

Of course, the downside of that is they come very expensive. You get a very expensive personal experience and MBA together, and in a business like ours, we
don’t actually recruit a lot of MBAs at senior levels, because of that. They’re just too out the market.

RN In terms of your business, what value have those MBAs who’ve had the relevant experience and stuff, what value have they added to your business?

C9 Very good research capabilities, we find, you know. I think, we’re retailers, so retail is a very practical, hands on exercise. It’s very commercial. We trade every single day. We can adapt and change our business in very short periods of time. Daily or weekly, if something doesn’t work in a store, we can change it tomorrow, whereas the MBA tends to promote more longer term problem solving, and we find that MBAs don’t naturally get into the very rapid working world that easily. We find that they’re almost over qualified at times, they’re looking for things that don’t exist.

I mean, retail, you buy something and you sell it, and if you don’t make a profit, you don’t try and keep selling it. It’s that simple. You don’t need a strategy behind it or whatever, so what we do find, where the MBAs can add value, is on the business model as a whole. If we’re looking to maybe get into new territories, or just think about our business, I think the research capability that they bring is always very good, because they’ve developed that judgmental capability, the ability to research something that differentiates between what’s good, what’s bad, what works, what doesn’t work, and so we use them in those capacities, as more project and research based work, which a lot of people, which a lot of MBAs seem to want to call strategy.

But, it’s definitely not strategy. Strategy is something completely...strategy is day to day, it’s not doing long term feasibilities and those kinds of things, so that, those exercises inform strategy and they will inform strategic decisions, but it’s not actually strategies. So, interesting.

RN And then, in terms of mental maturity, how does that come into it?
Mental maturity.

Can you talk to that, perhaps?

I think an MBA does move a person along quite quickly. It brings them, it brings a different context to their thinking and teaches them skills that you wouldn’t necessarily derive elsewhere. That ability to research something and make a judgement call, and just apply logic. This thing of making, being able to apply logic in support of a decision. I think that’s what it brings, so mentally, your MBAs, you’re actually more mature than somebody who hasn’t gone through that experience, but that said, it’s not necessarily more valuable. They are mentally a lot more mature, that’s not necessarily that they’re a lot more valuable.

In a business like ours, the retailer, who knows how to run a store, is probably more valuable than an MBA, but if we’re wanting to test the new model of business, or do a feasibility on moving to China or Brazil, then I think they would be very useful to us, that mental maturity is important.

In terms of the shortcomings, you said one of the shortcomings is that people may not be in the right, or they may be basically too theoretic, what else do you think is a shortcoming of the MBA?

That point, being a little bit too theoretical, sometimes being a bit fanciful, or the other thing I find at times with MBAs, is they tend to believe there’s more to be done than there’s actually to be done. The great entrepreneurs are the ones who have a look at the resources at their disposal, and they configure those resources to achieve an outcome, whereas I find quite often the MBAs are caught up in thinking about the resources themselves, and about whether they’re good resources or bad resources, as opposed to just putting them to use, so yes, and I’m generalising probably quite a lot, but I find that it comes back to what I was saying earlier about experience.
The person who has got a very deep experience, and goes and does an MBA, is infinitely more valuable than a young person without experience, because then they're just caught in this total world of overkill and of just too much, but what other weaknesses?

I don’t think there are many weaknesses, far more strengths in the MBA than there are weaknesses.

That’s good to hear. In terms of the MBA itself, and let’s say, business schools and stuff, I don’t know how much you’ve interacted with business schools and with students?

A lot, yes.

In terms of C9, so how have you achieved benefits for all three parties?

I’m a mentor at Harvard, on the Harvard MBA Programme, and we recently brought a Harvard MBA person across to us. A Chinese lady working in America, and doing the Harvard MBA current, so she flew across to us. She spent ten weeks with us, and yes, she brought fantastic value. We put her into our furniture business, to research it and to have a look at how it was doing, and she gave us some outstanding feedback. Great, insightful work that she did, so we used that.

I also work a lot with the University of Arkansas. I’m on the board of their retail and we just brought two of their MBAs across to us as well, also on a ten week internship. They worked in supply chain, and again same thing. We put them onto projects, and they gave us fantastic value.
And then, we have a programme in C9, called the Future Leaders Programme, and we have this problem of trying to bring people through from junior levels to senior levels at quite a rapid rate, and what we found is that it...Ravi, just give me a sec.

RN Sure.

And, what we found is that we’ve put something called the Future Leaders Programme together, and we found that if we can bring an MBA at a relatively middle to upper level of management, we can move those sort of people far quicker than we can from junior level, and we bring MBAs on that basis, so we brought an MBA in from UCT two years ago, and he is now senior executive on one of our divisions, and we’ve recently brought in a young lady from Stellenbosch. She did her MBA at Stellenbosch, and she’s now on our Future Leaders Programme, and she will be getting involved in some of our international research work, so yes, we mix a lot, I must say.

Something we’ve just been speaking about recently, is we’ve got quite a success story in one of our businesses in KKKK’s and when I was at TTTT, many years ago, we used this MBA class to do case studies on TTTT, on the company. They actually came in and wrote case studies, and we’re thinking of using Gibs as in fact, approaching Gibs, to see if they couldn’t give us an MBA, to come and write a case study on Milady’s, because there’s a great story there that’s starting to emerge, so we interact a lot with business schools, I must say.

RN And, what sort of feedback, so this is pretty interesting. You get people out across from Harvard and Arkansas, but what sort of feedback do you give back to the universities?

A lot, you know? It’s typically their summer, so a summer school programme, ten weeks, and we insist that they develop a blog while they’re with us, so they write a blog, and they send in information back to their faculties, and to their colleagues
constantly. We host them well. We literally take them to Cape Town, take them to the Berg, take them to a game reserve, take them to rugby matches. We really give them a South African experience.

And, that goes streaming back across to America, and of course we get a great response back. People want to come, and we’ve had a number of people through, but we give a lot of feedback back. We write reports, we give progress reports back to the universities, to the faculty over there, which they appreciate a lot, and then of course, there’s the final project that they do. The write up. We insist that they write up their project, and they present it to the senior execs, and there’s that as feedback, that goes back as well.

So, we haven’t failed in one yet. We’ve only had serious successes, it’s great, it’s been really good both ways, so Arkansas, both Arkansas and Harvard are very happy to send us people, and we’re very happy to host them, so it’s a great relationship, and we of course, at the same time, are getting straight from the MBA classes, we’re getting the latest in research and the latest research tools and methodologies and things that they’re learning, we’re getting access to, so you know, it’s a great win win all around.

RN That sounds brilliant, actually. And, are these students full time MBAs?

C9 Yes, in fact, all the students we’ve had so far have been full time MBAs. I think the Harvard is a two year, and Jenny is in her first year, and the Arkansas one is definitely also full time.

RN Excellent, and then obviously that’s benefited C9 tremendously, and as you’ve said, in terms of the research and the information that you get out?
Very much, they're too young to give us any major insights, or opinions, but what they really are good at, is as I said earlier, researching stuff, and you know, generating models for us to look at, and doing feasibilities and those kinds of things.

That's excellent.

And, in that sense, yes, they have been good, have given us a lot, really a lot.

And then, moving onto the next question then, how do the business schools interact and support you, as the organisation and the students through this internship programme?

Well, if I start at University of Arkansas, the agreement was that I would go onto their board. It’s the University of Arkansas, and they have something called the Sam Walton College of Business, so that would be like Gibbs, for example. It’s the Sam Walton College of Business, and what’s in that, there’s a department called the Centre for Retailing Excellence, and so I sit on the board of the Centre for Retailing Excellence, with about 50 other companies, American companies, so we get that direct input into their programme, and we also get a lot of feedback from them, which helps us.

And we, as part of the relationship is we allow their MBAs to come across, to do these ten week programmes, so there’s a very high interactivity there.

We in turn, are now sending some of our senior executives across to Arkansas to be trained there, in supply chain, so there’s a very good interaction.
We have a strong relationship with Gibs. We work with your business school all the time, and with Harvard, it’s a bit more remote. Harvard, I think, are a big institution, we’re a small company in their eyes, but even that, just participating, being a Harvard Alumni and participating on their Crimson Compass programme, their MBA and student mentor programme, I think we have a good interaction, you know?

RN Can you tell me a bit more about that programme?

C9 Which is that, the Crimson Compass?

RN Yes, Crimson Compass?

C9 Crimson Compass is the Harvard mentor programme, Crimson is the colour of Harvard, you know, and Compass is future career direction, and basically then they just look to alumni around the world, to participate, so for example, they sent, Harvard sent 90 of their MBAs to Cape Town last year, and seven of us, as South African Harvard mentors went and met with the students in Cape Town. They get offered work experience here, and so on, so we will, as C9, next year, when they come across again, we’ll offer a Harvard MBA work experience here, and it gives me an opportunity just to keep in touch with that, and if any of them want to ask me questions or be in touch, they do that, so now I get phone calls from numerous people all around the world, but more recently from Johannesburg, just wanting to talk about their progress, their careers, and just generally give advice, so it’s a great programme, I must say.

RN That sounds very interesting. I think it will be very useful for my research.

C9 Yes.
It’s very different, so alumni mentorship programme, very interesting.

It’s alumni mentorship, yes, go onto the Harvard website, it’s called the Crimson Compass. I don’t know if you’ll be able to get onto the actual thing, but you can read about it.

I’ll do that, thanks for that. What do you think, when I did my research and when I listen to the corridor talk and stuff like that, to a large extent, a lot of those people who haven’t done an MBA, view the MBA very negatively, and it’s not without reason, and it’s basically stemming, my research tells me, it’s stemming from exactly what you said, in that where people are just not at the right career level to be doing an MBA, to add any value to them or their business.

What can, and then sometimes the business schools, they’re teaching students the latest fads, which is unpractical, like you said, in terms of implementing on a day to day basis, what can the business schools, organisations and students do to improve the impact of an MBA? What are the key things that you think they should be doing better?

There is this thing that MBAs are a bit pretentious and they come out with these high expectations, and so on, but I must be quick to say, you get very good MBAs, and you get very bad MBAs. You know, you can probably do an MBA online these days, but since unless you’ve got a good quality business school, like UCT or like Harvard, or NSEAD or Gibbs and so on, you know, and as long as they’re maintaining a certain standard, I think you’re going to get a good quality MBA.

The worst is when somebody comes to visit you and ask you for a job, and they’ve got an MBA from Cardiff Online, or Henley, or whatever, and they haven’t really been taught. In fact, they’ve been self taught, and this principle of self teaching, when you get on and you do this online study, or you do this like UNISA, is that you’re working within your own limitations. So, you’re testing ideas with yourself, and you’re writing
within your own research capability, and so on, so you don’t really, kind of, break out of
yourself, if you know what I mean?

You’re kind of stuck in this closed entity, and then you get an MBA. Now, really
it’s...and a lot of people assume because they’ve got an MBA, they’ve accomplished
something, as opposed to you go through a rigorous process at a Gibs or a UCT, and
you’re drilled, you’re interacting with people. There’s a strong network, etc, and that’s
completely different, so what was your question? What could be done better?

RN What could they do better to improve the impact? So, a student goes away to a
Gibs or a Wits, and I concede the point that not everyone is equal.

C9 Yes.

RN But, they go away, and what can we do better, to actually pull these three
people together, so what can they do better to improve the impact, not only for the
business school, but for the student in terms of learning, and then for the organisation
in terms of actually practical.

C9 It comes back to what I said earlier, this thing of experience. If a business
school, the business schools have to insist on experience. What those Arkansas
students are getting when they come to us, is they’re going to a different country, into a
different kind of company, and they’re seriously getting a different out there experience.
They go back with emerging market experience. We give them projects to research in
emerging markets, etc.

I think that experience gives them a reality check of what it’s like. If you’re just
contained in an academic and theoretical world, then you’re finished. You’re not going
to succeed in business, because business is not a theoretical exercise, it’s a very practical thing.

So, the thing of practical exercises and getting your students out to do practical work, I can’t emphasise that enough. I think part of that reality checking is also getting realistic metaphors, people who can say, listen, that doesn’t work, this doesn’t work, forget that, and so I think there’s the first thing, experience.

The other thing, and I think from a corporate point of view, is how to integrate an MBA into your business, and if the business schools could give guidelines on that, or somehow there could be a symbiotic relationship between, and I guess our relationship with Arkansas is a very good example, is that they send their students to us, we give those students a rigorous time, make no mistake. We don’t give them MBA stuff. We give them practical, retail stuff, and they go back and they apply that in the MBAs, and the classes there learn a lot.

I think that’s quite good, but we’ve learned how to bring MBAs in, and I think corporates don’t know how to do it. They see MBAs as these very clever young people who you’ve got to put into very clever roles, whereas and mostly those are corporate roles, or strategic roles, whereas I think the MBAs thrive best in a practical environment, because they’ve developed decision making skills, they’ve developed judgement, and you don’t get that sitting in offices, making corporate decisions. You just don’t get it.

If I was an MBA, I’d say your first job must be straight into frontline operational management. Go and run a stall, go and run a DC, go and do something, because that’s where you’re going to apply your MBA skills. The gap is this thing, in fact, for too many people, MBA equals strategy.

When you’ve worked in business, there is no such thing as strategy, there’s a strategic process that you go through, which is essentially a decision making process, but once
the decisions are made, there is no strategy, it’s just implementation of decisions, you know? But, the MBAs want to, somehow they come out thinking they’ve got to get into this thing called strategy, which a lot of time, equates to sitting in a corporate office, thinking about where to go in the world, and I think that is history. I really do.

So, what could the MBA School do better? You know, yes, integrate to the practical world, I think is very important. Yes, what else?

RN How would you bring a programme like the one you’ve got with Arkansas back to a South African context, so let’s take a Gibs or a Wits or UCT, and you’ve got a part time student, so he is fully employed somewhere else, maybe not a competitor or whatever, but he’s employed, so how would you take that back, and where would you take that back?

C9 So, provided that we could get some value out of the students that come to us, that would be fantastic. The reason we get so much value out of the Arkansas people is because they are on Wal-Mart’s doorstep, they’re saturated in supply chain thinking, so when they come to us, they bring us good value.

When you get a Harvard student coming into your business, and they’ve just been lectured by the kind of people, they bring in good tools, good analytics into your business, so you’re getting serious value there.

You know, if you’re getting somebody out of Gibs, or UCT are you getting the same value? You know, possibly...maybe we’re not looking hard enough or maybe we’re not bringing people in, but for local people, we have what I described as our Future Leaders programme, and that’s where we bring local MBAs in, but there’s a rule to that. Is that they must be interested in retail, and they must want to be retailers.
You know, there’s nothing in our business that we can teach them, around grand business schemes and things. We’re practical, and the problem in South Africa is that we don’t have enough MBAs wanting to be retailers. Whereas if you study in Arkansas on the back doorstep of Wal-Mart and Tyson Foods and so on, you’ve probably already made that decision, that you want to be in retail.

If you’re studying in Harvard, and you’ve been through various, Nike, Adidas, etc, you probably want to be in sports clothing, which suits our business, C9 Sport. In South Africa, we just don’t find enough MBAs wanting to be retailers. Maybe it’s just not a sexy industry. Our industry is Investec and the management companies.

That’s an interesting point.

In other words, if the business schools could create more retailers for us, we’d be in with them like a flash.

How would you...let’s say a business school could create or define or could give you a bunch of students who are halfway through their MBA, who obviously work somewhere else, but would like to get some experience, in terms of retail. They’re interested in retail, and then they’re offered to you, for let’s say, a period of three months part time?

Well, we would take them, probably on a shorter, probably a ten week. Our internship programme, we find ten weeks a very good period of time. It’s enough time for them to get involved, but it’s not too long that you’re starting to wonder what to do with them next. It’s a good project period, ten weeks, and we’ve got...we want to go to Brazil, to China, we’re up in Africa, and we’re confronting problems all the time. We’ve got to think about an ERP system for our business, and so on, so there’s no shortage of work.
And, yes, we would go with it, but to send them our way and I think we’d work out a programme, because we do value the mindset of a good, experienced MBA person, and they can add tremendous value.

That’s great. Is there anything else you want to add, in terms of making this process better?

No, look, I think... yes, probably the biggest thing I’d say, and I’ve spoken to many MBA classes, and the one thing I say to them is that the MBA doesn’t guarantee you an automatic right to step into a position in corporate, at a certain level, because it gives you an absolutely fantastic bunch of skills, but the trick is to get in at a very active level, so that you are applying those skills. You don’t want to come to corporate, and never really apply your thinking, for the sake of a good salary and a nice job. You will move far, far quicker if you come into a practical job, get practical application of your MBA, you’ll move up through a system much quicker, than coming in at a senior level, where you’re going to sit for three, four, five years, and probably end up getting into project roles, and going nowhere.

I think business schools must understand that, they must not produce prima donnas and pretentious people for the market. They must produce people who really want to come in and work, and there’s nothing more valuable than an entrepreneur who has grown a business, been very successful and then decides, I really need to top up my skills, and he or she goes and does an MBA.

That person is hot property here, definitely, so I guess, that if anything, that would be the biggest thing for me, but we value MBAs big time. We are just very fussy about who we bring in, and very fussy about how we use them. With the Harvard and Arkansas MBAs, and even our Future Leaders coming into our business, the first thing they do, they go to our DC. They go into the warehouses, and they work in packing lines, they work on the floor, they interact with people there, they are given DC projects.
The next thing they do is they go to our stores, so they see in the DC how we receive stock and how stock gets moved to stores. The next thing we do is we put them into stores, we make them work as packers. They work as store managers, maybe as an area manager, they have to do that. From there, we will bring them across into the buying process, the planning process, and then we start giving them their projects.

So, by the time they get to the project, they've got this very deep insight of our retail process, as opposed to what many companies do, they bring the MBA in, and they put them straight onto the project, give them an office, a computer and a project, and they spend their first four, five weeks trying to work out what they're doing, and work out the retail process, so practicality, practical skills plus MBA equals high value.

Practical skills plus MBA, I'm going to quote you on that one.

Very high value. MBA with no practical skills, useless. Practical skills without MBA, very useful indeed. Practical skills plus MBA, very high value.

That's fantastic.

All right, Ravi.

Thank you so much for your time, C9, I really appreciate your time.

I hope that's helped.

I'll basically type this up. What I'm going to do is, when I'm done with my research, I will forward you a copy of it, for your reference.
That would be great.

And, we’ll be in touch, thank you so much for your time, go well.

Good luck, Ravi, how far are you with your MBA, by the way?

I’m pretty much done, it’s just the thesis to do now.

Keep C9 in mind, hey?

Thank you so much and go well.

Cheers, bye.

Bye.
APPENDIX K: TRANSCRIPTS OF COMPANY 10 (C10)

Speaker key

RN  Ravi Naicker

C10  Company 10

RN  So C10, I'm Ravi Naicker and I'm in my final year of MBA.

C10  With Gibs, hey?

RN  With Gibs, yes. So basically my thesis is around how collaboration can make the... or can improve the impact of the MBA. And I'm talking collaboration between business schools, organisations and students. And so I'd like to understand, from your perspective, what your involvement has been, how the experience has been and then try and unpack what we can do better as a business school, as an organisation and as students, to improve the impact of this programme.

C10  Of the MBA programme?

RN  Yes, but I'd like to draw your knowledge off your wider programmes, your executive learning programmes and what not, just to get a feel for whether there's certain principles that aren't being applied in the MBA. We'll get to it as we work through some of the questions. So let's kick off; I mean, just in terms of your career history, I mean, your current role...

C10  I'm the head of Learning and Talent Management for the corporate centre and I'm also head of Group Leadership for C10.
RN And your academic qualifications?

C10 I have a PhD in Adult Education and Leadership.

RN Okay, great. So let's start off; what do you think are the successes of an MBA?

C10 I think that one of the critical things in a country like South Africa, where we need a new set of leaders who are much more diverse, to get into management positions. And MBA is very successful in teaching people the fundamentals of how to run, manage and grow a business, and I think it teaches them the fundamentals. Whether it truly enables them to do that, I don't know, but that management capability is such a critical skill that I think that's the pre-eminent success.

RN What else do you think?

C10 I think the idea that candidates, especially on the Gibs MBA, get to do that overseas leg, which broadens their experience to beyond their own borders and their own boundaries, I think is also a very powerful experience because it exposes them to other economies, other industries and the markets or the countries that are typically chosen for travel are unlike ours, you know. So I particularly favour the trips that go to Japan, the trips that have gone to China, Singapore. I don't how much more we can learn from the UK and the US, the ones that have gone to India. So those emerging economies that are similar and dissimilar to ours, I think those are firm... something quite refreshing.

Yes, I think those are the successes and, you know, there are other things about the MBA that is successful, and I'm talking here... I've never done an MBA; I'm trying very, very hard not to do an MBA, but a very good friend of mine did hers with Gibs, and she talks at length about how it helped her manage her time because she was in a very
senior position in government; she's very involved in her church work. She's not married but the demands that the MBA placed on her time, she still managed to not give up anything at work, not give up anything at church because she knew she had to just fit more into her day. And also what it teaches in terms of managing pressure and managing competing demands, and I think those... you know, and I suppose the thing that comes out of that is the resilience. I think it teaches the candidates the resilience. So I think those three are the important ones.

RN And then, from your experiences, what do you believe are the failures of an MBA or the shortcomings of an MBA? I mean you mentioned something about you don't know if it enables someone to...

C10 Yes. Look, I... it's quite a good question and I don't have any personal experience of whether an MBA has failed or not, but I can intuit, based on what I have heard that, because of the intensity of the programme, candidates don't get the opportunity to delve in depth.

RN Okay.

C10 So that then may limit – and I'm saying may quite gently – may limit the ability to apply. But I think that business schools know that and so their teaching methodology is not just theoretical. That's why they use case studies as much as they do. So, really, it's... for me, I don't think the MBA is particular to any other university degree. The key thing is when you have taught people the concepts, how quickly are you teaching them the skills? So, for instance, in your case, when you complete your MBA or whilst you are doing your MBA, do you already have the ability to apply what you've learnt in finance back at work immediately? Do you have the opportunity immediately to apply back at work what you've learnt about marketing and about financial management and about strategy and all of the concepts that you learnt? And I think that the failure, I can imagine, comes with the perception that the distance between what is taught in class and the application back at work, that distance is too large.
Okay, that's an interesting point. How would... and we'll... if you can think about and park it right for a later question, but how would we actually then with that, yes, and we can park that for now, right. I'm sure you've dealt with the... with various business schools; how have you achieved benefits for all three parties; that's the business schools, yourself as business, and your students?

By being very explicit about the strategic imperative that causes us to approach a business school. So we never go to a business school unless we can – I'll have to call you back; bye; apologies.

No problem.

How do I sign this off?

I think you just put it down? That will be same thing.

So we need to be very clear what our strategic objectives are; we need to be explicit with the business schools to say, this is the problem that we want to solve; we think that it can be solved in this way, and then start to partner quite intimately with business schools so that business schools don't do for us what they did for another organisation, copy, paste what they've done, but to really meet us where we are, and answer specific questions and the problems we're facing. And that's not a quick conversation; it requires quite a lot of engagement with senior executives typically, with proposed students typically, to make sure that the programme will deliver the results that we want.

Another way that we ensure success is in building in early upfront metrics according to which we will measure our success. We look very carefully at the faculty that is chosen. We want typically not only academics but academics who have industry
experience and who continue to consult organisations to make absolutely sure that we
are not disconnected. And then we look at the methodology; methodology has to be
aligned to the target audience and has to be aligned to the purpose of the intervention.
And typically we favour action learning, we favour on the job learning, we favour case
studies, we favour interactive, we favour project work, and so on.

RN Yes. Tell me something; in terms of the metrics, typically, what sort of metrics
would you build in?

C10 We want to know what competencies candidates have before; so we want to
know, for instance, if financial management is a key module before the candidates
actually do that. We want to do a pre-assessment to check what the level of
competency is. We'll do the check again after the module is completed; again three
months, six months, nine months after, to see that there has been development. So
that's an example of... to measure the progress.

Another metric is around what kind of impact; so what is it... so if you look at
Kirkpatrick’s levels of evaluation, what we're interested in is really level three, which is
about how am I going to apply what I've learnt, and lastly, level four, which is about
what impact am I going to have on the business – how is the business going to be
better for the fact that I went on this intervention?

RN Yes. And, in terms of the students, what sort of benefit did they get out of this
intervention or these action learning programmes, and...?

C10 So they learn not only the theory, but they improve their critical thinking. They
get the opportunity to actually go and test their ideas. They get to try them out at work,
fail or succeed, come back, reflect on what they've learnt. Even the idea of reflection is
very important. And the other benefit is that they get exposure to the best faculty; they
get access to programmes that have been incredibly well designed. So their overall
learning experience and the quality of that experience is so much greater.

RN Now, you say they get to try things and even succeed and fail, right?

C10 Yes.

RN What level of support do you as business give to your students?

C10 Not enough, not enough; there’s a concept that it’s either the Centre for
Creative Leadership or the... or CLC; either CCL or CLC, I forget and I apologise. They
have a concept which they call Manager Led Learning and that’s also how you get your
ROI. If... and this also answers your original question; so, as much as we engage with
the business schools, we need to engage with our line managers who are the sending
managers, who are proving for you to go and study. So in that interaction there has to
be a contract between you and your line manager or you and your mentor, or whoever,
to say, Ravi’s going to go and do this MBA. These are the critical concepts that he’s
going to be learning. Manager, are you prepared to contract with him that he will come
and bounce off ideas? You will create opportunities for him back at work to apply those
concepts. You will coach him, you will mentor him, you will guide him, you will allow
him to shadow you. And that’s what the concept of manager led learning is.

So what it does is it makes the idea that you went to this MBA worth more. So you can
start to see that it costs much more than what we paid Gibs because now the manager
has to give of his or her time to help you consolidate and embed what you’ve learnt.

RN Yes, absolutely.
So the organisation gets the assurance that, yes, Ravi’s really learning good stuff, and I as the manager, I’m actually learning from what he’s learning because he’s now got more recent data. But we are very... we’re not there yet. We don’t do that well enough; we still find too often the distance between the employees on this fabulous intervention is so far from what the manager knows even, you know, and it typically ends with him or her signing off your leave, paying the bill and hope to god that you are actually going to learn something.

And the other way that both the student and the organisation and other employees learn is if you come back and say, guys, I’ve just been away at a study block; these were the major concepts, here are copies of my notes, here are the websites, here’s the content that I learnt. Let me put together a one and a half hour brown bag lunch. Let me share with you guys what I learnt when I was away at my study block.

What are you doing when you do that? You are consolidating what you learnt; you’re embedding it because now you become a teacher; you are sharing with people who may never get the opportunity to learn what you learnt and you’re sharing the material with them; you’re sharing your insights with them. You are inviting the people who come to your brown bag lunch to think about how can they apply what you’ve learnt to what they are going to do. You might then offer to be a mentor to teach people the things that you know you’re particular... So now you’re moving the learning from an individual basis, which is you, and you’re bringing it to your team. And that... those team members go into other parts of the organisation and they can transfer that. And that's how you start to get this group team organisational learning dynamic.

Absolutely, that's sounds great. However, the business school, what... how would they benefit from this process?

The business schools only benefit if they deal with clients who are smarter than they are.
If a client, an organisation, goes to a business school and says do it for us, the benefit... the business school benefits nothing. They only benefit from a client who knows more, as much as the faculty member does, who can ask the right questions, who can push, who can review material and say, actually, this was lazy work. There's this professor at Harvard who does X, Y, Z; go and look at what he does. There's this new case study that has come up, why don't you explore that? Actually, what we've proposed, what we've done two years ago, three years ago, why don't you do... you know.

So that challenge... because the minute a business school or an organisation says, oh, the business school is the expert and it ends there, then you've limited your own. And if you don't monitor what the business schools do, you will find that they will copy and paste stuff. They will do for us what they do for JJJJ, what they've done for YYYY, because all those banks are their clients. And isn't it easy to just copy, paste?

And to do what you did five years ago? And if we are asleep at the job, then the business schools will get away with it. So the business schools benefit from our active involvement, and that raises the bar for them. So we challenge them and we say we've come to you because we recognise your expertise; we recognise the network of faculty that you've got, and that's why we've come to you. And so we expect nothing less than your best effort.

Yes, that's actually great. Active involvement – I think that's an important point. So, in terms of the business school, right, how did they interact and support you as the organisation, and students?
C10 By making sure they choose the good faculty, that they have excellent design, that the content is relevant and up to date, that they expose us to concepts globally, that they use their exposure to so many industries, so many companies, to teach the most up to date – that's how they help us benefit.

RN In terms of the relationship?

C10 What about it?

RN How does the relationship work and under what circumstances do you get the most out of the business school?

C10 The business school, for me, how I measure how good a relationship is, is when the business school knows my business inside out. They know the leadership, they know our strategy, they know our business, they know our problems even before we know them; when they're not just about making the sale, when they're genuinely committed in helping us develop a core of leaders that can really be ready to take the organisation to the next level; when it's an ongoing partnership. In fact, that work partnership is quite important because, really, there's nothing that irritates me as much as any supplier who just wants to make the sale.

RN Yes, definitely. Okay, great; well then the next question I've got is, in terms of the action learning projects that you talked about, right; so you've talked about the manager led learning; can you tell me a bit more about how successful or unsuccessful action learning projects have been in your organisation?

C10 So I've not had the opportunity... well, no, let me restate that. We have, in the corporate centre, two flagship leadership development programmes. They're not part of an MBA but they are our flagship leadership programmes for new managers and for
middle managers, and both of those are provided by other universities; one is UCT... no, one is USB-ED and the other one is Gibs. And what we do in these programmes is we have action learning projects and USB-ED is particularly good because what they do is they have a coach who works with each of the action learning sets and guides the group from the conceptualisation of the concept, from testing if it's a good topic, from making sure that it's a real business challenge, to making sure that the quality of the research is good, that the findings are credible, to making sure that the executive will support this project. Those are the things that make for good action learning projects. Now, I think USB has been better than Gibs in making sure of the quality of it.

So... and, you know, the concept of action learning is quite a difficult concept because everybody thinks that they're good at it. But action learning as a methodology's very, very particular. And I happen to be a purist; I know what a good... what makes for good action learning. And it's interesting that now, in our new financial year, we are working with USB-ED to make their practice even better because that, if that action learning project is any worth, you will get an answer to a very difficult question that the business has been struggling with for a very long time. You will be able to show the return on investment that was made. You will be able to show this is what we did to solve the problem. This is what we tried; we know this works, we know that works; we know that doesn't work, and therefore, going forward, this is what we're going to do, because, based on actual research, we've proven now that this is the way to do it.

RN Yes. Now, in terms of this, right, and if we pull it back to the MBA, what level of involvement do you current MBA students that are funded or not funded through your organisation, involved in action learning projects or involved in projects which bring back their learning to the organisation?

C10 Not close enough because I, as head of learning and head of leadership development, have never been approached by any of our candidates who have received funding to say this is what I'm doing, this is what I want the executive to pay attention to. And I'm not close enough to know, to see what the topics are. And I think, you know, I have confidence that students choose to do what's convenient, and one of
the things that is convenient is to look at their own organisation; so to do topics that are
within their organisations because that's better than you going to do a study at YYYY or
at SAB because that's just that much more effort for you. But if you interview people
within the organisation, you... you know. So that's a way that you can then contribute
back to the organisation.

But I think that it's a lovely question because it challenges us, all of us, who are
involved in making the decisions to make sure the students that we fund are doing
topics that have benefit to the organisation. So, for instance, I know that BBBB, the
CEO of the corporate centre, has some fabulous ideas for... of stuff that he wants
masters students to study, you know, but we haven't done anything to say, okay, cool,
the next set of applicants, we're going to ask them to do these. For instance, we don't
know whether the candidates who get funding from the BANKSETA to do their
masters. We know that the BANKSETA compels that is has to be a banking related
topic so that the industry again will benefit.

But I think it's about living consciously and it's about making these decisions
consciously so that it's not just about saying yes, Ravi, of course you can have
permission, and of course we'll give you leave and of course we will pay the bill, but it's
about Ravi; let's you and us negotiate a topic that is pertinent for XXX right now. And
your acceptance of the funding is conditional on you doing this topic that is going to be
mutually beneficial. We're not there, unless you can contradict me.

RN Not at all, no.

C10 Okay. So there's still a lot of work to be done there.

RN And I mean... so I mean, definitely I think there's a lot of work to be done there.

Finally, in terms of the business school's organisations and students, right, is there that
you can add? So we've covered quite some interesting concepts in terms of the
manager led, vis-a-vis in terms of the partnering, in terms of the action learning project, is there anything else that you can think of that can make the impact of the MBA – so all those students that you funded or being funded by BANKSETA, is there anything else that the three parties can get together and do that will improve the impact of the MBA, or they should be doing that they're not doing at the present?

C10 I think it's that last point about that true collaboration, you know, and it's really about defining what the collaboration means. So for me, the collaboration would be yes, person applies, panel meets. An executive panel meets to consider all the applications. The panel challenges the candidates to look in the organisation and see what are the problems that the organisation is facing, that they wish to fix through the study of this MBA; to contract with line managers, to partner in the mentoring, the coaching, the support, not just signing the leave form, but really to partner in the education and the teaching and learning; for the candidate to come back and share with others what they've learnt through these brown bag sessions, through presentations, through doing poster sessions, making posters of what they're learning and inviting people to come have a look; having clear metrics, monitoring and evaluating on a frequent basis – what are you learning, is it working, what are we going to do differently as a result of what you've learnt, and to keep that conversation going.

RN Why doesn’t it happen?

C10 I think we're too busy; everybody... you just want to get your assignments done and you're just busy trying to manage your deliverables at the office with your commitments to the programme. Your line manager is busy managing the work of others, leading the team, making sales. Everybody is just too busy. But this is too important to be too busy with to not attend to it, and I don't think it will take a long time for your learning division or your talent team to just sit down, even write this up as a set of guidelines, a one pager, to say, guys, I would propose that when you evaluate future applications, you make sure that these things are built into the letter of undertaking or the contract, because I don't think it's that hard, I don't think it's that complicated. I
think it's because we haven't thought about it and I think it's because we think that it's too complicated, and it's not.

RN Yes. Great. Well, is there anything else from your side, C10?

C10 No.

RN Thank you for that.

C10 You're welcome.

RN You've given me some really valuable insights.

C10 Oh, I'm glad. How many people have... are you trying
Hi BS1. Basically, my name is Ravi Naicker, and I’m conducting research into how collaboration can better help business schools, students and organisations to improve the impact of the MBA. And, I think that a starting point would be just to understand, what do you think the success of...in fact, before we move onto that, your current role?

I’m the Academic Director.

And, your academic background?

I’ve got an MBL, and a DBA, and I was a full professor, and I was an academic for 20 years.

Great, so what do you think are the successes of the MBA?

In terms of the curriculum or the course?

I think, holistically, the course and what does it give students? What does it give business?
BS1 I think it teaches integrative management and in the old days, it was called general management, but if you have any CEO has to be able to integrate all aspects of business, so it actually gives them the theoretical knowledge of probably all the aspects of business, from governance to finance, to operations, so I think that is an integrated way of thinking. The systems way of thinking.

RN What else would you say are the benefits of the MBA?

BS1 Depending where you do it, it's probably the, it's a well known qualification. It's had a long history, from the Harvard Business School up to date, so it goes back to where you do it, how well it's accredited, whether it's a global MBA, but it's a well recognised brand.

RN In terms of that point then, you're basically differentiating, or you suggest that there's a differentiation between a good MBA and not such a good MBA. What would...

BS1 Yes, I think that the accreditation of the MBA by country or by a system like the Amber or in America, the Association of Business School, yes, the American equivalent. Here, they credit the MBA, some are not accredited.

RN And, what would differentiate a good MBA versus a poor MBA, i.e. one that's accredited and one that's not?

BS1 Usually the quality of the academics, that are teaching it. That's one of the things. Obviously, how long you've been in the business, you know, in the sense, Harvard's been since 1909, Harvard Business School, so you know, it's a combination of that, the location you're in, say, a London Business School, the partners you have, yes, but I think first and foremost, the quality of the academics and what they are doing has got to be one of your, probably your most important.
RN And, I mean, in terms of any other success, in terms of successes and moving onto failures, what do you think are the challenges that the MBA faces these days?

BS1 Well, I think MBAs are always faced with having to look at the environment they’re in, and make sure that their curriculums are up to date and relevant to the environment. For instance, ten years ago, there was nothing on the bricks in your MBA. Now, if you didn’t have it, you would be out of date, so I’m saying, but I think that most good schools review their MBAs every three to five years.

As I said, part of the international accreditation would be looking at international trends, yes, so yes, all of that.

RN What are the key failings currently?

BS1 In terms of the MBA?

RN Yes.

BS1 Well, I think there’s a couple. I think there’s a lot of people who are running MBAs in the world, not accredited, that people, there’s a fly by night. We don’t have that here, because they don’t allow it, but I think if you go to some of the countries in the world that’s not as strict as accreditation. I think, I would think keeping up to technology would be a weakness that has to be addressed continuously, because technology moves very fast in education, and maybe some places are not as up to date as they could be.

Is that what you want? But, I think it goes back to exactly that. Maybe teaching, yes, not teaching your local component as well. You can be in Russia, and you can teach...
an MBA and it could be the same as Singapore, or it could be whatever, but you've always got to have a local component in it. As I said, you've got to look at the environment that the business school is in, and say, are we producing relevant people for that part of the world?

RN You touched on an interesting point, you said that the MBA gives you theoretic knowledge?

BS1 Yes, but I think it's, when I say it, it's not only...well, it's mainly theoretical, because it's a Master's degree, although you do obviously touch on people doing practical projects, and stuff like that, but I'm saying, essentially it is still just a qualification to let you into a corporation. And, then you have to spend the 20 years of getting your experience, to get to the top, but I'm saying, it at least might let you in.

RN In terms of, and I'll touch on the experience part of it, the business practitioners that I have met, one of their big criticisms of the MBA is that it tends to be too theoretic, and so the students coming out don't offer them enough practical involvement.

BS1 That possibly is true as well, and maybe the MBA could be more practical, but I think on the other hand, the MBA is meant for people who will be strategic, conceptual thinkers, so you know, if they're looking at direct, practical stuff, it depends what level you're talking about. I mean, as I said, you can get that from an undergraduate degree, from a polytechnic, from whatever, if you're wanting just skills.

I'm saying, an MBA is trying to teach a person to think critically and conceptually, so because that's what's needed at the higher levels of management. Now, they might not be quite ready for that. They might get too much from the theory, and then they've got to do their 20 years, or their 10 years or their 15 years. They might not realise that, and companies might think, oh God, they've got too many ideas, but at least they have that as a basis. They have some frameworks that they can draw on, because they
have... I was saying the other day, for a lot of people who complain and say, I've got to do a research project for my MBA. I just want to go and run my business or whatever.

But, the point is, organisations are immensely complex these days, and everybody needs to be able to read quite sophisticated research, so if you’re studying a Masters and you do some research, it gives you a much better learning curve, to realise what is good research and what is bad research. If you hear what I’m saying?

RN    Definitely.

BS1    As a CEO, or if I’m on a board, I get presented a lot of research, and I need to be able to look at it critically.

RN    Yes, in terms of the experience, how much does the experience of the student add to the value of their learning on the programme?

BS1    I think it will always add. That’s what I’m saying, because business is about experience, you know, as well. That’s what I’m trying to say, is you can’t teach somebody to become the CEO, only they can do that, so I’m saying, you can point them in the right direction, and give them the research that’s available, or give them strategic ideas, but they are the people, so it goes back to how much experience somebody has.

RN    Then, in terms of the MBA programme that you’ve currently got, how have you achieved the benefits for all three parties, being the business school, the student and the organisations who actually invest in the MBA, either through sponsorship, or allowing students to come through to your MBA.
I forget the order, but for instance, the students have a lot of opportunities to study here in Johannesburg, or to go internationally, because we've got alliance with other international universities, so they get some global experience. We also have a trip to something like India or Brazil, or something. They don't all have to go, but they have that opportunity.

We don't have a direct trip this year, but we will have to Africa, to look at some of the things, so I'm saying, there's an opportunity to look at different environments, apart from Johannesburg.

For the company, it's hard to say, I don't know what, but I think it's that our students are fairly up to date. What I'm saying is we try and make sure that they do practical projects, in finance or yes, as I said, I don't...you know, I mean, that's a hard one, because depending what background they come from, you know? I mean, I had a medical doctor on Saturday saying he wants to do the Helen Joseph, become a manager, because he's a doctor, and he wants to be a manager of the Helen Joseph thing, so his kind of background would be different from somebody else, so we allow the degree a fair amount of selection. We got the call, but we allow people to select from quite a lot of electives, so they can customise their own careers, for their own industry, because it would be different per industry.

Yes, we have a careers unit here as well, which gives advice to the student on careers, and industries, and things like that. Yes, I can't think of...

What interaction does your alumni have with the school?

We've got an Alumni Society and we have certainly some events with the alumni, so the students can use the alumni. We have events, but they can access to them if they want to. That's what I'm saying, in fact, we've got some function at the end of the year now, where we are going to...have a pub evening where everybody can
meet all our alumni, and that type of thing, but they certainly, if somebody came and said, I want to work at X, and we would know that there were BS1 people there, we would put them in contact with them.

I'm sure every business school will.

RN How does the business school itself support the, I know you've spoken about some of the working, so how does the business school actually support business directly, and the students? What sort of interactional relationship do you have with business?

BS1 I'm probably the wrong person to ask, because I'm in the academic office, so I'm in the back office of the place, so the people to ask are the marketing and we had a whole careers fair with Deloitte and McKinsey and all sorts of other people, and I'm fairly new here, so I can't give you all those details, but there's certainly are career days with business in this area, yes, the director keeps contacts with all the companies. What I'm saying is, I'm not the person, we have open days, where the students come more. I'm not completely involved with the company side, so I can't give you too much detail on that.

I can give you people's names, if you want to go and speak to them?

RN That's great for now, that's fine. We'll get that later. I just want to understand, so I'm going to bounce a couple of ideas that came out of my previous interviews with business. Let me get your views on that.

Some of them have suggested that alumni could potentially be used as, one of the big failings of the MBA, and I think you touched on it here, is the expectations part. Where students who do an MBA expect...
BS1  To be top management.

RN  Absolutely.

BS1  And, they haven't done their dues, yes.

RN  To be the CEO of a company within the next year. You know, to climb the ladder very quickly, and to get this huge salary package. And, business feels that as well. How would we manage that, those student's expectations?

BS1  That's very hard, because some do actually achieve very well. What I'm trying to say is, there are some that...depending on their age and where they are from their own experience, can do very well very quickly, but I think as a general thing, as you were saying, maybe there should be more contact with business.

I was actually...I think also something the other way around, I do actually think that business could also accommodate MBAs better, because you find a lot of the MBAs leaving the place they worked at, and going somewhere else, because often a company hasn't...when I say challenging enough, or they haven't said, look, here's somebody who is ambitious, who actually has now done something, and then in a way, used their knowledge while they were there, and then promoted them when they did.

I know that, for instance, I did an executive programme for Vodacom, where they did that quite well at one stage. You know, they actually put people on a programme and said, you're coming on this. When you finish, you will be senior management. I'm just saying, it was much more designed into the company’s belief, and I think it’s, I’m not saying that they can be CEO overnight, but I think you could get better value out of that, if companies also...that's why the company MBAs work so well for companies that just do their own MBAs, and do their own stuff with a business school, is exactly that.
You then design individual careers for everybody on the programme and it’s an advanced thing.

For the students, I think really you could give them alumni and whatever. I think a lot of that they certainly get in the first six months, or the first year when they’re out, when they realise they haven’t, but there are people who should be actually fast tracked higher, and companies sometimes don’t do that.

RN You make an interesting point there, so in terms of managing expectation, my experience is, through my research, that a lot of people who are sponsored through companies are high fliers, or people being fast tracked, and the view that you have given here is companies need to obviously have a forward looking view, and almost accommodate them in some way, not necessarily upward stretch.

BS1 Exactly, but realise that they are going to go through this process. They will be changed, and how could you best, how can you best use this, and for instance, I was at UNISA before, and a lot of the companies used the MBAs to do an industry analysis, or do a company analysis of their own company.

That’s a very useful way, they’ve got fresh ideas. They can come and do a presentation to the board. The board doesn’t need to have to accept it, but they hear the latest trends or they hear, something maybe they hadn’t, and then everybody, as I said, what’s his name? Vodacom, they took that particular course, they broke it into four groups and they sent them to four parts of the world, and paid for all of it, for them to go and do a competitor analysis, and then they presented that back to their top management team, so I think it’s a two way thing.

The value you can get out of the people, you’ve got free researchers, who are reading the latest stuff, you know as well.
RN What involvement would the business school have in this process? If a company came up with strategic ideas, we’ve got five or six things that we’d like you to look at, as a student, give them some support and direction with it, financial, or whether it’s actually direction in terms of giving them the support of more senior, more experienced people, to go away and do some sort of action learning project. What involvement would the business school have, and to what extent?

BS1 I can’t talk here, I know that we have thought about that, and maybe in future things, but I certainly know at some of the other places, we would try and direct projects to companies, and for instance, I was involved with a group that looked at a wine farm in the Cape, and we strategized for that, and presented.

I’m just saying, it depends, we don’t have this clear-cut process here, but I’m sure if people came and said, we’d like somebody to do a project on this, we would certainly look at that.

RN In a perfect world, if you could redesign this process, how would it work?

BS1 A perfect world would be that we used our alumni and all the companies that we’re attached to, and run it more like a consultancy tooling. They do that at Wharton, so for instance, at Wharton Business School, they have a small business unit that people work on, and help business with that issue, or they have a unit for bigger corporations, so that would help them, so they’d say, we have a team of MBAs who are doing marketing. Have any companies got marketing problems?

They have it much more linked to that. But, a lot of business schools don’t do that.

RN In terms of that model that you’ve just briefly chatted about, you’d have several companies in interaction with the business school?
They would come to the business school and say, look, we’ve got problems. Let’s say, marketing, and there would be seven ideas for marketing, and then the school would set up, got all the students in marketing to look at different issues of whatever the project was, yes.

And then, basically then feedback there, these are the solutions, and that’s a very good idea. I think that’s a very good idea, and then obviously the learning would then come back to the business school, who would then update their curriculum and it would work like that?

Exactly, and yes, and to the business advantage, is they get...when I say a cheaper service than if they use consultants. Obviously all the students could be wrong, but they could get some ideas, they’re not going to pay the same for, but yes, so everybody, it’s covering costs. Usually covering costs, not making profits out of that, but you cover the cost for that.

You don’t necessarily need, the business doesn’t necessarily need to implement the ideas of the student?

No, they’re listening to that, but it allows the student to have a real life problem, from a company, and then obviously when they go away, they can say, look, I did a marketing project for Eskom or whatever. It could be anything, and they can put that on their CV as well.

Great.

Or, I did a project on small business, I analysed small businesses for...you know, and I gave advice on that, so if they then want to apply to be a small business advisor, or do something else, they actually have a real project as well.
That sounds excellent, I think that's a great idea. And then, in terms of this interaction process, you've basically given me some really good advice here. In terms of the alumni, getting back to helping students, I've heard or an idea that has come across is that alumni could potentially be mentors to students, to current students, firstly in terms of managing their expectations, and then guiding their process, or their journey through the MB. What are your thoughts on that?

They could, and I'm not saying they can't, but a lot of alumni are quite busy, so it would have to be a voluntary thing.

Yes.

Because, it's hard enough just getting alumni to work for the school, what I'm saying is yes, it's usually only when they've got...they're fairly senior and they've got some time. It's not like we have hundreds that will come to the school and work with the school. We have much more students than we have alumni that are prepared to work for the school.

So, I would think it's a good idea, I just think it might be a little tricky to implement if, you know, because it would just have to be voluntary.

What else would you say, in terms of the criteria for putting together some of these things? How would you address some of the challenges like getting the commitment or getting the time of the mentors?

Very hard, that's what I'm trying to say, because they're all...we've got an alumni office, but I'm saying, I've seen a couple. It's usually a few very dedicated people that come in and help. You don't get huge attendance, because business
people are very busy, and obviously they’re also busy doing their own careers, their own lives.

What I would think of probably more is if you collected maybe companies that were owned, or people that predominantly had, you might be able to say, this is an alumni company. I think obviously BIDVest has done it with the undergraduate thing, but I would rather that we had more internship programmes. We have this, but it’s not as popular, that people go and work in a company, for a little...we have it at the lower levels, but the MBA, it’s sometimes quite hard for them as well, so we’ve got part time and full time, but the full time, that they actually went and spent three months working in the company.

Because sometimes they’re not as experienced as the part time people, so yes. I think it sounds nice, but having dealt with the alumni many times, it’s hard enough just to get the alumni to come here. I mean, yes.

RN In terms of the alumni themselves, I assume that the interaction is quite restrained, or there isn’t as much interaction as the business school would like?

BS1 Yes, exactly, but I’m saying, in fact, the people we’ve got are very good. They do a lot, it’s just the number wouldn’t stretch to all the people.

So, I think they would be good mentors, if there was one for each, or one for a couple or whatever, but there isn’t. That’s one of the areas, and it doesn’t mean that it can’t change, but yes, I think that’s...how you manage the expectations, I think by telling the people. You know, this is only the theory, now you’ve got to go and do the practice. They get some practical examples, and yes, it’s very hard, because it does depend on the experience of the person.
If you haven’t got a part time class, you might have somebody who is very experienced but quite young, and somebody who it’s the first time they’re now doing the MBA, and it’s the first time they’re in business, so that’s, I’m saying the company route is the best, because then they are selected by the company as people that should be changing when they’re finished. They’re moving from middle to senior management, or they’re moving from lower to upper management or something like that, but that’s what you don’t usually get on the MBA.

RN I see an interesting trend that’s moving or the view in terms of turning this model, is to move away from the more individualistic, i.e. student driven application, to more a company view, where...

BS1 That would be nice, if you have the company support it and bring it all in, but I still think some of the research shows that a lot of people who choose to do an MBA, choose it for themselves, and it’s not paid by the company, because they really don’t want to stay with their company. They actually want to move, that’s why they’re doing the MBA in the first place, but I’m just saying, if companies want to get the benefit, they should in a way do their own career guidance on people.

RN Finally, what do you think these three parties can do better? Do you have any other thoughts, in terms of making the MBA a better process, so that students don’t leave immediately after getting their MBA that companies can benefit?

BS1 That it’s designed into the company, that’s my number one thing, because they will leave. I think...the students, yes, because they’re looking for career advancement, so unless the company is actually designed, that is the only way they’re going to keep them, because if they actually have that, they’ve got a much better chance to get jobs. That’s what I’m saying, there’s a good brand, so they’re going to be exposed to a whole lot of different ideas, a whole lot of other companies, they’re going to have career fairs, companies present so a good chance is that they use that to do exactly that, to move to
whatever level they want to, or whatever company, so the companies must decide
whether they want to pay or not. That's the thing.

I think the students, I'm not sure that they don't get a more realistic view. They might
think they should be at the top, but I think most of them, I can't believe that, if they go
back into working for a while, don't understand that it takes you a while to become the
top. You're actually teaching them the history of management. You're teaching them
how long it takes to become the CEO. You're teaching them all the subjects that they
need to run the company, and most of them will not have all of those subjects, won't
have all of that experience, so I'm saying, they might wish to be, but unless they're
starting something, give them a year or two.

I think they should be surveyed five years after they've left the MBA, because that then
gives a more realistic thing of how they've used it, and what they've done, and this
goes back to the same thing, that it is an individualistically driven degree, so it depends
on the person.

Because, people say, I know somebody got an MBA and they didn't do anything. Well,
that's true. Only some people do, but it doesn't mean that they don't have the skills, or
understand. Is there anything else?

RN I think that's it from my side. Is there anything else from your side?

BS1 I think that's fine. I'd just like to see this because maybe once, I think probably
one of the other things is trying to listen more, what companies want, that's why I'm
saying, that should always be listened to, and we should be focusing the MBA,
delivering at least two thirds of the course with the skills that are required.

But, as I said, it gives a management degree, so it's going to be higher than just skills.
RN: Absolutely.

BS1: That’s why I’m saying, you have to actually ask the companies what they are wanting, because they might be asking the wrong person, if they’re asking the MBA for certain things.

RN: Absolutely, I think the purpose is tantamount to this whole process.

Thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate your time, and as mentioned, by CCC, as soon as I’m done with the research, I’ll give you a copy of the research and you can have a look at it.

BS1: Yes, on that, maybe if we’re in a region, we should look at sharing something like companies and things like that as well. I know we’ve got major players in this region, that could be another thing, you know?
APPENDIX M: TRANSCRIPTS OF BUSINESS SCHOOL 2 (BS2)

Speaker key

RN Ravindran Naicker

SE BS2

RN How's it, BS2, its Ravi. How are you?

BS2 Yes, hi Ravi.

RN So basically I'm a second year student at, final year student at the Gordon Institute of Business Science. My research is basically looking to how collaboration can help business schools, organisations and students improve the impact of the MBA, and it's basically around how we can work together to make this MBA process better. And just to let you know, your participation in this process is voluntary, you can withdraw at any time without penalty. I am going to record the conversation but everything will be kept confidential and no names will be disclosed in the research. So are you comfortable with moving ahead then?

BS2 Yes, sure. Sorry, can you just explain you're doing this particular project in fulfilment of a course requirement or...? Sorry, just clarify that for me.

RN Sure. It's basically with regard to my research, my thesis for the MBA. It's the last part basically.

BS2 Okay, sure.
Okay, so before we get going, your background, BS2?

Yes, it’s rather varied. I was becoming a chartered accountant and in my last year I gave it up, went over to the US and had an opportunity to study so I did Economic Development and Industrial Labour Relations focusing on South East Asian tiger economies. This was just around the time or just after our first democratic elections so I was looking at ways in which I could come back with models to benefit the country. But there were other things, I guess, in store for me and I didn’t come back as soon... the first chunk of time in the US turned out to be ten years. And then I started managing intellectual property for US institutions during that particular time, came back, did an MBA here at BS2 and then took off back to the US and continued to work for an institution, educational institution in the US managing again intellectual property and then started off this position, I started off at BS2 in 2009. That’s when I returned back home.

Okay, great. And then you, basically your qualification is Economic Development and Industrial Relations?

Yes, Economic Development and Industrial Relations but, you know, I did the MBA and my concentration on the MBA was a combination of leadership and finance. So I think if you had to ask me quite frankly which particular area, I can’t really pinpoint it because I have interest in both economic development and I would say political economy.

That’s great. So let’s get into the questions. For you, what are the successes of the MBA?

From a student point of view or from now directing the program point of view?
RN I think if you can put on sort of a dual cap, so I mean in reality you’ll have a view in terms of as a student, what’s worked for you and then as a business school, or a program director, what actually works.

BS2 Sure. So from a student point of view, and here again I’m speaking from a BS2 perspective, it is... when I did mine it was on a full time basis so it was not even a one year program but an 11 month program. It’s a couple of different things. One is exposure to 80 different, very, very different diverse individuals in terms of their thinking, their work experience, their background, engaging, learning from them, the stress and the pressure of the program, assessment after assessment, so managing that. I came from a very stressful background but to manage academic stress in that particular way is very different. The ability to write, to research and to research something very, very quickly, to be able to make sense out of the information that is constantly coming at you so basically separating the chaff from the real nuggets itself. To construct a report, to make the pitch or in the context of the classroom to be able to convince others, to be able to hold my own in terms of the positions that I took, so again, very kind of critical skills that were developed. And so yes, that’s from a student point of view. And I think, you know, it was backed up in terms of the recognition. For me I went back to the States so it was not a problem in terms of the recognition that I got for the studies itself.

And then from a director’s point of view, I think just the evolution of the MBA since I did it to what it is and just, given the macroeconomic crisis that we all see and we’re confronted with and questions that civil society is asking about the relevance of especially the MBA program but more so the so-called involvement of MBA graduates to kind of being agents of the crisis itself or somehow perpetuating it. And by that I basically mean if you remember the Enron case, Jeffery Skilling and Kenneth Lay, and particularly Jeffery Skilling, he was brought before the Commission in the US and he’s your classical Harvard graduate and he was asked, you know, did you not, for example, perceive the downside of the decisions that you guys made? And he was quite arrogant in terms of his response which of course didn’t go down well. So for me, from a program director’s perspective, it is the changes, rather the changes that have been made to our MBA program, the greater infusion of critical thinking, the greater
awareness of the impacts of decisions that individuals make to community, to shareholders, to the environment, especially in the context of South Africa as an emerging market country and the relevance of us, of students creating value in the market place in terms of job opportunities, just understanding the huge divide that we see that confronts us as South Africans on a daily basis.

RN Okay, and I mean, that basically then leads on, I think you’ve touched on it a bit, right, what do you think are the failings of an MBA?

BS2 Well, the failings, yes, I think the traditional one has just been where we perpetuate the siloed way of thinking – here’s finance, here’s marketing, here’s economics and we don’t necessarily show the linkage, you know, between all three areas and more. So I think that’s been the classical kind of failing because we tend to wear our finance hat in terms of looking at the return on investment, internal rate of return, are we using, you know, our cash in the way that it’s supposed to be etc. So sometimes we are, we kind of, I guess the decisions that we are forced to make brings us into kind of conflict with longer term kind of thinking or sustainable thinking. But slowly and gradually I think, you know, many business schools have changed their thinking around this one over here. They’ve said, you know, don’t, post MBA don’t play to the tune of the Wall Street analyst or the analyst that is looking at every quarter reporting. Rather, you know, dig in and say, you know what, I’m a manager who comes with a very different view; as much as there’s tremendous pressure from shareholders, part of my responsibility is to educate the shareholders and to say that we should really be doing things for a more sustainable kind of term or period.

RN So in terms of how, so we understand what some of the successes are, some of the failings are, right. How have you, as BS2, ensured that there are benefits through your program for all three parties?

BS2 Yes, sure. So from, so let me say firstly from the institution point of view we have, just in keeping with the theme of change of the curriculum, we’ve also introduced
a stream on the MBA called Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. We’ve
deliberately recruited faculty members in that particular area. Allan Gray, for example,
through the Orbis Foundation have given us an endowment to set up their values
based leadership centre here together with the Bertha Foundation so we’re making
tremendous inroads in terms of closing the gap between society and the business
school and playing a bigger role, as we should be, as an educational institution in terms
of either thought leadership, skilled individuals, taking on, to the extent that we can,
some of the challenges that society might be facing either through governmental
organisations, non-governmental organisations and for profit entities. That’s one. The
other is we’ve recruited many more faculty members in the last two and a half years.
Our faculty count has gone up from 22 to 38 so it’s almost a 100% jump in faculty.
We’ve gone for AMBA accreditation, we’re going for AACSB accreditation, so from an
institution point of view we are making certain claims and the best way to kind of verify
those claims is to put oneself through an audit and we’re really happy with that.

From a student point of view, you know, because we’re much more clearer about the
institution we are, we’re attracting the individuals that come with a very different way of
engaging and recognise that their contributions to society, post MBA, need to be done
rather differently. And what’s, I guess, really assuring then in terms of the third leg, if I
understood, you know, what you meant by the third leg, from an employer perspective,
employers... Just yesterday or the day before yesterday we ran our first management
consulting conference, a student run initiative which was open to all institutions, which
you may know of, which is coming to GGGG. And you know, I don’t know whether your
institution, whether your class is going to be participating in that but I had the good
fortune of engaging with Delta Partners, a global management consulting company.
And I engaged with this one particular partner and he reassured me of just the calibre
of the student that’s coming out of BS2 from the BS2, that that fits in with that particular
entity. So, and we had a Women in Business conference about a month and a half ago,
I had the same kind of feedback from Deloittes as well as from [unclear]. So our
graduates are being recognised for their quality, for the way they think, for their ability
to contribute to institutions and add value to those institutions so we are particularly
happy with that.
RN And how did you do that? So basically you, from what you tell me, business’ needs are being met by the quality of your students and obviously by the quality of your curriculum. How did you know what you should be teaching and what was relevant?

BS2 So we consult all the time with our alumni who are in industry. We’ve got an active board. We consult with the board of directors, especially for some of the bigger changes that we have made like introducing the Social Innovation laboratory or the stream, the values based leadership centre. So you know, these are practitioners in the field, they are sitting on the boards of quite important companies so that engagement is incredibly important for us in terms of the steps that we want to take. But I think it’s also, you know MBA programs the world over; they all tend to have the same kind of blueprint. You’ve got your accounting; you’ve got your economics, the classical kind of thematic ways in which the program is taught. We still maintain the same thing. However, we’re looking for greater ability to link all of them together. So as an example we also introduced a very different course on the program called Research Methods, Evidence Based Practice and the idea here is to use that as a link point into all of the other courses. So that’s how we know. We engage with our alumni, we engage with industry, we engage with the board, we put out what we are wanting to do to these individuals and we get the feedback etc.

RN Tell me more about your engagement with your alumni. How active are they? How actively do you engage them?

BS2 Well, I think one of the challenges for South African based institutions is kind of creating a greater alumni involvement and presence, you know, with the institutions. Unlike in the US where alumni, they’ve certainly had a longer period of time where they’ve been able to kind of get this to where it is, alumni absolutely contribute in terms of their own time, contribute financially and they’re really passionate about their institutions. So one is to create that passion, create that greater link. So we, you know, every year we have major alumni events. In October is another one where alumni come onto campus and, you know, from the director to faculty members to others involved with the school, we all are involved with that particular event where alumni are
constantly told about what’s happening at the school. We share where we’re going to
with them, we also call upon them and now we strategise around where our ask and
where our needs are and we then, you know, in engaging with the alumni and by
ensuring that they’re constantly aware of where the institution is going, it doesn’t come
as a surprise. And when you start talking about this is what we want to do, this is the
vision, this is where we’re going to, alumni are more than willing to kind of help and to
give. It also works in our favour when, you know, when employers are saying really
good things about the school. We are ranked; the rankings are talking about the
institution itself. So when you have strong leadership that is clear about where they
want to take the institution and the reasons for taking it in that particular direction,
alumni are very eager to engage.

RN Just on that alumni point, a lot of the business practitioners that I chatted to
were rather keen on a mentorship program for their current students and I just wanted
to get your views on alumni acting or fulfilling that role as mentors for current students.
What are your views on that?

BS2 I think it’s a very important one. Firstly, it depends on the kind of mentorship
because the idea, while a very good one, requires a great deal of energy and effort and
it requires commitment. And oftentimes what we find is while people are very eager
and gung-ho to commit, when it comes to the actual commitment itself, it’s not
necessarily there because life is complicated, issues come up and you find that the
promises that individuals made just can’t be fulfilled. So I think there has to be a very
deliberate kind of plan when it comes to that kind of engagement where alumni are told
firstly, you know, it’s going to take ten, 20 hours spread out over, say, two or three
months or six months, this is what it’s going to look like, so there are no surprises, you
know, when it comes to that mentorship. So in principle I absolutely agree.

The way we’ve been able to kind of do it, and we get to do it on an ad hoc basis, and
because we’re dealing with 160 students, you know, full time plus the modular, each
student comes with a very different, unique set of needs so we kind of say it needs to
be much more student driven. So through our career services for example, through our
alumni office we will certainly support this particular initiative. But through clubs on
campus and we’ve gone, you know, rather a big way over the last two years about just
starting and then just exploding this whole concept of having clubs on campus, student
run clubs in particular areas. That then becomes the entry point for alumni to get
involved because students then, through their networking activities, the various
networking activities, they kind of… again this is part and parcel of the ethos of the
school where students have to take responsibility for their development, they recognise
which areas they require work in and then they approach individuals and say hey, you
know, this is where I’m coming from, firstly I’m thinking about this particular career, do
you think that this makes sense? So it starts off with a very simple question like that
there and it then gets much more, you know, involved.

RN That’s through your clubs on campus initiative?

BS2 That’s right.

RN How would you otherwise incentivise alumni to be more involved with the
school?

BS2 Oh, I think it goes with that ethos of just giving back. So on the front end, you
know, students need to be told the engagement or the relationship with the institution
doesn’t stop in ten months, 11 months of 24 months. It’s a longer kind of term
engagement. So by clarifying upfront that, you know, the institution will always call on
those individuals, and again just reiterating some very simple things, that the strength
of the institution is only as strong – if I can say it in that kind of way – by the kind of
students you attract but then also by the alumni and of course the faculty. I mean,
that’s a key component in terms of talking about the strength of an institution because
students will become graduates and alumni, really the ambassadors of that school. And
you know, if you take a class of 80, if you conservatively say okay, only 10% of those
would be real mentors, you’ve got eight or 16. That’s quite a nice number to start off
with. I think what also needs to kind of happen in terms of just fostering this over here,
if you can highlight the individuals that have given back, it tends to inspire others and motivate others. That’s what it’s about.

RN Excellent. I mean, what criteria would apply to selecting mentors?

BS2 I think individuals that have a greater awareness of themselves, individuals that are very mature, individuals that can, you know, provide advice to individuals that, or to students that can be meaningful, that can be impactful. You know, just as an individual might take a career step or advancement within the organisation, where that particular individual is being looked at not only to be able to manage and lead a group of individuals, based on this recognition that he or she has the functional expertise and the skills, but there has to be a mind shift of that individual when they move up one, move up I guess in the organisation itself. So just as there’s an expectation that there will be a mind shift in that individual with taking this career advancement, and it has to happen in that particular way otherwise that individual’s not adding any value to that particular team, so too the alumni that’s going to be involved in the mentorship program, we need to recognise that, you know, it is not only around perhaps giving advice around the functional things, whether his career makes sense, it’s also to play that leadership inspirational role to individuals.

RN Great. While we’re on the point of expectations, a lot of the business practitioners again mention, and this is across the board, that the expectations of MBA students and graduates are way too high. And so people finish an MBA or during the MBA they expect to be, you know I’m exaggerating in saying they expect to be the CEO in the next year or two, you know. So how would we, what’s your view on students’ expectations in terms of your business school and how would we manage those expectations into the future?

BS2 Yes, I think it’s a very real expectation and I guess one has to ask oneself the question, where does this expectation come from? Has it been started off with and perpetuated by the institution? Is it out there in the industry or is it out there in the
dialogues and conversations that happen around MBAs the world over? So I think the first question is, ask the question where has this come from? The second one is to absolutely set the record straight from the time of recruitment and from the time of clarifying upfront what the MBA is going to be doing. So we have this, you know, very rigorous application process here, I'm sure it's similar to other institutions, and in so doing we try to understand where the individual's coming from, we try to understand where the individual wants to go post MBA and then in the interview itself, you know, it is further reiterated that individuals must not have this expectation post MBA that the red carpet is going to be rolled out for them and they're going to have an open chequebook and they kind of fill in the details.

So I for one, in the recruitment that they do, we run a GMAT course over here and the individuals that come along to the GMAT preparation, you know, I get questions asked of me and I kind of shoot very clearly and very directly around this particular issue and I say, you know, don’t have any expectation that your salary’s going to be doubled the first year after your MBA. That’s certainly not the candidate that we are recruiting for at the business school. The whole ethos is to do with managers and leaders and with that of course comes, with that comes a higher awareness of oneself. So one needs to be authentic and one needs to be realistic about these kinds of expectations. And again, the MBA is used as an entry point so we reiterate that as well. It’s an entry point into a management position. It no way endorses the capability of the individual. The individual has to show that he or she is capable once he or she gets into an organisation.

RN And I think finally, I mean thanks for that input. I think finally, what are your views or what can universities or business schools, students and organisations do better together to actually improve the MBA itself and the outputs from the MBA?

BS2 I think one of the things that I struggle with which keeps coming back home is that we don’t do enough collaboration. You know, we’re very separate education institutions. Collaboration doesn’t take place to the extent that I was used to in the US. So I think it needs to start off with collaborations where we can have open, honest conversations. Educational institutions are there for a particular purpose and it’s to
provide opportunities for individuals to be taught certain skills. And South Africa is a large country and the continent is incredibly large so we shouldn’t necessarily see it as we’re in competition with each other for students. I think we all have offerings and these offerings are sometimes similar but different because of the nature of the institution and we will, you know, attract students that kind of align their thinking with the offerings that we have, so collaboration, definitely so, much more openness.

And then being able to kind of, I think we have like the South African Business Schools Association meetings, SABSA forum, but just to kind of use that in a much more dynamic way to allow us to kind of share some of the issues that we are facing and to jointly host things where we can be seen from, you know, by the public as coming together as educational institutions to address... Take our own country; the high unemployment, the high inequality that we see in society, I don’t believe that we as business schools have ever come together and said okay, we’re going to be running some kind of colloquium or we’re running some kind of conference around this particular issue. So we need to kind of, you know, create common agenda items and speak to those kinds of issues.

Also, you know, at this particular level over here, program directors need to be able to kind of share more information about their programs and see how we can learn, what kind of innovations we’re talking about on our programs, does it make sense? Perhaps have, you know, students come up to your institution, any other incitation and spend some time. I mean, we’re talking about the economic hub of the continent in Johannesburg. How can we leverage that? We have a very different kind of industry sector based here in the VVVV, you know, how can folks up in the north benefit from this? So just be much more creative but it starts off with I think signing up to being much more collaborative.

RN In terms of collaboration, right, you mentioned that in the US they’re a lot more collaborative in terms of the business schools and business themselves. Can you tell me a bit more about that collaborative effort or what efforts do they go through to actually ensure that there’s collaboration?
BS2 Yes, so I think, one, they firstly, I mean the body that I was associated with was called The National Council for University Research Administrators and every year, I mean we used to come together for an annual conference in Washington DC and the numbers every year used to grow. When I left I think it had gone up to like 2,000 members coming together for about four, five days of activities relating to educational institutions. So one is to create a common kind of conference where we can all kind of come together because we are all facing similar kinds of issues, so create a platform where we come and talk about those issues but not only talk for the sake of talking but then look at ways in which we can then work together with one voice and articulate that particular position to government in terms of helping shape and inform government strategy around education.

I’m not in any way suggesting that this happens overnight. In the US it had its humble beginnings in the 60s and it was also fraught with a great deal of, I guess, missteps and obstacles etc but they kept at it. And there were certain individuals that believed in this and believed in the power of just collaboration and coming together and true enough, they did that in spite of the obstacles and were able to sow the seeds of a very powerful dynamic body that began to speak on behalf of educational institutions in the US not only to the federal government in terms of positions and influence, especially intellectual property ownership etc, but also as far as it came to kind of negotiating with private industry.

RN Okay, great. Well, is there anything else that you can tell me that we can do better in concluding?

BS2 I think we need to do a better job in terms of ensuring that South Africa is really represented in our classrooms and there are high degrees of diversity, diverse thought, bringing individuals that... So we need to also create opportunities, and by opportunities I mean scholarships for individuals to be able to kind of lessen their financial burden and to recognise what apartheid has done to people of colour in this country, you know, from an access point of view. We’re still dealing with the legacies of that there. Yes, it’s incredibly important. We talk about emerging markets but we need
to ask who's really speaking on behalf of emerging markets. A case in point, one year I was running, again we have these recruitment sessions and there was a European national and he told me quite frankly that he's, you know, he's not wanting to come to a South African business school to hear European perspectives or developed economy perspectives. If he wants that then he'll go to a European school. He wanted to hear perspectives of individuals that kind of come from certain backgrounds, so the more emerging market. And because our program also tends to attract a lot of foreign national students, especially Africans north of South Africa, he wanted to kind of hear from other African students. So I think that we have a rather unique opportunity in South Africa to be able to appeal to more Africans and they can be the catalyst for, I guess, greater understanding of country specific issues when they engage with either Europeans, Americans, whatever the case may be.

RN Okay, great. Well, thanks for your time, BS2. I appreciate it.

BS2 Yes, sure Ravi. All the best with completing your research project and now also crunching the data to, kind of, go with the research project as well.

RN Definitely.
OKAY, SO I'M GOING TO BE RECORDING THE CONVERSATION, RIGHT; EVERYTHING WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL.

YES, IT BETTER BE.

RN  Yes, and I've done quite a few. I've met with quite a few of the businesses as well. So I think let's kick off. I mean, let's start off at a high level in terms of what do you believe the successes of the MBA are?

THAT'S A BROAD QUESTION SO WHAT ARE YOU, WHAT SPECIFICALLY, WHEN YOU SAY SUCCESS, HOW DO YOU DEFINE IT?
RN  Look, I think...

BS3  Given that we’ve got 30 minutes, I’d prefer if you just ask me very pointed... because success is very broad so what do you mean? Are you talking completion, are you talking impact?

RN  I think impact, very much impact in terms of...

BS3  I just want to make sure this is on silent, right? Give me a second otherwise it will record. Okay, so in terms of, let’s just, I’ll take a step back and then I’ll come to the question. Remember the whole idea of the MBA program or any good MBA program in this country or around the world is to make sure that we create the management and leadership pipeline. So if I use that as the background, it’s about imparting knowledge, skills, relationship, exposing students to relationships and experiences that teach them how to deal with complexity because that’s the lay of the land, right? So the environment of business is complex, it’s constantly shifting, it’s not just a local playing field, it’s a global playing field now.

So if you ask me what is the impact of our curriculum on students who come through these doors and graduate in what they do, and I can give you specific examples because we conduct research and focus groups with alumni. In fact we did an in-depth one a couple of months ago where we looked at their success in their business and their impact in their business. So it’s all very well for an MBA or schools offering MBAs to say, you know, we have a great pass rate, we offer great curriculum, blah-blah-blah, but the proof of the pudding is what you will go and do when you’re back in the work and how down the line we would have created that kind of momentum for you to grow in your career and fine tune decision making. And so we do, so if you ask me based on our very empirical evidence, I would say the impact is profound because the BS3 MBA has been designed in such a way to teach you how to operate and make management decisions under pressure, how to view it through a multiple lens, not just a siloed kind of marketing or a finance lens, so you see it in a broader scope. And also we’re
bringing complexity into the two year program because you have to juggle multiple things. You know, like why do we make your life so difficult, why do we make your deliverables so... It’s about teaching you those skills so that you can operate like that in the real world.

So, looking at the success of our alumni, because we track success of our alumni and we track success in two ways. One is, maybe the first one I should mention is their positions and career development. And with career development in most cases comes the remuneration for, you know, of how success in their cases is determined. So I would be, I mean I can categorically say that 80% of our alumni grow into a general management role because that’s what we’re a school for, general management, running business units and... And you know, when you graduate initially, it’s still taking time to unpack what you’ve learnt, you know, and not just keep like job-hopping, because we look at that as well because you think oh, I’ve got this MBA now and the world’s my oyster, everybody wants me. It’s not necessarily the case. So it’s about unpacking what you’ve learnt, adding value in your current business or business unit and then using that to grow.

RN And then in terms of the, I don’t know if it’s your research or your experience, the shortcomings of doing an MBA?

BS3 So now you’re asking me a very difficult question because, I mean I’m a big, big supporter of an MBA program so you’re obviously going to get maybe a kind of biased... So the shortcomings would firstly be the choice of the wrong MBA program because there are MBA programs and there are MBA programs. So, that would be a shortcoming because if you want a quick and dirty and easy method or to just have the MBA, the letters MBA after your name, then that would be a shortcoming. And I think in terms of the rigorous MBA programs in this country, and I did my MBA through AAA, the IIII, I can tell you if you go through a rigorous program like that and the BS3 MBA program, against some other programs that you may have, they’re chalk and cheese.
RN What differentiates a rigorous program versus a normal program that you find?

BS3 So it’s about the face to face, it’s about who’s in the room, it’s who’s in the room in terms of the calibre of students in the room and the calibre of the person standing in front of that room. It’s about the way the program is designed to unfold and integrate. It’s the way you take what you’ve learnt and apply it immediately so the learning becomes immediate, impactful and it becomes part of your mindset. It’s about giving you local and global best practice. It’s about the methodology that’s used to create that impact that I’m talking about. So there’s a host of things. I think some of those are the key... But one of the big things is, that is why we always say to applicants, when we admit you to the program, we want you to choose us and we’ll choose you because we always have far more applicants than we have places. We want, because we know this, it’s about what you say about yourself, what others say about you, our interviews with you or our panel sessions with you before you come onto the program. They are very, very good indicators of calibre of person we admit into the program. So in my view that’s the rigor I’m talking about.

RN So let me ask you, in terms of those two questions, business are telling me that expectations of students are too grandiose so a student expects that I’m going to go on this MBA and thereafter the world’s my oyster. How do you manage that?

BS3 How would we manage that, how would BS3 or as a business school manage that?

RN Well, collectively.

BS3 So there’s two things. One, that used to be the lay of the land but when the economic climate changed, so you also have to remember the environment of business in which we operate, so there’s always been, and this is, research will show you this, the MBA has always been seen as a premium program because who goes on these
people? People have been identified for career progression, people, especially in South Africa where 70 to 80% of the applicants are sponsored by their companies. So it’s very well for business to say to you students have grandiose... How do they manage it? Because if they’re saying, jeez Ravi, I think you’re great, go on the BS3 MBA program, we’re paying for you because... I mean why would they pay 200,000 to send you on this program? So the managing of expectations is not just the business school’s responsibility. In fact, to a large extent its management between the business and the individuals they nominate because it’s part of the talent pipeline. So, and I think as you heard me say right from the beginning, as a business school we say don’t get, you know, don’t get the sense of arrogance that you are going to go out and change the world the moment you have an MBA. You will be smarter, you will have more knowledge, experiences and relationships but the world doesn’t suddenly owe you because you’ve got an MBA program. You have to work just as hard as everyone to say, I mean five MBA applicants, who’re they going to take? You’re going to have to, again you have to be distinct or extinct, right?

So how do we manage expectations? I think it’s about, within the HR spectrum of the organisations themselves, business themselves, they’ve got to have that tough discussion with individuals who come onto the program and say we’re saying this to you because we believe in you, because we think you can... but we want you to be realistic. So it’s about being realistic about the expectations. So one of the things we do, as you heard me say earlier, is we track salaries post graduation and, because that’s one of the things graduates expect instantly. Historically it was the case. You know, I could, in fact I’ve been here for almost 11 years so I can tell you historically there were 60 to 70% increase in salary. There is still a significant increase in salary for most graduates but that’s normal because, you know, if you come from a small company or you’re a self employed individual, because you have different kinds of people in the room, so the management of expectations has to happen on all fronts. In addition to which there’s an interesting gender – because that’s the area I researched so I have to bring that in – women still expect to earn far less than their male counterparts. And there’s empirical evidence, like Magnet Communications does an MBA survey, you may have participated in it last year or this year, I don’t know. We usually ask our current students, and this is a worldwide survey. And women still expect to earn, I think the number was 20% lower than their male counterparts. So
there’s a lot of dynamics at play, right? It’s not just a linear answer that because we think the MBA... you know.

And of course I think the market place is also discerning in the sense of who they want and how much they’ll pay to acquire that talent or skill set and knowledge base so they also play a game. Within a sector, within an industry, you know, if you, I don’t know, what sector do you come from?

RN Finance.

BS3 Right, so in the financial services sector, you know, if you’re the next big thing people are going to vie for your position. So that happens in the market as well. So there are a number of things that create the expectation. In my view the best way to manage that expectation is... Did your company pay for you?

RN Yes.

BS3 Did they have this discussion with you?

RN No.

BS3 Exactly my point. So where does the problem come from? And business is saying yes, but MBAs have... So where does the business, where? Okay. So yes.

RN So in terms of this process, I mean you’ve made some really valid points in terms of some of the lackings, right, in terms of this process. How have you achieved benefits for all three parties, so that’s business schools, students and organisations?
BS3  So how short do you want my answer to be or how long because this one, I can talk till... So the benefits for all three, and this is, if you remember what BS3’ mantra is, we’re a business school for business, and I just want you to reflect on what we say is our mission statement which it’s to increase the competitive advantage of individuals, organisations and the country. Okay, so I’ll speak to it in that way. So as individuals you leave here very different. If you don’t then we must give you a refund because if you tell me that you have not changed from the day you walked in through these doors then there’s either something wrong with us or something wrong with you. So that’s the one. And when you go back into your organisation, into your business, the value, the return on investment, so that’s answering the second part of your question, how does it impact the three parties, so it’s the student, it’s BS3... I’ll come back to the BS3 side. How do we get the benefit of it? And the third part, the most important part for us is to increase our competitiveness as a nation and that is what BS3 is all about.

So our benefit is to say the more success we have in creating management and talent, leadership pipeline, the more successful business will be, the more successful we will be because we partner with business, right? We have 75 company partners and your company may be one of them, business partners. We work with 75 to 80 people. We run programs for all those 75 companies across 27 countries around the world. So the benefit to your company is, firstly to you as an individual is that you’re getting an experience that moves the boundaries. The second thing is we teach you how to be a global best player, not just a local, you know, internal kind of vying for competition, to be the best in my field, in my company, in my business unit. And the third thing is your company becomes more competitive in that sector, because that’s what it’s all about, your competitive advantage. And if we increase competitiveness, we increase our chances as a country to improve our competitiveness.

RN  Absolutely. I mean, and then you as a business school, so you touched on the one point in terms of our country becoming more competitively advantageous, right, but what else or what benefits do you get out of the relationships?
BS3  Well, we get more students like you, so it’s reputation. It’s not just about more students; let me make that very clear because we always have far more applicants than we have places. But you know, and I go back to the point I made earlier, if our reputation as the graduates who leave this place, if you’re not making an impact, do you think your company’s going to say okay, we’ll send five more people to BS3? So there’s a whole, it’s a, there’s a connectedness and that’s... It’s almost if you want, I like to think of it as partnering for progress. So it’s not about oh, BS3 will have... I mean we have full classes; you know that, you’ve been in a class. I can’t take another 20 people and put them in your class. So it’s about, but in building our reputation we have to make sure that our graduates go out and do what it is we intend for them to do.

RN  Tell me more about this partnering for progress. What involvement would, or currently exists in terms of business feedback into the MBA and could there be more of that?

BS3  So we have a lot of that and part of what I’ve told you about, which you don’t see while you’re a student in the class, right, because, how do we... Like at the beginning of this year, as part of our faculty workshop, we have faculty workshops because we must develop as faculty of how we’re going to, how do we know what business needs? We need to go talk to business. So I’m giving you a typical example of what we did is we took all our faculty, we have a two day workshop at the beginning of every year and we do it a few times in the year but the beginning of this year we said right, we’re going to go and identify these, we identified a few of the companies and we said we’d send faculty learning teams in and we go ask business what they need. What are they seeing in terms of graduates, what are they looking for in MBA graduates, what are they looking for in terms of general management? Where do they see the gaps, where do they see...? So I’m giving you a practical example of how we did it.

Secondly, for us to be able to make sure that we’re covering not just what business needs but what the country needs, last year, and I’m giving you another practical example, on the faculty workshop we went on a two day journey outside of BS3. In other words, it’s like what we do with you in QQQ; you can’t learn by sitting here in the
ZZZZ. So we did a faculty meander if you like downtown, stayed overnight in Soweto, came to the JSE, it’s what you... So what I’m saying to you is that the way in which we work, we’re not an ivory tower. We don’t just sit here and think jeez, I know what everybody needs because that’s how we stay humble at BS3. So we, you don’t know this because you sit in the class, you’re seeing the benefit of what we design for you to go through. Those are two examples.

The third example, we do what is, I spoke to you earlier of focus groups, right? So we ask our alumni, we do focus groups of our alumni as well and say now you’re alumni, now you’re applying back into the workplace what you’ve learnt and... It’s so interesting because just today I did by company segmentation how many people were sent to us from these, I think we took ten companies or maybe 15 and how many were sent to us from each of those companies over the years. And then the second thing I did was look at their position in their companies. These people have just gone on to shoot the lights out. So I’m saying, I mean we’ll have those few who just, but that’s a combination of reasons they don’t make... But then again, you’re the master of your own destiny, right? So we ask alumni.

And the fourth element is we also interview the JSE top 40 companies. We run a focus group of the JSE listed top 40 companies. And so we do a research focus group with that and we say okay, tell us what you think the impact of BS3 has been. So we stay humble by asking, by doing this research. It’s not... And the last element is, because we are a world class business school and we’re a global business school, we benchmark against best practice internationally. So how do we do this? By participating in the FT rankings, going for international accreditation, going to... like I’m off to the US in two weeks time. Because you have to learn, you have to learn to know whether, I mean I can sit here and tell you how wonderful we are, right, but if we’re not going through all these kind of QA processes, how do we know that what we’re doing is right? So I’ve given you all avenues in which we make sure that we’re relevant. It’s about relevance also.
So, there are a couple of ideas that have been put forward by some of the business practitioners and some of your colleagues and I’d like to bounce them off you and get your views on them, right? So in terms of alumni, and it’s pretty good that you have them involved in terms of the focus groups and getting what’s relevant. There’s a thought that certain alumni could actually be mentors to current students. What’s your view on that?

We do that anyway. Like we’ve just done the full time MBA class now; they will have a learning partner with the alums. We invite, last night we had a master class with our alumni and we say guys, how can you contribute? Come and do interviews with people we’re admitting into the program. So we do that anyway, like LLLL phones me to interview potential students for their MBA because I’m based here. So I’m showing you that there are ways in which this is done. We can invite alumni to be on the advisory councils in the various areas of the school. We invite alumni to... Yes, you know those 70 partner companies I talked about as well? A lot of our, like through the learning and development and HRDs in those companies, a lot of that has been referrals by our alumni so there’s a huge, it’s partnership. You can’t, you know... And the word of mouth reputation is so significant. So again, alumni, mentoring, we... For example in the entrepreneurship MBA program, do you know how many of our alumni mentor or teach on that program?

No.

You see? That’s what you don’t know. There are other things. I don’t know what other schools are doing but that’s what we do. So for example I just hosted a faculty lunch now for the full time MBA program. Of the ten people sitting around, I had two sessions last week and this week. Of the eight, nine faculty who were in the session, four of them are alumni. And we have, so I’m taking your question slightly broader because it’s not just about mentoring. So what we do is at the end of this year you’ll see in your concluding module, we’ll say who do you think would make a perfect teacher for BS3? Nominate them.
And then in terms of the, so another interesting concept in terms of, so a lot of the people that I spoke to, heads of HR and heads of L&D and whatever, and they would like to see, and definitely there’s a distinction between a consulting role versus a business school role, they would like to see their students, who they funded, implement many action learning projects back into business but they’d like input from the business school to the extent that they guide the students. So let’s say we had a leadership course and there were certain things that they could do, go away in business, do an assignment, unpack the EDP, right, and then present that to the business schools who could then provide input. Would you be interested in that?

So we do this again in multiple ways. So one of the things we do, because we can’t consult with every business because then, firstly we’d never get a syllabus off the ground and we’d never, and it’s true for any business, it’s true for those businesses who’ve mentioned that to you, but we consult in terms of those ways I demonstrated and then, because remember our faculty are practitioners and academics so they’re giving you, your assignments are stretch assignments in terms of practical application into the workplace. So we can’t do an assignment that will satisfy every business requirement but it will, because they so go find what your HIV policy in your company, blah-blah-blah. So it’s practical. I mean you know this. You’ve done the BS3 MBA program so you know what I’m talking about. I can’t tell you what other schools do but that’s... At the same time, and I know you’re specifically saying around the MBA program but we do, with these 70 partner companies, we talk to their HRDs and their L&D people all the time in terms of tell us what your business needs because we co-design their customised program. And from that, that information serves to say what is it that we need to do in academic programs. So we host a HRD conference once a year with all the HR directors of those 70 partner companies so, again we’re a business school for business.

So that’s something new I haven’t heard before is that yes, you do a lot of customising and a lot of what you learn there then will feed into your more formal programs, and I think that’s a view that’s very interesting. I don’t think the other business schools are doing that.
Yes, but now you also have to remember the competitive, our competitive advantage of a lot of what I’m saying.

Yes, no definitely. And then finally, I think, BS3, you’ve given me a lot of food for thought. Finally, what can we do to make this process better, so how can...? Given you’ve done a lot and, particularly from a business school perspective, we know that there’s some gaps in terms of business, there are definitely some gaps in terms of the students, how can we make that process better?

So you must be specific for me because I don’t like general kind of questions. What do you mean, gaps? What gaps do you see and then I can say how we can use that as a start point to make it better?

So from a business perspective, and I just did an interview now where it’s we pay the money and the student goes off and we expect a return. That’s business’s view consistently. From a student perspective, I’m going to go on this MBA, at the end of the MBA I’d better get a GM job at my role and at my work or I’d better get this huge salary, right, but I haven’t delivered anything through the process. So those are the two gaps there. From a business school perspective, you’ve got your partners and you’re doing a lot, particularly in L&D and those customised programs...

Yes, but remember the customised feeds into...

Feeds into the MBA, right. So you’re doing as much as you can in terms of that. How can we get this process working better?

So one of the things is, and it’s interesting because companies say they want one thing but, remember for companies, the bottom line is the most important thing, right? So how much time, when we ask... Let me give you a typical example. So I’ve
been here for xxx years. For the first couple of years every student had to nominate a company mentor. And let me tell you, why did we stop doing it?

RN It wasn’t very good.

BS3 And we made it you’re a learning partner to the student, you are, the success of this journey, this two year journey is your partnering. And so it starts with a flare because it’s a cool thing to have and then the kind of momentum dies. So for it to be more successful it needs buy-in from all parties. So I’m not apportioning blame to the business but also the students because the students are, I’ve got to put my head down, I’ve got to pass this subject, I’m not interested in mentoring because that’s just a side kind of show, it’s a soft skill kind of thing, oh, it’s... But yet it’s such a critical part of this journey. So one of the things I’m doing in the re-design for the MBA program, I’m actually reintroducing, and I’m calling them learning partners; I’m not calling them mentors. And I’m calling syndicates learning teams because it’s like how do you have high performance teams? Somebody manages high performance teams so you get an outcome in professional services’ speak. So in that way, you know, it’s a partnering process.

So what, I do want to reintroduce that but again for it to be successful we need the student to make sure that they commit to bringing a learning partner along and then the learning partner becomes intimately involved because it means giving up, once a month you’ve got to attend a session with your student, that kind of thing. So we did that. So I can tell you this because it was, you know, we formally appoint... And sometimes the relationships broke because there was no trust or sometimes people moved jobs and then it was... However, the success of having a learning partner is very important because part of that journey is how does that person, I mean the idea around the mentoring was how does that person create not an opportunity, because then that sounds opportunistic, but like in terms of representing, like what you need to do, sometimes you won’t be able to get a door open because you need access to some information but the learning partner can help you. So again, who you nominate as your learning partner and a mentoring protégé relationship is not necessarily an easy one.
It’s a rough one because you’re meant to push each other. And then the benefit for the mentor is that whatever you learn in the journey, because this person, even if they went through it, it may, some of it may be very irrelevant do how do you take what’s this, share with that and that becomes best practice, for example, in your financial services team or whatever the case may be?

So it’s not a case of not having done it because that was always the case but it’s about, again, where’s the urgency and the commitment and once you start it, you must see it through, all parties. You know, like we used to host monthly mentor/mentee relationship cocktail sessions, so we come and you talk, other mentors talk to each other. We first have a, like a session together in the classroom and then have other mentors talk to each other and, you know, what are the common things you’ve seen, what are the pitfalls, how can I help my students or my mentees who have got this particular problem? So I think there’s a well, there’s good intention. It’s about the constraints of time and other deliverables and making sure this all comes together.

RN So on that idea, let me bounce something quickly off you. On this mentee relationship, one of the practitioners suggested that almost a learning and development practitioner, right, be appointed. But because the people that you’re sending on an MBA program are your fast-track, are your top people you want to, you’re spending 200,000 on them, you allocate them a senior person but you have a tripartite agreement between the student, the business school and the mentor/coach, right? And the role of that person would be to then push this person to apply what they’ve learnt into the business, because they understand the relevance of it, to open the doors where necessary. From a business school perspective you would support that relationship through your curriculum in terms of what...

BS3 Sorry, maybe I didn’t explain myself properly. This was the formal process. It was exactly that. They had like a whole... And then part of it is your mentor had to write a report every eight weeks of how this was applied, what kind of constraints... Like you have great ideas you learn on the program, the curriculum and you want to apply it and then if you can’t, you go to your mentor and say jeez, I’m having... So it was an eight
weekly report from your mentor and it was a formal agreement. You know, we officially
send it out, so it existed.

RN   It's the motivation and the energy around it that's the challenge.

BS3   Yes, it's about the sustainability of that.

RN   Okay, great. That's perfect.

BS3   And we don't do things because we think it must, it's the cool thing to do. We do
it because it must have impact. You'll notice me say that word a lot.

RN   No, that's good. So BS3, is there anything else that you want to add to...

BS3   That's broad again.

RN   In terms of collaboration?

BS3   I think collaboration is always, I mean you heard me say partnering for
progress, right? Because ultimately it's not just about, and I go back to the vision, you
know, BS3' mission statement. It’s about individuals, organisations, the country. And
so collaboration always yields better results. And that’s what we call ourselves, a
business school for business. Other schools have other kinds of mantras. Because for
us to increase the competitiveness of yourself as an individual participant, your
company and the country, we have to partner for progress and of course, you know,
people say we pay a lot of money, we get... I mean what you don’t know, and I’m
saying this to you but I’m sure other people said to you, I mean what you pay for your
MBA program does not even start to cover what we have to pump in to make this
program the flagship program of this school. You would have read in the Financial Mail
a few months ago about the MBAs not being subsidised at a master’s level. It’s
subsidised at an honours level and that’s a big difference of money.

So again, because we want this to be the best program, we want our graduates to be
the best we invest a lot of time, energy, money into making this work. It is collaboration
and that is why our alumni are so important because you are the best brand ambassadors. You know, we can spend millions, as some other business schools do,
on advertising their brand but who’s our best brand? You guys. You, a student in the
work, as alumni back in the work, what you do and how you do it. And also just, you
know, if there’s arrogance attached to an MBA then you’ve lost the plot. You’re not
doing this thing to be, you know... Like the joke, standing joke, how will you know
someone’s done an MBA? They'll tell you. You know, it’s not about that. It’s not about
you having to say... It’s what you demonstrate and what you do. And it’s not just about
strategy because everybody wants to only be involved in strategy. Without the doing,
without the operationalising, what happens to strategy? Okay, so it’s doing.

And the last element, and this is very important, is that we want our alumni to be
authentic and mindful leaders and that brings to the whole conclusion around ethical
business practice and ethics. And we’ve seen many examples around the world of how
bad ethical, bad ethics has led to major problems. Well, we find ourselves in a financial
crisis and part of that is bad ethics. So, it’s about the knowing, the doing and the being;
being your value system. The doing is the operation and the knowing, fantastic; you
know the stuff now go and do it. Okay? So yes, and then it’s all about partnering. If we
don’t partner...

Absolutely. So thank you so much for your time, BS3. I really appreciate your
time.

It’s a pleasure. Good luck with the last bits of...
So let me just introduce myself. I’m Ravi Naicker, I’m in my final year of MBA and I’m going to be conducting some research which will explore the different ways in which collaborative learning can achieve the maximum output from an MBA program for business schools, students and organisations involved in the MBA program. Our interview is probably going to be about 30 minutes and will help us understand how business schools, students and organisations can work together to ensure that all parties can maximise their respective benefits from the MBA. And I just want to let you know upfront, in terms of the content, your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All the data will be kept confidential and if you have any concerns you can contact myself or VVVV who’s my supervisor. Are you comfortable with that?

Yes, that’s fine.

Okay, great. So yes, there are just a couple of questions that I’m going to run through in terms of the MBA. I just want to get an idea; your current role at YYY?

At BS4.

At BS4, sorry, my apologies; yes, your current role at BS4?
Well, I mean I’ve been heading up academic programs of the business school from 1996 onwards. I’m in the process of handing over to colleagues so I’m stepping down in managing programs. I’ve done it for 16 years. So the MBA program was, when I started off in this role I was directly responsible for the MBA program but as we grew over the years and we added more programs, I was academic head of all the programs.

And then your academic background or your qualifications?

Well, I trained as an engineer, I’ve got a masters in engineering, I’ve got an MBA and I’ve got a PhD in Finance.

Great. Okay, so let’s get into the questions, right? In your view, what do you believe are the successes of the MBA?

Just repeat that. What are the...?

What are the successes of the MBA for you?

Well, an MBA is an academic learning program and successes of an MBA learning program is developing generally a young to middle-aged managers and budding managers to hopefully manage the rest of their careers. And I think many MBA programs have been very successful in doing that. There are MBA programs that have not been successful in doing that at all. So I mean, it’s a bit difficult to generalise about MBAs. I mean, there are some MBAs around the world that are just fly-by-night schools. They give a piece of paper that says MBA but it’s not worth the paper it’s printed on. So it depends on the quality of the program that you engage in, whether you actually undergo that development that is possible in order to make an individual a better manager in his particular environment.
So just building on what you’ve just said, right, so there are successful MBA programs and there are those ones that are not as successful. What would you feel would contribute to a successful program? What elements of it?

Well, I mean a successful program will develop the leadership of a particular person, not merely teaching leadership but actually develop his leadership skills. There’s a big difference. I think a successful program will develop analytical thinking abilities of a candidate, they can actually do some sums and actually understand the difference of measures and be able to implement it. I mean, a successful MBA program develops a person’s social skills so he is well adapted in the world of work and can lead with empathy. And a successful MBA program develops a candidate that can formulate his argument, can take an argument apart, can critically argue the case that he’s about or take somebody else’s argument apart if he doesn’t agree with it. I think those are some of the critical issues I would think should happen in a good MBA program.

Now I’m very keen in terms of unpacking your first point. So you said leadership and not merely teaching it but actually doing it; how would a program get a student to actually do leadership rather than just teach the concept of leadership?

I’ve got experience of what we’re doing at our business school. I’m not in the leadership field so I see the successes that we have in our program so I can reflect on that. I think part and parcel of what we’re doing is actually exposing students to leadership throughout the whole MBA. It’s not just a module that you do for six months and you’re done with it. The leadership program is a continuous process that involves a fair amount of reflection of students. We expect them to keep a journal, think about the learning, think about their life experience or their work experience, reflect on that and then write down how you would act upon similar instances were they to occur again and of course revisit that because over a longer period of time you can, I mean you have an incident and you say well, I should do this differently or there’s probably a better way to do it. When something similar happens sometime later then you can start seeing, have I actually been doing things differently? And these journals that the
students keep, sometimes it’s up to 200 pages, are assessed by staff and they have to write effective essays on them and we are seeing a major improvement in terms of what the program participants are saying they’re doing in leadership. So we are seeing their engagement with the leadership and developing their leadership through their journal and their reflection.

RN   Journaling and reflection, okay, that sounds excellent. Throughout my research, when I look at the criticism or the failings of the MBA there are quite a number of failings in terms of, and some of which you’ve touched on in terms of the quality of the school and the quality of the program. Can you elaborate more on what you believe are the failings of an MBA?

BS4   Well, I mean there are a number. If you just teach a student some functional disciplines and you don’t get to a point where they actually start thinking about that in business these things are all integrated, where the level of what they learn is far too low, where you teach them and say you can solve a financial problem or this problem by applying certain models and not think about all the other issues involved, if you don’t bring that as part of an MBA then you don’t know about the risk side or the investor world. So it’s really about broadening or raising and understanding the limitations of what one can do in a learning program, that taking a person that thinks he knows a lot and just pat him on the back and tell him that he knows a lot, I mean, that’s been the downfall of many programs in the sense that they take high achievement as learning a couple of models and now you can do whatever you want to do.

RN   What else would you say, I mean from what I’m getting, there seems to be an inability of MBAs to practically apply what they’ve learned. Is that something that you’ve experienced?

BS4   Well, it’s probably criticism against the MBA in general but I think it hails primarily from the States where this criticism was also raised because in the States you do an MBA straight after a bachelor’s and then you start seeking employment. We are
strong believers that an MBA should be post experience as well. Hence we have a
three year working experience requirement but our average is seven years of working
experience before a student gets on an MBA program. And then the majority of our
participants are part time MBA modules and part-timers and they have to apply their
learning in the workplace. You learn through doing. You do in various ways. One way
in which we, is to analyse case studies but the other way is actually going and applying
the work in the workplace and come with recommendations for particular businesses
that are part of a syndicate or whatever. So actually candidates can do it in real life. So
yes, if it’s all just theoretical, there’s very little value added.

RN In terms of the experience criteria, so you’ve got an average of seven years?

BS4 Yes, approximately.

RN And how have you found that to be more beneficial than those students who
obviously have one or two years experience? How has the experience component
added to the learning on the MBA?

BS4 Well, I mean I cannot talk about people with one or two years experience
because we don’t have them so I don’t know how they would be in class. But I know
from many years ago when we did allow students with very limited work experience
onto the program that they’ve got no way of contributing to the learning. I mean, part
and parcel of an MBA program is the fact that you must contribute to the learning of the
class as a participant in the program. The lecturer is not the person who has all the
knowledge on a particular subject. He has got a limited knowledge. The participants in
the class bring their own knowledge. So you become a learning facilitator and the
participant must bring in their own experience of particular subject areas. And the more
experience you have, the more experience you also have in the richness of the
learning process.
RN Now in terms of the learning process or the benefits process, so I understand that the business school contributes a learning facilitator, the experience of the individual themselves contributes to the learning of the class, right? How have you achieved benefits for all three parties, so the business school, which is yourself, the organisations and students on your learning programs?

BS4 Well, in the majority of those subjects that make up an MBA program, students have to do assignments that are appropriate to the businesses that they work in. So there’s learning for the participant in being able to apply it in the real business world. The business that he works for, for who he does the assignment learns because of the work that’s being done for him, almost like a consultant on an almost free basis. And all of this feeds back to the business school and becomes part and parcel of the experience that teaching staff have had with the engagement of students and businesses. So this is a rich learning process.

RN What level of engagement is there between yourselves, being the business school, and business themselves directly?

BS4 Well, it’s on many levels. First we have an active advisory board made up of former business leaders and we meet on a regular basis. They advise the business school about matters of, certain matters that we should take note of. Secondly, we have an engagement of our staff in businesses. We allow consulting for our academic staff so they are engaged with business so they know what’s happening in business and they reflect it back in their learning. We do assignments within companies and we do, and so we have a facilitator at the school who works with that particular company, they arrange for a particular learning experience in that company. We have company visits for our full time MBAs where they actually go and visit a company and learn about that company and various aspects of the business and how an MBA working relationship with that business is. So there are many points of contact between the business school and business itself.
RN And then you, as the business school, how do you, just building on that, how do you support the organisations and students to achieve their objectives? So you’ve met with their advisory board or you’ve interacted with business and obviously you’ve got a group of students in your program; how do you support their learning? So what do you do in class and outside class over and above the company visits and that sort of exposure?

BS4 I don’t know whether I understand the question. What are we doing to assist the student?

RN So how have you supported business and the students in achieving their objectives basically? So what do you do in particular as the business school to create this environment? I think you’ve touched on it briefly.

BS4 Ensuring the learning program that we offer and the way it’s been presented develops people on the program to make a relevant contribution to business when they re-enter business or when they are, the majority of them are in business so I mean business gets the benefit of a learning program through the candidates who have undergone the development.

RN And then in terms of business giving back, right, apart from the advisory board, does business interact the other way as well and support the student’s learning and the business school?

BS4 Well, I mean the majority or a large proportion of our students study on a modular basis for their MBAs. The majority of them have company support to do that so certainly yes, businesses support their students actually doing their MBAs because they’ve actually hand-picked the candidate that has to go and do an MBA and they send them to our school. So in that way a business supports students to achieve their goals as well as the business’s goals. Businesses will come and visit the school and
say we have a particular problem, could we have somebody assist us in addressing the
problem, and these can become research topics as part of research reports that
students have to complete or alternatively assignments that the students have to
complete. So it depends on the nature of the problem that needs to be resolved. So
there’s an active interaction between business and the school.

RN What role does your MBA alumni play in your current programs?

BS4 Well, alumni play a role in various guises. I mean some of the alumni are on our
advisory board, some alumni refer students to go and do an MBA and some alumni are
actively involved in screening students for admission to the MBA program. We insist on
having an interview with alumni as part of our application process to the MBA program.
And then alumni themselves have, are organised in regions and within their regions
they organise functions where they also could meet with prospective MBA students and
give them advice about the MBA program. So there’s a good interaction between
alumni and prospective students. This of course could always be much, much better.

RN What would you, so one of my participants mentioned that current students be
paired with an alumni and enter into a mentor/mentee relationship. Do you think that
would work?

BS4 Yes, we have a program like that as well. Some of the alumni volunteer to
become mentors to MBA students and some MBA students request alumni and then
we match them. If, we do not think that this should become compulsory.

RN And then in your view, in terms of this process, how would you see action
learning as part of improving the learning on the MBA? Do you think action learning
could add to this and how would it add to the learning on the MBA?
BS4 Well, I think various people have various definitions about action learning. I view action learning as applying your knowledge in the real life and we already do that as a major part, a distinguishing part of our MBA program. Students get many assignments that they actually have to go and do and apply the knowledge in the real business world. So action learning I think is an important facet of business education where you not only apply the knowledge that you got through your case study but actually go to a live business and see the real live thing.

RN So if I’m understanding you correctly, your assignments actually require the students to unpack their current business to make it relevant.

BS4 Well not necessarily their current business. I mean, in many of the subjects that make up the MBA, the students are given assignments that they have to go and do and practice what they’ve learnt in a real life company and they have to come up with assignments so that to me is an action learning project. And they learn a lot by doing that and realising it’s not just a theoretical case but a practical case and many, many more angles to be considered.

RN So basically an action learning project, right, so some of the business practitioners that I spoke to were quite keen on several ideas and I just want to bounce them off you to get your views on it, right? One of the ideas was that throughout the MBA they would like to set up specific action learning projects within their business, so taking out of basically executive development or leadership development where there were three or four strategic projects that they would like to get implemented. And if they’ve got a group of MBAs within their business, they would like that group of MBAs to get allocated a couple of projects and they’d like the business school input into these projects. So while the person is doing an MBA, they’ve got a strategic project, two or three strategic projects over the two or three year period and they’re required to implement this and provide feedback and whatnot. Would you or how would you facilitate a learning of this sort or would you be interested in being involved in this sort of action learning project?
Well, I think it’s an interesting case. I mean, the business school’s responsibility is in developing a learning program that develops future business leaders. We are not a consultant to a business. So I think one must make it very clear the distinction between where the responsibility should stop and start. If the business wants a consultant to initiate a particulate process, they must either get a consultant or a student can do that as part and parcel of their learning. The academic faculty will be involved in assessing the student whether he’s applied business principles correctly in evaluating the situation and writing up the kind of situation but it would be going a step too far, as I’m concerned, if business schools have to take responsibility for the work that students are delivering within a business. Then effectively the business is getting the benefits of consulting with business school faculty.

Okay, so there’s a distinction between consulting versus evaluation of what a student’s done?

Yes, there’s a big distinction.

Okay, great. And effectively a part of the learning, so if, as a student, if I have to take an example, if I’m a student, I’m learning financials so I’m learning, I’m doing the basics of financial management and I came up with a concept that I think will work at work, and if I work in the accounting department and I make a couple of suggestions, I could then bring it back and you’d evaluate the paper and I could do it as part of an assignment. You’d evaluate my assignment but you wouldn’t actively get involved in actually managing that action learning project, right?

Yes, correct. I mean, I don’t see that business schools can become involved in organisational development in implementing these things. They’re effectively using faculty as a consultant to your business.
Sure, okay so that’s an important distinction I think. And I think there was another point in terms of what the guys said. So the business practitioners that I’ve also spoken to said that they don’t get regular enough feedback on an individual’s performance or development. Now, yes, they get the results but as to whether this person can apply it and whatnot, they’d like, whether it be a yearly report or a half yearly report on a student’s overall performance, and not necessarily just the result but in terms of that student’s ability to interact... Like you mentioned some important concepts, you know, social interaction, leadership, those sorts of more strategic items, they’d like feedback on that. What’s your view in terms of how that would work?

Again, it’s a difficult one to answer because effectively the student enrols to a program, not the business. The business may be a sponsor of a particular student and as a sponsor you have certain rights but his rights go to the person that he’s sponsoring. So I mean it’s a difficult kind of relationship. If the student says, you know, I need some feedback in terms of my development; of course the student has the right to certain feedback about his development as he progresses through the program. But business, being the sponsor of a particular student, will have to ask the student to actually give him what kind of feedback have you got? If the business school had to start giving businesses in general or specific sponsoring businesses specific feedback about the candidates that they are sponsoring, who has to do that? Because effectively learning is a collective engagement; one lecturer can comment about one subject, somebody else on another subject but that’s kind of collective. If business schools are required to give that kind of feedback to businesses then we’ll have to start up another department in our business schools.

What if business was willing to pay for that feedback and if... So let’s take, now I’m talking about an organisation with five, ten students who they’re willing to sponsor, willing to pay for the feedback but at the same time they want to move away from the individualistic internal applications to a block application where we’re giving you ten students a year, we’re going to fully fund them but we want progress reports or we want, well at the end of each module we want to know what the objectives are and what the students should have been able to apply. Would that be something that would work?
BS4 I think we’d have to sit down with the business. I mean if that was the case, one would have to sit down with the business and ask them what kind of feedback would you be expecting and one must be able to think around a strategy to implement such a requirement and the cost of it, so if you want that kind of feedback then this is what it’s going to cost you because the business school will have to implement certain processes to give that feedback to the business. It could work.

RN So I suppose there’d have to be a business case because that feedback must then result in certain benefits or certain information that comes through there.

BS4 Sure. I mean investing in such cases that the business school and the business sits around the table and decides what is fundamental, what is in their mutual benefit and then come up with a proposal and do a proper costing for the proposal and then you can get to a point where you say okay this can work or this cannot work.

RN That sounds good. And then finally, BS4, what can business schools, organisations and students do collectively to improve the impact of the MBA? I know it’s quite a wide question but...

BS4 No, I mean how can we change the world? That’s the kind of question you’re asking.

RN Very much that, yes.

BS4 You know there are so many facets to it in asking that question. I always tell people, you know, the best way, probably the best political dispensation for any country is to have a benevolent dictator. Unfortunately you don’t get them. And the same thing would go for an MBA. I mean if you get somebody who’s not really, who has a certain
leadership attitude and who is leading by example, that would make a major difference into businesses but I mean those are pie in the sky things.

RN Yes. I mean some basic stuff, is there anything that you can think of that we can do better to ensure that the reputation of the business, of the MBA is upheld and that business gets what they want and organisations get what they need?

BS4 Yes, well I think there are many things. Firstly, it starts with the MBA program. It must be a solid program and there must be real development. We mustn’t pass a student who shouldn’t pass. Some schools create the impression that entry into the program is an extremely difficult thing and once you’ve entered you have to apply to fail. I think that is wrong. I think an MBA journey should be a tough one, it should really hone the student to be a better decision maker and if all programs were to do that then it will enhance the quality of the MBA in general. I think MBAs should, or MBA graduates can certainly be more modest. There’s no big achievement in doing an MBA. Yes, it is an achievement but it is not something that, you know the standard joke, how do you know somebody’s got an MBA? He tells you. You know, that kind of thing, I mean if you’re modest enough about it then you won’t get overextended in terms of expectations that are out there about a student or the alumni of a particular school. I think the future MBA graduates should be very focused on sustainability, on the environment. If those issues don’t feature strongly in his agenda and it’s just about profit making then it will harm the MBA to a large extent. So these are all issues that are important.

RN Just a final question there, on the expectations piece, right, I’ve got this tremendously a lot from the business practitioners that students’ expectations are inflated. How can we better manage those expectations?

BS4 I think one must, from a school’s point of view one can manage that by saying, I mean, you all have this idea that you’re going to be the world’s biggest mover and shaker but kill that right from the start. Unfortunately it’s the schools that create this
kind of impression. You know, if you graduate from our school you’re going to be the
biggest mover and shaker. I think that’s wrong. And at school level if we are saying
we’re going to develop you as a person to be a more effective and more efficient leader
in your organisation then we achieve a lot, but not to create this impression that when
you’ve got our MBA the sun or whatever, the sun shines out of your face. Modesty is
an incredibly important attribute.

RN Well, is there anything else that you want to add, BS4?

BS4 No, that’s fine.

RN Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

BS4 Good luck with your research.

RN Thank you so much and as soon as I’m done with it, I think VVVV’s given us the
go ahead to give you a copy of the research so I’ll forward you a copy of that.

BS4 Okay.

RN Thank you so much.

BS4 Okay, pleasure. Keep well.

RN Cheers, bye.
6216 BS4 Bye-bye.