



**Educational value of group learning activities in MBA education: student perceptions and instructor intentions**

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## **Abstract**

The objectives of this study were to assess the perceptions of educational value of group learning held by students and compare it with the intentions of lecturers involved in the MBA programme. Eighty-two MBA students enrolled at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) of the University of Pretoria completed an online questionnaire, the results of which reflected an overall positive perception of educational value of group learning. However, negative perceptions of group dynamics, fairness and administrative processes also surfaced. There appears to be some evidence of racial undertones to the negative perceptions. These perceptions were significantly different between junior and senior students ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Semi-structured interviews with lecturers and administrative staff revealed markedly different intentions and approaches to group learning. An awareness of the difficulties faced by students in group activities could be demonstrated, but different opinions were held on appropriate interventions. The study concludes with suggestions to improve identified weaknesses through a more focused educational approach. Such an approach would place greater emphasis on personal reflection and addressing of dysfunctional behaviour in groups, as part of a posited central skill in management.

Keywords: MBA education, adult learning, group learning, group dynamics, education management.

## 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 at any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the following people, who were instrumental in the completion of this research:

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# Chapter 1

## Problem definition

### 1.1 Introduction and motivation

The Masters Degree in Business Administration (MBA) is considered by many not only as the sole relevant qualification to manage, but also as a major contributor to the graduate's human capital (Baruch, 2009). While business schools across the United States and in South Africa have applications streaming in, there are also reports in the lay press questioning the purported value of the MBA as a management qualification (Merritt, 2004). Criticism from academic circles is levelled against the MBA's apparent failure to speak adequately to management practice (Mintzberg, 2004) and manager performance (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). The criticism from Mintzberg (2004) is especially scathing when he says: "MBA programmes train the wrong people, in the wrong ways with the wrong consequences" (p.6).

Even though the negative reports may not decrease the overall popularity of the MBA as a qualification, it may affect individual business schools as the competition for an MBA from a highly regarded business school intensifies. It therefore makes business sense for a business school to adopt a critical look at the content of its MBA curricula and the method with which it is delivered. Addressing the problem from a student-perceptual view on the educational value received from the MBA could address critical elements of the MBA

offering that will increase the demand for the degree from the particular institution.

It is known that instructional innovativeness improves students' perception of educational value (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2006). To this end, business schools have focused on offering different instructional modes including online courses, traditional classroom instruction and so-called hybrid models (Terry, 2007). Two teaching/learning techniques that have become stalwarts of delivery of content at business schools are case studies and group assignments (Rodrigues, 2005). This study proposes an investigation into one of the elements of the instructional repertoire offered at many leading business schools – group learning and assessment. An investigation into the educational outcomes of group learning will be conducted using the framework proposed by Gabriel and Griffiths (2008). The perceptions of the students will be compared and contrasted with the intentions of the instructors and suggestions made to better align the different perspectives. Focusing on maximising the educational value and outcome of group learning necessitates an understanding of the group dynamics as well as the transfer of technical skills in the learning environment (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008). The information gained from this study would enable business school administrators and faculty to adjust MBA delivery modes, curricula and assessments on a continual basis to ensure optimum client value as well as establish an academic foundation to the educational approach.



## 1.2 Research scope

The scope of the study is limited to:

- (i) Perceptions surrounding group learning and its impact on education of students enrolled for a Masters degree in Business Administration (MBA).
- (ii) Educational outcomes that MBA instructors attempt to achieve with group learning.

## 1.3 Research objectives

1. Evaluate students' perception of the actual educational value of group learning in business education and the main factors that influence these perceptions.
2. Evaluate the educational value that instructors intend to impart through group learning and what methods are employed to ensure that this takes place.
3. Suggest possible changes to improve the educational value of group learning.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

#### 2.1 Educational outcomes of an MBA

In a study reporting on 35 in-depth interviews of MBA alumni from a prominent UK business school, three broad learning outcomes were identified: (1) broadened perspectives; (2) an enhanced sense of self; and (3) tools, techniques and theories (Hay, 2006). The argument is therefore forwarded that the contribution of the MBA education to management practice and performance is complex and subtle.

A Canadian study (Sturges, Simpson, & Altman, 2003) explored the educational outcomes perceived by MBA graduates against the background of a career-competency framework. They identified the development of “knowing-why career competencies” (relating to career values, meanings and motivations) as the most important outcome, followed by “knowing-how career competencies” (skills and job-related competencies). Both these outcomes were valued very highly, and the third category, “knowing-whom competencies” (referring to social capital development) was rated significantly less important. It is not clear from the literature to what extent the different teaching/learning techniques address the different broad learning outcomes or career competencies.

Baruch (2009), in asserting that the MBA adds considerable human capital to a graduate and his/her organisation, drew on a rich set of data including secondary data, interviews with managers and HR professionals. The author attributed tangible and intangible outcomes to the MBA education that is associated with a positive effect at an individual, organisational and national level. In an evaluation of fourteen (14) longitudinal surveys, Boyatzis (Boyatzis & Saatcioglu, 2008) identified emotional, social and cognitive competencies developed during MBA education. Each of these competencies can be developed during the programme, but are eroded in the face of a lack of continuous improvement and renewal. Along similar lines, Butler (Butler, Johnson, & Forbes, 2008) investigated the effect of a skills-based course on competencies of practicing managers and found that the application of the skills extended beyond the classroom. He cautioned though that success in this endeavour depended upon educators focussing on a well-defined set of business-relevant skills. While it is assumed that a business school would be in a position to list relevant business skills, it is unsure what the realisation of the importance of such skills and their development through the programme is in the mind of the educators of a business school.

## **2.2 Group learning**

Educationalists have of late adopted a more holistic approach to learning and there is strong encouragement of the use of social constructivist principles when designing teaching environments (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). This places the emphasis of the educational process on the individual's learning through the interactions in the group. Within this context, there is

increasing recognition for the use of group learning (also called collaborative learning) to be more facilitative to “active meaning-making” than traditional instructor-dominated teaching/learning techniques. Group learning refers to the grouping of a small number of students “who cognitively and cooperatively engage in a common task to achieve a shared goal” (Brandon & Hollingshead, 1999). From a pedagogic perspective, group learning activities include class room discussion, case studies and group projects, and can together be seen as so-called active-type teaching/learning techniques (Rodrigues, 2005). At a high level therefore, group learning can serve two broad pedagogic purposes: (1) a teaching method (process approach) or (2) skill to be learned (content approach) (Kelly, 2009). To what extent the different approaches are followed in the MBA programme under investigation is unclear, as is the applicability of the two approaches to different subjects to maximise educational value.

The unique benefits of group learning transcend disciplinary boundaries (Kanisin-Overton, McCalister, Kelly, & Macvicar, 2009; Pfister & Oehl, 2009). According to Hay & Hodgkinson (2008), the learning derived from an MBA extends beyond the classroom and includes skills to deal with group dynamics. However, the study did not investigate whether this learning was intended. Studies have shown that some of the benefits derived from the MBA education are in fact incidental, and that most of these benefits emanate from group activities (Sturges, *et al.*, 2003). It is the purpose of this study to identify whether some of the incidental educational benefits can be maximised by increasing the sensitisation of instructors to those benefits and increasing

activities that yield these benefits. Alternatively, the incidental benefits can be institutionalised in the formal curriculum through curricular innovation.

Drawing from the theories of Steiner (1972) on group work and Bion (1961) of work and regression in groups, Hammar Chiriac (2008) developed a framework to understand the group dynamics underlying group learning. Her work focused specifically on problem-based learning as practiced in tutorial groups in which she showed that it was possible to understand and fully describe the underlying processes. Types of activities identified included additive, disjunctive, conjunctive, compensatory and complementary, while a distinction could be made between work groups, dependence groups, fight groups and pairing groups. Whether the findings can be extended to group learning in other settings than the tutorial group is as yet undetermined, but is likely to be the case since the theories upon which it is based did not deal exclusively with tutorial groups nor with problem-based learning, but with group work in general. Applying this framework can therefore not only serve as a research tool, but also inform as to processes that can be implemented to maximise the learning experienced in groups.

In a study evaluating the contribution of group learning to development of higher order thinking skills and attitudes, Jaarsma (Jaarsma, de Grave, Muijtjens, Scherpbier, & van Beukelen, 2008) demonstrated a positive relationship between teacher performance and learning and a negative effect of group interaction. The authors concluded that this points to poor alignment of teaching and assessment as well as poor organisation of group processes. It is uncertain whether this applies to the group learning activities at business schools, and this needs to be investigated.

Postholm (2008) offered an interesting perspective on the role of group learning by positing that an understanding of group processes involved in learning can allow teachers to transform their classrooms into research opportunities. He furthermore contended that the benefits derived from group learning is situational and needed to be constantly adjusted in order to maximise benefits.

An area of adjustment that is frequently applied in group learning is the rotation of group members. Various allocation methods have been forwarded, ranging from the popular Belbin team roles (Belbin, 1981) to others incorporating Hofstede's (Hofstede, 1984) cultural dimensions (Rodrigues, 2005) and combinations of these (Kelly, 2009). It is therefore clear that the area of group learning is an active area of research that makes a new set of demands on the time and commitment of business educators.

### **2.3 Adult graduate learning**

While the body of work on adult learning is substantive, it mainly deals either with basic adult education or the needs and characteristics of the adult undergraduate (Kerns, 2006). A separate research focus on adult graduate education is advised, given the different demands their unique characteristics and needs place on educators. These unique characteristics relate to a familiarity with the higher education demands and landscape, a shortened timeframe for completion and greater focus.

Within the field of medical education, the literature provides evidence of the superior success of incorporation of adult learning theory into training of specialists (Hartzell, Veerappan, Posley, Shumway, & Durning, 2009). The

latter study focused on multidisciplinary input into learning and a decentralised teaching method where the responsibility of delivering of content resides with the student and the educator serves a moderating role.

Galbraith (Galbraith & Fouch, 2007) summarised adult learning theory by indicating that sensory stimulation, cognitive and reinforcement theories, combined with facilitation now form the foundation of modern andragogy. Applying the principles of andragogy in the field of professional safety training, she demonstrated superior results as measured by a well-recognised safety index. While there is some evidence that business schools have adapted curricula and teaching methods to better address adult graduate learning needs (so-called critical management education) (Hay & Hodgkinson, 2008), it is unsure how widespread an approach this represents.

Support structures for adult learners also pose unique challenges to educators (Roberts & Plakhotnik, 2009). Within the context of a business school the concept of mentoring as support should be evaluated as to its contribution to success in the academic program. Again, although some business schools do incorporate mentoring into their academic offering, it is unsure how widespread a view this represents.

## **2.4 The role of assessment in learning**

Direct methods of assessing of students include oral and written examinations as well as assignments. Indirect assessment of learning has thus far focused on skills displayed by alumni (Kelley, Pingsheng, & Beom-Joon, 2010). Although the causal link between skills displayed by alumni and business education during the MBA is tremendously complex, the general consensus is

that the contribution of MBA education to management practice and skills is subtle (Hay, 2006).

Scholars have nevertheless argued convincingly that assessment and feedback constitutes a learning opportunity that is often neglected by instructors and proposes formative feedback theory to evaluate the effectiveness of such feedback (Fluckiger, Vigil, Pasco, & Danielson, 2010). Furthermore, Martell (2007) has shown that assessment plays a critical role in continuous evaluation of the learning process as well as the development of curricula, thereby “closing the loop” in terms of assurance of learning. This is especially important for business schools that are increasingly called upon to meet the needs of diverse constituencies. The study furthermore highlighted that MBA assessment in general seem to be lagging behind and does not conform to accepted standards as set out by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). One possible explanation for the general lagging behind in assessment at business schools may lie in failure to understand the uniqueness of adult graduate learning. Since the adult graduate learners also brings with her a vast amount of experience, assessment needs to be very astute in order to ascertain what was truly learnt anew or in a different perspective (Kerns, 2006).

It is accepted that collaborative assessment, through also incorporating peer-evaluation, is an important element to enhance the group learning process (Elliott, 2008). In fact, Johnson & Johnson (2002) stated the principle of peer evaluation as one of the three pillars upon which positive group interaction is based. The current study will investigate the perceptions of students and instructors towards peer-evaluation of group learning activities.



A counter-argument is forwarded by Torrance (2007) that the role of assessment in learning is overemphasised. He postulates that the transparency associated with assessment has led to “learning” being replaced by “criteria compliance”. This view has to balance the preponderance of modern academics to “let assessment drive learning”.



## Chapter 3

### Research propositions

1. Students value group learning mostly for its contribution to development of soft skills.
2. Positive student perceptions of the educational value of group learning are associated with positive group dynamics.
3. The student's perception of the group learning experience in the MBA programme changes over time.
4. Instructors do not actively manage the group learning process.

## Chapter 4

### Research methodology

#### 4.1 Research design

A cursory literature survey was performed to shed some light on the educational principles of group learning as manifested in the MBA. Group learning was identified as a key educational activity within MBA curricula that seek to be responsive to environmental comments.

The study was conducted in two phases. First, a descriptive study was conducted to gain insight into the perceptions of MBA students on group learning through the use of an online questionnaire. The questionnaire investigated student perceptions of the educational value of group learning as applied in business schools. Emphasis was placed on acquisition of technical (subject matter), integrative and interpersonal skills that enhance management capability, factors that determine and shape experience of syndicate work. These factors related to group dynamics and administrative processes as part of the academic offering.

In the second stage of the study, the core themes explored in the questionnaire to the students were utilised to guide semi-structured interviews with selected business school MBA faculty. The interviews added more in-

depth analysis and contributed to a deeper understanding of the educational processes followed in group learning.

## 4.2 Population

The population of the study was composed of all MBA students enrolled and instructors involved in the modular MBA-programme at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), University of Pretoria.

## 4.3 Sampling method and sample size

The class lists of the first- and second year MBA students were used as the sample frame. Based on a population of approximately 400 students, a sample size of 80 was taken. It was expected that enough data will be collected to allow meaningful statistical analysis, given the size of the sample (Blumberg, Cooper, & Schindler, 2008). The data was collected via an anonymous, self-administered online questionnaire (SurveyMonkey, 2010). The questionnaire is included in Appendix 1 *infra*. The responses in the questionnaire were coded using a 7-point Likert scale, but demographic data and some word-associations responses will also be required. Random sampling was used to reduce the possibility of bias being introduced into the study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four lecturers and a programme manager. The lecturers were from diverse educational backgrounds, but effort was made to have lecturers involved in subjects dominated by technical skills (Accounting, Statistics, Economics and Finance), those dominated by “soft skills” (Human Resource management,

Organisational behaviour, Ethics) and the integrative subjects (Strategy, Entrepreneurship). The sampling method was purposive, focusing on instructors deemed to be progressive educators and with a wealth of teaching experience. The interviews were between 30 - 40 minutes in length to allow adequate exploration of the interviewee's insights. An interview guide is contained in Appendix 2.

In an effort to make the study applicable within the context of other business schools, it would be important to minimise research error. Minimal research error allows decision-makers to mitigate against taking poor decisions. In the current study, the risk of random sampling error should be considered due to the nature of the sampling frame used and the unique methods that may be employed by GIBS. The fact that a sample is classified on the basis of enrolment for a MBA does not consider the academic stature or experience within the programme and may introduce bias in the study. Research error that should be guarded against includes data processing error. In the current study, the electronic version of the questionnaire reduces the risk of data processing error. The interviews with instructors were electronically recorded and professionally transcribed, therefore similarly reducing the risk of data processing error.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

Data from the responses to the questionnaire were categorised as categorical (Blumberg, *et al.*, 2008). The Likert scale responses were converted to means as if the data were continuous. While this is mathematically not strictly

correct, it is considered an acceptable and common approach of treatment of such data (Albright, Winston, & Zappe, 2009).

The data was analysed with the aid of descriptive statistics and a correlation model used to identify the factors that showed the strongest association with positive student experience of group learning. The changes in student groups over time was analysed using comparison of means or medians, depending on the normality of distribution of the data. This allowed the testing of the first three research propositions. The factors identified to show a strong association to positive student experience of educational value was subsequently incorporated into the semi-structured interviews with instructors so as to elicit response on andragogical response to these factors.

The transcripts of interviews were read through a number of times to familiarise the author with the data and to identify common themes (Richards, 2005). Qualitative analysis was performed through a combination of manual coding and thematic analysis, using Nvivo<sup>®</sup> 9. Using this software facilitated the identification of broad themes, classified as nodes and allocation of references to the nodes. The references and nodes were then sorted into narrower themes where after it was searched for counter examples to determine how widespread a view they represented.

## 4.5 Research limitations

There are numerous limitations to the study, apart from time. The following limitations have been identified:

- A limited sample taken from the population of students and instructors, excluded the views of individuals outside of the sample.
- The population was limited to those associated with GIBS and therefore limited the extensibility of findings to other scenarios.
- Questionnaire usage did not allow in-depth analysis of some of the influencing factors and may detract from the value of the study.

## Chapter 5

### Results

#### 5.1 Survey questionnaires

##### 5.1.1 Descriptive statistics

A total of 83 responses to the electronic questionnaires were received. An overall response rate of 21.8% (83 out of 380), and a completion rate of 98.8% (82 out of 83) were recorded. The incomplete responses of the respondent that did not complete the survey were excluded from subsequent analyses.

##### *Demographic information*

The dataset was slightly skewed towards male opinions, reflected by 48 male (58.5%) and 34 female responses (41.5%). No respondent was under the age of 25. The majority of respondents (41) fell in the age category of between 30 – 34 years old, while 16 and 18 respondents fell in the age category 25 – 29 and 35 - 39 years, respectively. A mean of 3.22 for age was calculated, suggesting that the average age of respondents fell in the category of 30 – 34 years old. The distribution of the data is depicted in figure 1 below. The age categories were coded as follows:

1 = younger than 25 years of age

2 = 25 - 29 years old

3 = 30 - 34 years old



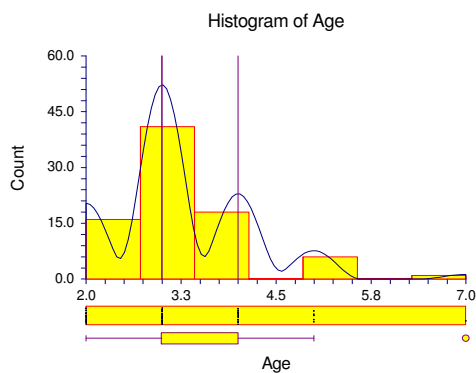
4 = 35 - 39 years old

5 = 40 - 44 years old

6 = 45 - 49 years old

7 = Older than 50 years of age

**Figure 1**



Of the 82 respondents, the majority (39) belonged to the White population group, while 28 were Black African, 11 were Indian and 4 were Coloured. The majority of respondents were of South African citizenship, followed by other African nationality and only one respondent of British nationality. The frequency distribution of undergraduate degrees is depicted in Figure 2 below.

The coding used was:

1 = Commerce

2 = Engineering

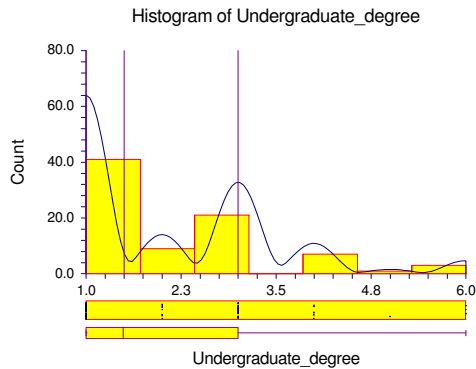
3 = Humanities

4 = Physical science

5 = Natural and Agricultural science

6 = No undergraduate degree

Figure 2



The majority of respondents (50.0%) came from an undergraduate background in commerce, followed by Engineering (25.6%), Humanities (10.98%) and Physical science (8.54%). Only one respondent graduated with a degree in Natural and Agricultural science while three respondents did not have any undergraduate degree.

Respondents were predominantly employed in the private sector (79.3%). More respondents were self-employed (13.4%) than were in the employ of government (7.3%). Lastly, responses were received from 43 first year MBA (52.4%) and 39 second year MBA students (47.6%).

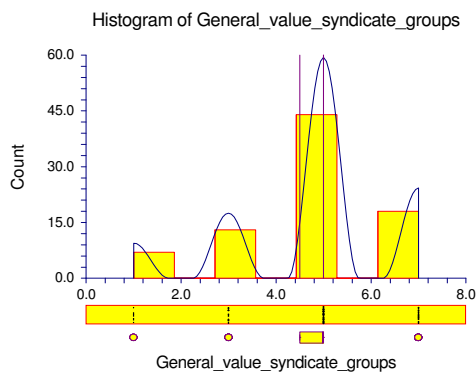
### ***Responses to survey questions***

Eighty-two responses were received to all the survey questions, comprising of the demographic composition as outlined above. A 7-point Likert scale was used to collect the responses, where 1 on the scale corresponds to strongly disagree and 7 to strongly agree.

### ***I found syndicate work generally valuable to my learning***

The data was found not to be normally distributed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The median value of the responses was 5, which corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale. In general, the majority of respondents perceived syndicate work to have been valuable to their learning. The responses are visually represented in figure 3 below.

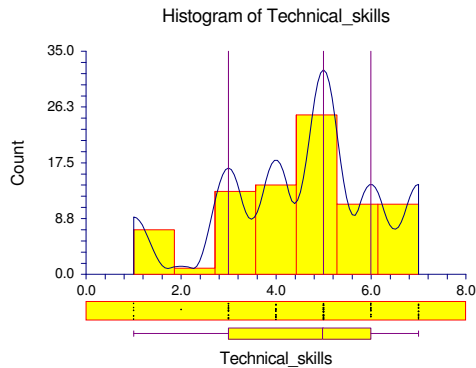
**Figure 3**



### ***Syndicate work helped me understand technical issues in subjects better***

Both the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics rejected normality of data of responses to this question. The median value of responses was 5, which corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale. One can therefore deduce that most respondents felt that syndicate work assisted them in understanding technical issues better. The responses to the question are depicted in figure 4 below.

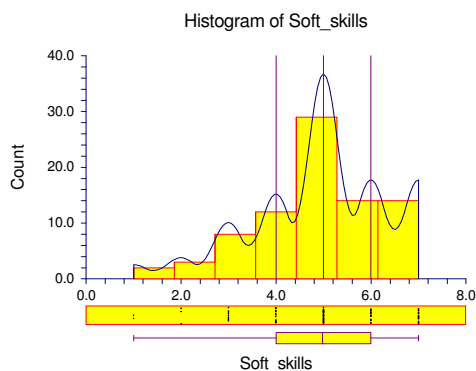
Figure 4



### ***Syndicate work helped me develop soft skills***

Normality of the data could not be rejected and therefore the mean was calculated to be 4.96 with a standard deviation of 1.46. The mean corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale but is ever so slightly located in the “indifferent” section. This statistic can be interpreted to convey that 95% of respondents fell between category “disagree” and “moderately agree”. The data is represented in figure 5 below.

Figure 5



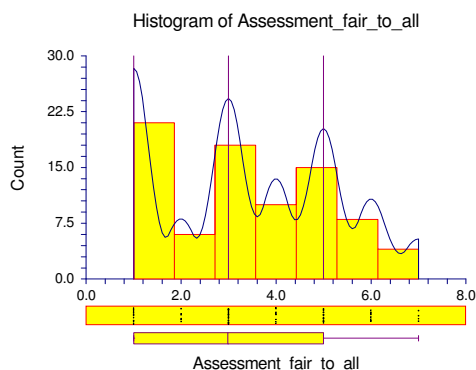
### ***Syndicate work helped me to integrate knowledge from different subject areas***

Normality was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic and the median was calculated as 5. This corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale. One can therefore conclude that respondents were in general in agreement with the statement put to them in the questionnaire and felt that syndicate work did help them to integrate knowledge from different subject areas.

### ***The assessment of syndicate work was fair to all members of the group***

A median of 3 was calculated for the responses to this question, given that normality was rejected by the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics. The median is located in the “disagree” category of the Likert scale. One can interpret this as a general feeling among respondents that assessment of syndicate work was perceived not to be fair to all members of the group. A visual representation of the data can be found in figure 6 below.

**Figure 6**

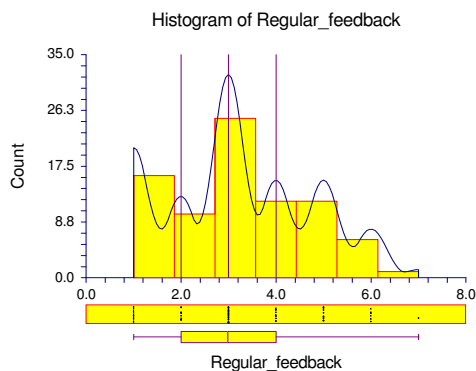


### ***Feedback on syndicate work was received regularly***

Normality of distribution of the data for this question was rejected based on the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics. The median was

found to be 3, indicating that the general perception of respondents was that feedback on syndicate work was not received regularly. The median corresponds to the “disagree” section of the Likert scale. A graphic representation of the data can be found in figure 7 below.

Figure 7



### ***Feedback on syndicate work helped me identify areas for further learning***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Shapiro-Wilk test statistic and the median was calculated as 4. This corresponds to the “indifferent” section of the Likert scale, and indicates that the overall feeling was undecided as to whether feedback was constructive in identifying areas for future learning.

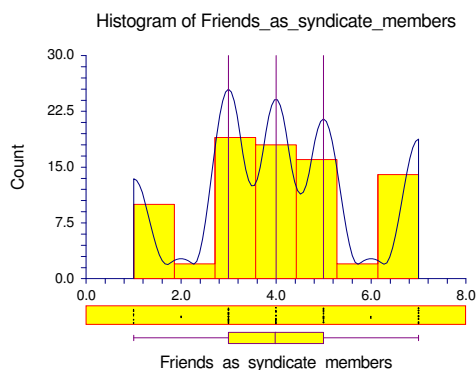
### ***My individual mark was higher than the group mark***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic and the median was calculated as 3. This corresponds to the “often” category of the Likert scale for this question, indicating that in general respondents felt that they more often than not, received better marks for individual work than for syndicate work.

### ***I would prefer to be in a syndicate with friends***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic and the median was calculated as 4. This corresponds to the “indifferent” category of the Likert scale. Visually assessing the distribution of the data in figure 9 suggests that while the respondents were polarised in their responses to the questions, a fair amount truly were indifferent as to whether they were in syndicates with friends or not.

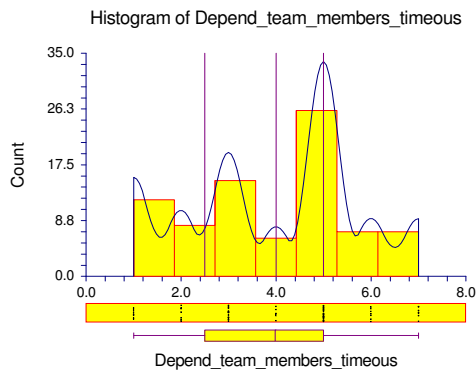
**Figure 8**



### ***I was comfortable to depend on syndicate members to deliver on time***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 4. This corresponds to the “indifferent” section of the Likert scale, indicating that respondents in general felt uncertain whether they could depend on their team members to deliver on time. Alternatively, it could indicate that the respondents were divided on the issue. Visual inspection of the distribution of the data seems to support the latter suggestion. The data can be visually assessed in figure 8 below.

Figure 9



***I felt individually accountable for syndicate work***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 5. This corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale and in general suggests that the respondents agreed with the statement and would feel individually accountable for syndicate work.

***Splitting up the syndicate was an innovative way of dealing with workload pressure***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 5. This corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale and suggests that splitting up of syndicates does happen and is seen as a method of dealing with workload pressure.

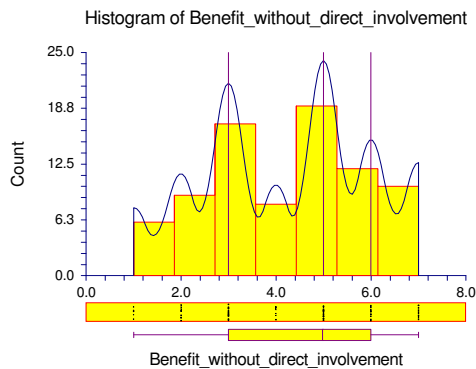
***I still benefited from syndicate work even if I was not directly involved in an assignment***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 4.99, which corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale. Visual appraisal of the data presented in a



histogram (figure 10 below), suggests that the views of the respondents on this questions was quite spread, but the majority did feel that they continued to benefit from syndicate work without being directly involved.

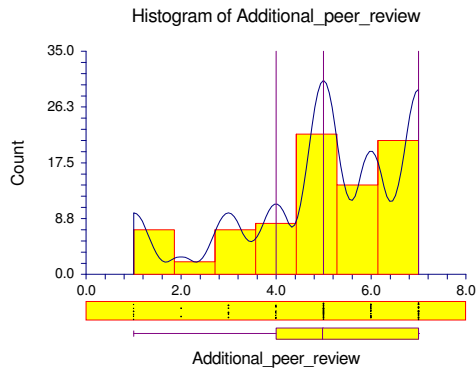
**Figure 10**



***I would support an additional peer-assessment portion to syndicate assignment marks***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 5, which corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale. Visual inspection of the histogram of the data distribution (figure 11 below) suggests that respondents were firm and outspoken in their opinion on this matter and would most likely strongly support additional peer-assessment of members’ contribution to syndicate assignments.

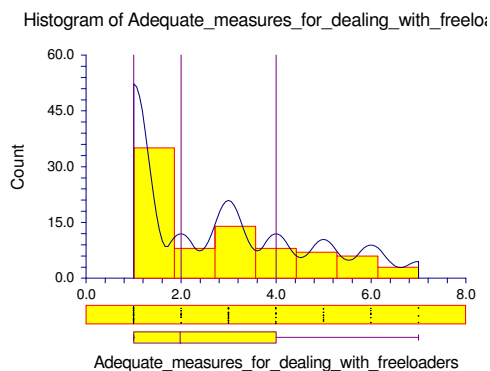
Figure 11



***The mechanisms in place for dealing with “freeloaders” in syndicate assignments are adequate***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 2, which corresponds to the “moderately disagree” section of the Likert scale. This indicates that there is in general strong disagreement with the statement and respondents feel that mechanisms for dealing with “freeloaders” are not adequate at all. The histogram in figure 12 graphically confirms this.

Figure 12



***The syndicate assignments were a reasonable simulation of situations one would encounter in the workplace***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 5, which corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale. A valid conclusion from this could be that respondents were in agreement with the statement and in general felt that the syndicate assignments were a reasonable simulation of real-life workplace situations.

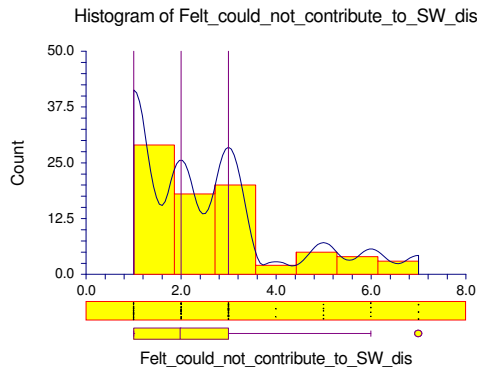
***The composition of my syndicate contributed positively to the educational value***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 5, which corresponds to the “agree” section of the Likert scale. Generally, respondents were in agreement that the composition of the syndicate contributed positively to the educational value derived from syndicate work.

***I often felt incapable of positively contributing to syndicate discussions***

Normality of the data was rejected using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, and the median was calculated as 2, which corresponds to the “moderately disagree” section of the Likert scale. One can interpret this as the respondents disagreeing fairly strongly with the statement. Figure 13 below indicates that the vast majority answered in the negative for this question, underlining the strong feeling of disagreement.

Figure 13



### 5.1.2 Statistical test results

#### *Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results*

The ANOVA procedure was used to explore differences in means between the datasets of responses to questions addressing skills development. Since normality of the data was rejected based on skewness normality of residuals, the medians were used. The nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA was therefore the appropriate test and yielded the results contained in table 1 below.

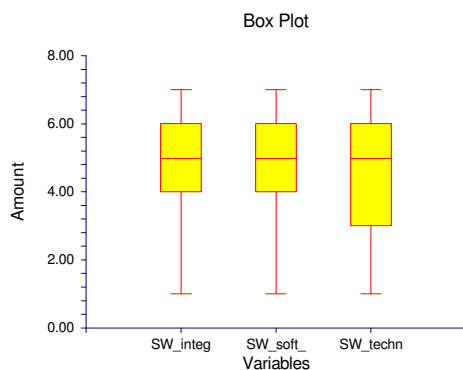
Table 1

Method	DF	Chi-Square (H)	Prob Level
Not Corrected for Ties	2	2.64709	0.266190
Corrected for Ties	2	2.787665	0.248123

In terms of the test statistic, this implied that the null hypothesis that all medians are equal could not be rejected at the 5% level of significance

( $p = 0.248$ ). One can therefore conclude that students perceived syndicate work to be equally important in the development of technical, soft and integrative skills. The proposition that students valued syndicate work primarily for its contribution to the development of soft skills could therefore not be upheld. Figure 14 below is a box plot of the distribution of the data of responses to the three questions. From the figure it can be seen that the median positions for the three datasets are similar. The pattern of distribution of data was similar for responses pertaining to soft skills and integrative skills, but greater variation in response (to the lower end of the Likert scale) were observed for technical skills. It can therefore be deduced that there was greater disagreement among respondents as to the value of syndicate work in developing technical skills, albeit not at a level that was deemed statistically significant.

**Figure 14**



### **Correlations**

In order to establish the correlation between group experience and group dynamics, the survey questions pertaining to group dynamics were identified and correlated to the survey item dealing with general experience of syndicate work. The following questions were identified as dealing with group dynamics:

- I was comfortable to depend on team members to contribute timeously
- I would prefer to be in a group with friends
- I felt individually accountable for group work
- I would support an additional peer-assessment portion to syndicate assignment marks
- The mechanisms in place for dealing with “freeloaders” are adequate
- The composition of my group contributed positively to the educational value
- I often felt incapable of positively contributing to group discussions

Since the data was not normally distributed, the Spearman rho correlation coefficient was the appropriate statistical procedure and it yielded the results contained in table 2 below.

Table 2

Correlations

			Depend team members timeous	SW friends	Indiv accountable contribution	Adeq measures to deal freeloaders	Peer-assessment perception	Synd composition edu value	Felt could not contribute to SW discussions	SW general perception
Spearman's rho	Depend team members timeous	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.165	.006	-.029	.034	-.021	.035	-.098
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.141	.957	.799	.764	.855	.754	.382
		N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81
	SW friends	Correlation Coefficient	.165	1.000	-.007	.039	.263	.044	.084	.005
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.141	.	.949	.730	.018	.694	.459	.962
		N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81
	Indiv accountable contribution	Correlation Coefficient	.006	-.007	1.000	-.052	.213	.095	-.203	.091
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.957	.949	.	.644	.056	.398	.069	.420
		N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81
Adeq measures to deal freeloaders	Correlation Coefficient	-.029	.039	-.052	1.000	-.282	.361**	.185	.056	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.799	.730	.644	.	.011	.001	.098	.619	
	N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	
Peer-assessment perception	Correlation Coefficient	.034	.263	.213	-.282	1.000	.116	-.042	.204	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.764	.018	.056	.011	.	.304	.707	.068	
	N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	
Synd composition edu value	Correlation Coefficient	-.021	.044	.095	.361**	.116	1.000	.017	.439**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.855	.694	.398	.001	.304	.	.882	.000	
	N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	
Felt could not contribute to SW discussions	Correlation Coefficient	.035	.084	-.203	.185	-.042	.017	1.000	-.178	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.754	.459	.069	.098	.707	.882	.	.111	
	N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	
SW general perception	Correlation Coefficient	-.098	.005	.091	.056	.204	.439**	-.178	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.382	.962	.420	.619	.068	.000	.111	.	
	N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	82	

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There was a weak positive correlation (Spearman's rho coefficient = 0.263) between the support for peer-assessment and the desire to be in a group with friends. In other words, those respondents who agreed with the statement that peer-assessment of syndicate assignments should be supported were likely to also want to be in a group with friends. The correlation was calculated to be significant at the 5% level of significance.

A moderate weak negative correlation (Spearman's rho coefficient = - 0.282) was demonstrated between mechanisms in place for dealing with freeloaders and support for peer-assessment. The correlation was significant at the 5% level of significance. The correlation was interpreted to signify that respondents who felt that mechanisms for dealing with freeloaders were inadequate were likely to support peer-assessment. A further moderate positive correlation ((Spearman's rho coefficient = 0.361) was found to exist between mechanisms in place for dealing with freeloaders and the feeling that syndicate composition contributed to educational value. This was found to be statistically significant at the 1% level of significance.

Despite the correlations between the different statements that related to group dynamics, none of these correlated with the general experience of syndicate work as positive. The only variable that did show a reasonably strong positive correlation to a positive general experience of syndicate work (Spearman's rho coefficient = 0.439) was the feeling that syndicate composition contributed positively to educational value. The correlation was statistically significant at the 1% level of significance. In other words, respondents who indicated that



the composition of their group contributed positively to the educational value were very likely to have experienced the syndicate work as a positive experience.

Since only one variable pertaining to group dynamics correlated with a positive experience of syndicate work, the proposition that a positive syndicate experience is correlated with positive group dynamics cannot be upheld.

#### ***Mann-Whitney U and T- tests***

When comparing the MBA1 and MBA2 group with regards to their perceptions of a number of variables, some clear differences emerged. To evaluate the groups with regards to their perceptions of fairness of assessment to all group members, the Mann-Whitney U nonparametric procedure was used since the data was not normally distributed. The test statistic is listed in table 3 below.

Table 3

<b>Mann-Whitney U or Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test for Difference in Medians</b>				
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mann Whitney U</b>	<b>W Sum Ranks</b>	<b>Mean of W</b>	<b>Std Dev of W</b>
Assessment_fair_to_all	1364	2310	1784.5	105.7104
X2Assessment_fair_to_all	313	1093	1618.5	105.7104
Number Sets of Ties Multiplicity Factor = 20178				
<b>Approximation With Correction</b>				
<b>Alternative Hypothesis</b>		<b>Z-Value</b>	<b>Prob Level</b>	<b>Reject H0 at .050</b>
Diff<>0		-4.9664	0.000001	Yes
Diff<0		-4.9759	1.000000	No
Diff>0		-4.9664	0.000000	Yes

A highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) difference in medians for the variable “assessment fair to all” was found to exist between the first - and second year MBA students. The second year students tend to disagree with the statement significantly more than the first years and feel that assessment of syndicate assignments is not fair to all members of the group.

A statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) between the two year groups was also found to exist for the variable “regular feedback”. The second year group tended to disagree with this statement more than the first year group, suggesting negative perceptions of the regularity of feedback received. Since normal distribution and equal variance, the latter using the modified

Levene test, could not be rejected at the 5% level of significance, the T-test was performed. The test results are presented in table 4 below.

Table 4

<b>Equal-Variance T-Test Results</b>			
<b>Alternative Hypothesis</b>	<b>T-Value</b>	<b>Prob Level</b>	<b>Reject H0 at .050</b>
Difference <> 0	4.6589	0.000012	Yes
Difference < 0	4.6589	0.999994	No
Difference > 0	4.6589	0.000006	Yes

Difference: (Regular\_feedback)-(X2Regular\_feedback)

Another aspect of feedback – whether it identified areas of future learning – differed significantly between the two years. Using the Mann-Whitney U test, a statistically significant ( $p < 0.002$ ) difference between the two groups was demonstrated. The results in table 5 below indicates that second year MBA students tended to feel more strongly that the feedback they received on syndicate assignments failed to identify areas of future further learning to them than the first years.

Table 5

Mann-Whitney U or Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test for Difference in Medians				
Variable	Mann Whitney U	W Sum Ranks	Mean of W	Std Dev of W
Feedback_ID_learning	1271	2217	1784.5	106.3439
X2Feedback_ID_learning	406	1186	1618.5	106.3439
Number Sets of Ties = 7, Multiplicity Factor = 13794				
<b>Approximation With Correction</b>				
Alternative Hypothesis		Z-Value	Prob Level	Reject H0 at .050
Diff<>0		-4.0623	0.000049	Yes
Diff<0		-4.0717	0.999977	No
Diff>0		-4.0623	0.000024	Yes

The two groups also differed in perceptions of higher individual marks than syndicate marks. Neither normal distribution of the data nor equal variances (Modified Levene) could be rejected and hence the T-test was performed and demonstrated a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) between the two groups. From the results listed in table 5 below it can be said that second year students tend to feel that they scored higher in individual assignments than they did in syndicate assignments. This is contrary to what the perceptions of the first years were.

Table 6

<b>Equal-Variance T-Test Results</b>			
<b>Alternative Hypothesis</b>	<b>T-Value</b>	<b>Prob Level</b>	<b>Reject H0 at .050</b>
Difference <> 0	-3.0534	0.003083	Yes
Difference < 0	-3.0534	0.001541	Yes
Difference > 0	-3.0534	0.998459	No

Difference: (Individual\_higher\_than\_SW)-(X2Individual\_higher\_than\_SW)

Lastly, a statistically significant ( $p < 0.0001$ ) difference between the two year groups was demonstrated with regards to their perception of the adequacy of mechanisms in place to deal with freeloaders. The test statistics are presented in table 7 below.

Table 7

<b>Mann-Whitney U or Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test for Difference in Medians</b>				
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mann Whitney U</b>	<b>W Sum Ranks</b>	<b>Mean of W</b>	<b>Std Dev of W</b>
Adeq_measures_to_deal_freeloaders	1363	2309	1763	100.8708
X2Adeq_measures_to_deal_freeloaders	271	1012	1558	100.8708
Number Sets of Ties = 7, Multiplicity Factor 47148				
<b>Approximation With Correction</b>				
<b>Alternative Hypothesis</b>		<b>Z-Value</b>	<b>Prob Level</b>	<b>Reject H0 at .050</b>
Diff<>0		-5.4079	0.000000	Yes
Diff<0		-5.4178	1.000000	No
Diff>0		-5.4079	0.000000	Yes

In summary, statistically highly significant differences were observed between the first year and second year group for the following variables:

- Assessment is fair to all
- Regular feedback on syndicate assignments was received
- Feedback helped identify further learning
- Individual mark higher than syndicate mark
- Adequate mechanisms in place to deal with freeloaders

The proposition that the experience of group learning in the MBA changes over time can therefore not be disproved.

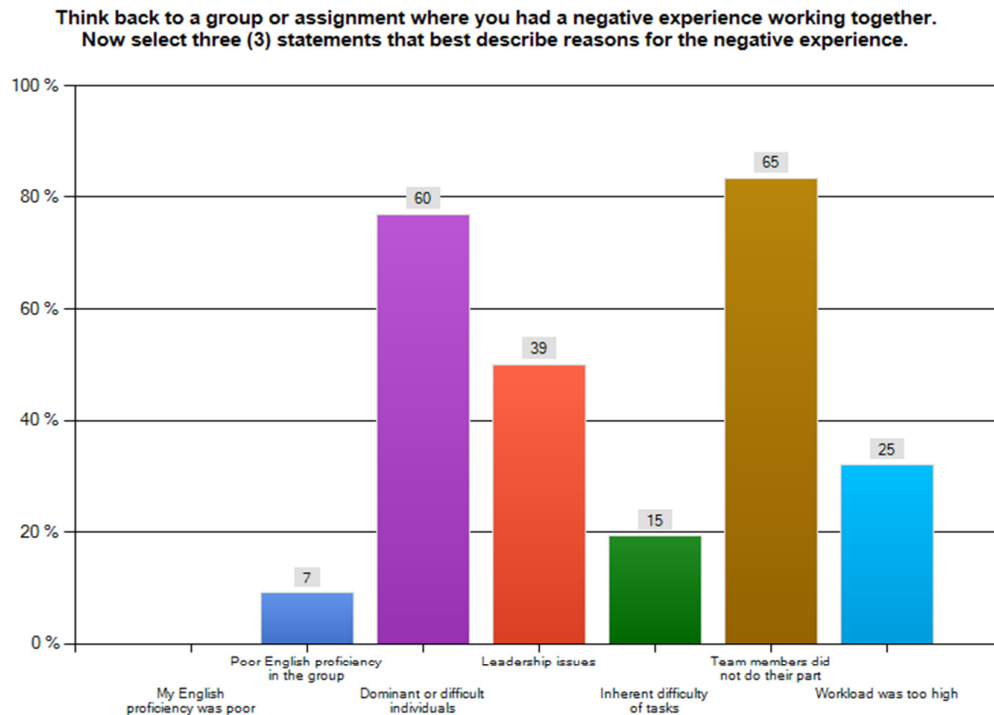
### **5.1.3 Open-ended questions**

The last two questions of the survey focused on asking respondents to rate the three most important attributes that characterised a positive and a negative group experience. Free-text responses were also recorded.

#### ***Factors that contributed to a negative group experience***

Seventy-eight responses were recorded. Sixty-five (65) respondents indicated that the primary reason for a negative experience in a syndicate was team members not doing their part, followed by dominant or difficult individuals (60 respondents) and leadership issues (39 respondents). Figure 15 below is a graphic representation of the reasons identified for a negative group experience.

Figure 15



All the most commonly selected reasons pointed to failing group dynamics, and this theme was further underlined in the free text responses. Eighteen (18) free text responses were recorded. Only one free text responses was written in a positive tone, with the respondent indicating that taking up responsibility was the key to avoiding negative group experiences. They are listed in table 8 below. The following themes can be identified:

- Perceived racism
- Lack of communication
- Failure to deliver on time
- Lack of commitment
- Different working styles
- Bias



- Personality issues

Table 8

1 Pedantic Project Manager
2 Insufficient commitment and communication from some individuals
3 Lack of respect from team members, where members did not submit their portion of work on time and did not bother to explain why.
4 No one seemed interested or took the lead
5 Not really had any negative experience, take responsibility and deal with it if there is any issues!
6 Racism. Whites thought they were educationally superior and formed allegiance to each other
7 No ownership or accountability to people who are leading a particular assignment
8 Different working styles - syndicate members who love meeting and talking with no action are frustrating
9 none
10 Team members were biased to the opinion of females.
11 Some people simply lack integrity, and commitment to the group
12 I was particularly not happy with an individual that did not pull their weight, let alone pitch up for classes. How they got to write exams is beyond me.
13 Personality differences and race perceptions
14 The workload contributed to a charged atmosphere, especially when you had team members delivering below standard work or did not pull their weight
15 - Lack of Communication
16 Some individuals are bullies who are difficult to reason with so you just let some issues go.
17 Racial imbalance and some groups (engineers and whites) thinking they were superior than other groups and as such wanting to tell what us must be done and how. Result: Retaliation. Subsequent interpretation: Blacks dont want to contribute to tasks.
18 Failure to reach sufficient enough consensus

The language used in the free text responses was emotive of nature as can be seen in words such as “charged atmosphere”, “pedantic”, “beyond me” and “bullies”. Perceived racism (overt or subtle) was mentioned three times and

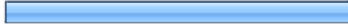




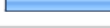


contributed to the development of separatism and feelings of allegiance forming. No respondent indicated that English proficiency was a personal problem, but seven (7) respondents indicated that English proficiency in the group was a problem. Twenty-five respondents indicated that negative group experiences were noticed when workload was high. The inherent difficulty of tasks was not seen as influencing group experience negatively.

***Factors that contributed to a positive group experience***

Eighty (80) responses were recorded and fifty-nine (59) respondents identified mutual respect as the most important reason for a positive group experience. Agreement on task significance (50 respondents) and opportunity for everyone to participate (39 respondents) were the other two factors that made up the three most commonly identified reasons. Equitable division of work (38 respondents) was also seen as an important factor. The results are summarised in figure 16 below.

**Figure 16**

		Response Percent	Response Count
Mutual respect		73.8%	59
Good listening skills		37.5%	30
Equitable division of work		47.5%	38
Opportunity for everyone to participate		48.8%	39
Agreement on task significance		62.5%	50
Comfortable workload		22.5%	18
	Other (please specify)		2
<b>answered question</b>			<b>80</b>

Only two free text comments were recorded and they dealt with high standards being set, motivated and driven individuals and agreement on doing well. Again, group dynamics came to the fore in determining what factors influence a positive group experience. The open-ended questions therefore supported the proposition that positive group dynamics influenced the group experience positively or alternatively that poor group dynamics influenced the group experience negatively.

## 5.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 4 lecturers and a senior programme manager. The total duration of the interviews was approximately 3 hours, averaging 36 minutes per interview. The themes that were identified during the interviews are discussed below.

### 5.2.1 Students' perceptions of syndicate work

Only two (2) interviewees expressed an opinion on whether students perceived syndicate assignments as positive. Both interviewees felt strongly that the perception was decidedly negative, citing difficulties with syndicate members' contributions (*"...I believe that most people don't like being in it, because they feel that there are always (inaudible) who get away with not doing the work and actually sharing the mark at the end of the day..."*) and motivation (*"...I think it is a negative, I think the very nature of the MBA person is they are not necessarily about learning things or whatever it is about getting the MBA, getting a good mark or whatever and in a sense they want to get from here to there..."*) as reasons for this.

### 5.2.2 Educational value of syndicate work

This was by far the theme that was prolific in generating comments with a total of 46 references made. The theme was consistent in all interviews but the views expressed were decidedly disparate. Great emphasis was placed on the fact that the approach to MBA education is preparing the graduates for general management.

*"...we're a general management school. So our assumption is we're teaching people to become general managers..."*

*“...managers, not MBA’s. Absolutely, that’s our philosophy...”*

From the interviews emerged that general managers have to be trained to do analysis and make informed, quality decisions while dealing with people. The theme was therefore subdivided into educational value derived from the teaching of technical skills, soft skills and skills of integration.

### ***Developing soft skills***

All interviewees commented on this aspect, with a total of 19 references. A number of different concepts were understood to form a part of soft skills and this ranged from negotiation to debating and communication. Interviewee 1 and 3 commented *“...but you have to influence and sort of negotiate and get the whole group to agree with you...”*, *“...That debate is syndicate...”*.

One interviewee spent considerable time explaining the importance of the syndicate assignment in engaging members in debate, so as to develop a better understanding of different perspectives. *“...Ideally you want them to be debating, you want them to be testing thoughts, you want them all to be having an input into this thing.”* *“...A phenomenal assignment, really the stuff that came out of that was superb, but quite honestly, that, as a syndicate assignment, would have been even better, because let them debate it, let them get into and take a stand on that, because it’s highly, highly charged...”*

Furthermore, lecturers also seem to be looking at the syndicate work to help students develop an approach to solving problems. Interviewee 3 commented *“...want to instil a method of thinking or a way of thinking, an approach to things, rather than the detail whichever model is fashion of the month, now...”* while interviewee 5 emphasised the value of group composition to teaching

the student to come to grips with issues of diversity “...if the syndicates are made up properly and there is a diverse group of people in a sense from backgrounds I think the syndicate can be a very useful concept...”. The latter interviewee went further and highlighted the different perspectives offered by diverse groups members and felt that this had special value to the learning value derived from syndicate work “...Well I think it helps in a sense because people can highlight different perspectives whereas if you are doing an individual assignment it is really hard to look at alternative perspectives...”.

If soft skills are understood to refer to interpersonal skills, many of the interviewees felt that syndicate work especially address this development. Statements such as “...useful in a way of forcing people to adhere to deadlines, be considerate, communicate better, understand how problems can occur, so I think there is a whole lot of other learning processes which come through...”, “...most of the syndicate assignments are mechanisms to force people to engage with each other...” and “...As you are going to have to do at the workplace, they are tough conversations. So let’s have tough conversations...” serve to confirm this.

The role of the syndicate assignment in simulating how one would work as a team in the workplace also came to the fore quite prominently. “...I would think that the intention is that every syndicate project is planning and led and organised and controlled to some aspect and then part obviously of your management is getting people to work together as a team and so that I think is the intention...”.

“...certainly very few people in this world work on their own, most of our work

*is done through teams...”*

*“...I think it is really about the collaboration and working towards a common goal in a group...”*

A general consensus was that dealing with people was a critical outcome to be achieved in the education of a general manager, but some felt that this was not explicitly taught or measured.

*“...people have opinions and management is about managing those opinions...”*

*“...hardest form managing is the management of peers where there’s no form of structural authority and that’s what you find in an MBA syndicate group...”*

*“...but it is the messiness of people, because it’s the only part about management that will never change...”*

*“...how to learn from the syndicate process, I think that is completely and utterly missing...”*

*“...So none of the power basis applies and so it’s a very interesting way to work but we don’t teach people...”*

One of the interviewees expressed a very strong opinion that the syndicate assignment should facilitate a development opportunity on an individual and personal level – a journey of self-discovery and growth. The person also expressed the opinion that much more could be done to enhance and emphasise the value derived from syndicate work in this respect. Some of the

person's statements in support of this are listed below:

*"...But we don't make any of this conscious to the students and therefore we are missing out on I think one of the greatest learning opportunities of the MBA which is who am I in a syndicate..."*

*"...I am very conscious as I go through my course is to talk about what is happening in your syndicate. So I am trying to feed it in there, but we need it much more..."*

*"...So probably more open conversations amongst the group than possibly you would have if you started off with finance and economics..."*

#### ***Developing technical skills***

Four of the interviewees commented on this aspect and made nine (9) references in total. Interviewees interpreted the technical skills to refer to subjects such as accounting and finance. Interviewee 4 commented: *"...A tutoring process would happen and you would be a bit better prepared for the exam, the non-finance people..."*

Opinions are divided on the contribution that syndicate assignments make to the development of technical skills. Interviewee 2 commented: *"...I don't think it's about transferring technical skills..."*, *"...I think, firstly, technical skills get acquired by an individual who is motivated to learn them or not, and a syndicate member can as little transfer a technical skill as I can..."* and lastly, *"...my personal bias is that the technical skills matter less than a set of interpersonal skills..."*. Contrastingly, the other three (3) interviewees that commented on this aspect felt that development of technical skills was an

intended and realised outcome of syndicate work. This can be evidenced in the following statements:

*“...You’re actually beginning to see the ability to do analysis and you people are coaching each other in the technical skills, absolutely...”*

*“...That is indeed what one is looking for, because we use the Socratic method and we heavily reliant on the learning that happens in that syndicate...”*

*“...getting people to work in teams, hopefully sharing their knowledge...”*

*“...And I found that was particularly problematic because what that meant was there was now no knowledge in either the class or in the syndicate and so in a sense the entire effort had to come from the lecturer in that subject...”*

*“...Correct because the chances are there is somebody there with better skills than the other and so in that way that person can then really assist with the ground level learning occurring...”*

#### ***Developing skills of integration***

There were few comments on the role that syndicate assignments played in developing integrative skills. The general understanding of the interviewees was that integrative skills refer to skills that allow the possessor thereof to apply theory to practice in an innovative and realistic manner.

*“...it’s at a higher cognitive level, maybe a bit of integration...”*

*“...I’m looking for something that is more – how would we call it, ambiguous, and were you take theory and putting it into a context...”*



*“...They’ve got to be teasing out – they’ve got to be making sense of their environment, they’ve got to be dealing with ...”*

*“...So it’s enactment of the process of questioning...”*

### **5.2.3 Syndicate assignments as a simulation of the workplace**

All interviewees commented on the fact that the syndicate assignment is a major part of making the MBA applicable to everyday workplace situations. In total, 11 references were made of this aspect. The lecturers intend to set syndicate assignments to reflect real-life workplace situations: *“...we like to think that this is a simulation of what happens in the job, or the company environment...”*, *“...would like to believe the syndicate assignment is a practical work orientated, issues focused concept and that’s how you learn the best I would have thought...”* and *“...the MBA is designed to simulate the real world...”*. Interviewee 5 commented: *“...And the point I also try and make to them is in different areas you will have different roles and that is exactly the same at work...”*. However, there is also realisation of the fact that a certain amount of simulation is needed to allow for experimentation: *“...that relatively hierarchy free environment is a useful experimental space in which you can experiment with different cells, if you wish, different styles of managing...”*.

Of course the workplace is a multidimensional setting and therefore the lecturers also have different opinions of what attributes of the workplace are best simulated by syndicate assignments. On the one hand many interviewees commented on the pressure in the MBA and how that simulates the workplace, while on the other hand the teamwork towards a common goal was emphasised.

*“...I think you know to succeed in the workplace you have often got to take high pressure where you are actually not coping and how are you going to deal with it”*

*“...because in business, and this is general management course, we have to work in teams”.*

Yet another perspective is offered when reference is made to organisational structure and performance management, and the possible role of the syndicate assignment in addressing this part of management is posited.

*“...well it is a leaderless group, but it also reflects matrix organisations which is what most of us are working in now “*

*“...the biggest problem with performance management is dealing with underperformance and this is where you can learn how to do it...”*

#### **5.2.4 The role of administration and lecturers in syndicate dynamics**

All interviewees commented on the role of lecturers and administrators in syndicate dynamics and a total of 13 references concerning this aspect were made in the interviews. The views were mostly strong against involvement in syndicate dynamics and problems:

*“...we don't want to get involved unless it's absolutely necessary...”*

*“...So from that perspective, we don't want to get involved to that extent, because it is ultimately the student's responsibility and their learnings...”*

*“...The syndicate must clean that up. They mustn't complain afterwards...”*

*“...So that's up to the syndicate which is hard because the Lecturer can't*

*always drive that...*

The view of the majority is slightly tempered by one interviewee when the person says: *“...Oh, certainly, but subtly, it’s got to be very subtly done. Once you prescribe it, you’re going to mix those dynamics up totally...”*. Another interviewee acknowledged the inherent difficulty of working in groups: *“...peer opinions are the hardest to manage...”*

Many comments were made around group dynamics training and its role in addressing some of the problems in syndicate groups, thereby justifying the non-involvement of staff. Some of these comments are listed below:

*“...My view, we’ve got to do group dynamics at least three times a year, just to sort this kind of problem out,...”*

*“...you use the basic technology you use in team building, and you use that. You redo the Belbin process and see what the roles are and what the strengths of the different teams are. Running through the performing, norming, storming and all of – running through that technology...”*

*“...you use the basic technology you use in team building, and you use that. You redo the Belbin process and see what the roles are and what the strengths of the different teams are. Running through the performing, norming, storming and all of – running through that technology...”*

Lastly, one interviewee expressed a very strong opinion that it was the responsibility of staff to get involved in these processes and to make the learning that can be derived from such a situation very apparent: *“...are not sitting back saying am I learning, how am I learning, who am I being, what am*

*I a learning through the syndicate process and I think that is our job is to make it explicit....”*

### **5.2.5 Reasons for difficulties in syndicates**

All five interviewees made a total of 22 references to possible reasons for difficulties in syndicates. A number of different reasons were forwarded, but the strongest agreement between interviewees was the phenomenon of a syndicate member not contributing but still getting awarded the same mark as the rest of the syndicate members who did contribute.

*“...most common problem is obviously people who hide in a syndicate and who don't cooperate and who in the end get the mark, but they didn't actually participate in the assignment...”*

*“...The problems that I typically hear about are non-performers, people who are free-riders...”*

*“...freeloaders...”*

*“...I think the very essence of management now out there in South Africa is about how do you handle the freeloaders...”*

While many interviewees discussed the structure of the syndicate as a possible difficulty, there was some disagreement on exactly what the underlying cause for this was. Some felt that difficulties in syndicates could be attributed to the lack of hierarchy, while others felt that a natural hierarchy developed and that there are inherent hierarchical problems manifesting in syndicates.

*“...And where there is now power relationship it's much worse, because once*

*I am your boss I can tell you where to take a hike...”*

*“...because peer opinions are – there’s no formal authority, so you can’t say, Okay, my opinion today is more important than yours...”*

*“...everybody are peers...”*

*“...there are natural roles that different people fulfil and if it’s an HR assignment, obviously I’m expected to take the lead, because I’m the HR expert, as opposed to the other guy who’s he finance expert and so on, but it’s temporary, it’s a temporary hierarchy...”*

*“...When syndicates collapse, it’s when one individual dominates, ja, absolutely...”*

*“...So I try and sort of get them to recognise those attributes and their argument is always well but at work then we’ll fire somebody, well I guess...”  
increasingly you can’t...”*

Another theme that emerged was that of dealing with conflict and diversity. Many interviewees felt that the inability of syndicate members to deal with diversity was at the heart of syndicate problems. Far more seriously was the opinion of one interviewee who felt that racism was exacerbated due to syndicate difficulties. There was acknowledgement from some, but not all interviewees that the necessary skills to deal with conflict are not explicitly taught to students.

*“...But I think the potential for more diversity problems is very real and it’s just because we don’t tell people how to handle it...”*

*“...that racism gets more entrenched through our syndicate processes because we don’t teach people how to do it, we don’t make it overt...”*

*“...I think one of the biggest problems with diversity is we don’t give feedback across diversity...”*

*“...Ja, so the one is we haven’t given you the skills. We haven’t taught you what the processes are...”*

*“...it’s an underlying principle that we don’t like conflict necessarily...”*

*“...They don’t teach you how to manage this”*

It was also commented upon that time and workload pressure bring out frustration and contribute to dysfunction in syndicates. *“...one of your very last syndicate assignments and I know there is just, let’s get this damn thing done...”*. Some comments were also made about the importance of setting up the syndicate according to some ground rules and managing the process according to those. This was seen as a method of preventing problems and when problems did arise, it was attributed to a lack of setting up rules at the start.

*“...disconnect in terms of expectations...”*

*“...group consensus about what expected behaviour should be...”*

### **5.2.6 Quality control of academic content of syndicate assignments**

All five interviewees commented, yielding a total of 22 references to measures put in place to ensure the quality of academic content in syndicate assignments. Although one interviewee indicated that the overall

responsibility for the course outlines and content of syndicate assignments resides with that individual, in collaboration with a senior manager, it was clear that there were many inconsistencies in the process.

*“...the assignments and course outlines get approved by ... and myself...”*

Lecturers essentially follow their own process and put content into syndicate assignments not specifically to achieve a desired outcome, but because it is expected of them.

*“...I don't always necessarily agree with syndicate work in all of the subjects...”*

*“...just allocated the assignments to each individual. There was no way faculties could have picked that up. And then your syndicate assignment was as good as the individual...”*

*“...so I teach my class and my real goal is to make people understand there is no closure, closure is not possible, that this is an ongoing process where you take snapshot and you make a decision based on information at hand. I can't say that to students. I need to give them some kind of deliverable that is – or assignment with a clear deliverable. So what then do I assess?...”*

*“...At the moment I don't assess my real teaching goal at all, at all...”*

*“...I'm relying on it to take place and what I'm assessing is a deliverable that I know people care about...”*

*“...I am much more cynical about the syndicate process by that stage...”*

One interviewee expressed concern that this haphazard approach to

syndicate assignments detracted from the value that the academic offering could add. The person commented: *“...I would say we could increase student learning by 40% by using the syndicate processes as a learning opportunity...”*

What exactly is learnt from syndicate assignments is not monitored to any extent, although staff recognised the benefit thereof.

*“...we don’t monitor it further, although I think practically speaking you can’t really continue with it...”*

*“...there is absolutely no communication or discussion around it...”*

*“...Sadly, no. We’re not monitoring it. I think the only time that we actually get to monitor it, is when people bring issues to our attention...”*

A good assignment is seen as one in which all members of the syndicate contributed equally, and to that end, individual lectures have been putting mechanisms in place to ensure that this objective is met in the completion of the syndicate assignment.

*“...a bad syndicate assignment is where one individual of the syndicate can own the whole assignment and he can just run with it...”*

*“...They’ve got to write these things up as case studies. I’m hoping to get 10 good case studies and then we’ve got a really nice research article that will flow from that... and that also sorts out quality...”*

*“...what I do is I request that the syndicate and the individuals forming the syndicate attach a one or two page contribution from their perspective what they have learned from participating in the particular assignment...”*



Some comments belied the inconsistency in approach to syndicate assignments applied by staff.

*“...there is no consistency throughout...”*

*“...I think we are over-teaching...”*

*“...there should be somebody who is owning the learning and I don't believe that has happened...”*

Lastly, one interviewee felt strongly that there is a mechanism in place to ensure academic quality in the form of lecturer assessment, which is consistently applied at the end of each lecture block.

*“...If you get bad evaluations two or three times in a row, you will never teach on that programme again, okay...”*

*“...So the guys who get the ratings, they really work...”*

*“...Okay, so ratings critical, critical. You bomb three or four times, nobody uses you...”*

### **5.2.7 Quality and role of feedback**

This theme seemed to be quite important and elicited comments from all interviewees. The importance of feedback is clearly acknowledged and seen as a requirement for all assignments. Feedback subsequent to exams is only required for students who have failed. There is acknowledgement of the educational value of feedback to students, and agreement that the current feedback to students is not ideal.

*“...we literally insist that at least feedback for people who failed, so they can*

*know why they've gone wrong and then the rest there is no feedback, which is, I agree, not a very good..."*

*"...educational opportunity that we are sort of pushing by the wayside..."*

*"...Okay, so that means there's been an administrative failure. We require comments on how they did with every assignment, meaningful comments, so people can improve..."*

*"...With exams we don't require it, except when people fail, there needs to be a justification..."*

The modular design was seen to complicate feedback since by the time that the feedback is available, students have moved onto a different block of lectures. The method of assessment also seems to hinder feedback. There were clearly different styles of assessment as witnessed from the different approaches of the lecturers who were interviewed.

*"...Okay, but they're always going to say that. The problem is how much is enough, so it's very, very difficult, but I think to overcome that, is faculty need to have a rubric of sorts, and when they brief the students, they need to tell them I'm looking for content, I'm looking for theory, I'm looking for writing style and that's the breakdown..."*

*"...So, I mean all the evidence suggest that feedback is better when there's an opportunity for you to change your behaviour and one of the disadvantage of the modular format is that that it's a process, it requires time to unfold, and that's not really possible..."*

*"...because the weakness of our model is the very fact that we don't have me*

*coming back and say, “This is what I’m observing,” and you then able to change or not...”*

*“...So one of the consequences of our choice to go for a modular design is that we lose that iterative – or some dimension of that iterative process and making it more modular, I don’t think will solve it...”*

*“...But the lecturer has to go in for 10 minutes and say, I just want to give you some feedback...”*

*“...I think there should be more one on one feedback...”*

*“...So I think this cold giving out of marks isn’t ideal. It’s getting marks in rather than seeing it as a development opportunity...”*

*“...It is really hard to give good feedback in a sense I think one tends to mark relatively...”*

*“...my response quite frankly would be go to the one that scored seventy five in a sense as opposed to really trying to sort of write copious notes about this is a bit thin or whatever but in a sense what else they need to do...”*

### **5.2.8 Peer assessment**

Compared to the other themes, peer assessment elicited fewer references, although four interviewees commented on it. The method was applied for the first time in 2011 and is based on members of a syndicate rating each others’ contributions and incorporating this rating into the mark of the individual for the syndicate assignment.

*“...I am not sure that GIBS does do that, I certainly know that at ... for*

*example there was a form that every student had to complete where he would rate how his fellow syndicate members their participation level and contribution towards the thing so that is quite a nice concept...”*

*“...So you’re going to assign a percentage mark of the overall mark of that assignment...”*

*“...each syndicate member rates the other members’ contribution. So that’s beginning to help...”*

The support for peer assessment was based on two premises. First of all it was seen as a more realistic simulation of the reality on the workplace. Secondly it was seen as a method of dealing with members not contributing in syndicate assignments.

*“...The first thing is I’m very much in favour of peer assessment and I think that it could be extended to the workplace as well...”*

*“...An attempt to fix that is, what was the contribution in the syndicate assignment?...”*

Some of the caveats raised included the complexity of peer assessment and the need for the process to be transparent.

*“...it needs to be an open and – you can’t hide that, you need to be open about that, because that’s not fair...”*

*“...peer assessment needs to be extraordinarily (carefully managed) – it’s a very complex form of assessment..”*

### 5.2.9 Syndicate work as a differentiating factor

Opinion was spilt on whether syndicate work and the management thereof within the educational model could serve as a differentiator for a business school. On the one hand it was felt that syndicate work is applied at most business schools, and on the other hand it was felt that a different process around syndicate work could add value and serve as a differentiator.

*“...This is the norm of most business schools working in syndicates, so I don’t see it as a differentiator...”*

*“...it will never be a differentiator, I don’t think and I don’t agree it in that context...”*

*“...So I think it’s way beyond the MBA and I believe that if we can get this right, it can be a huge point of differentiation...”*

*“...So I think that it’s a huge opportunity to differentiate a business school, but it’s very hard to know who would know that and understand it, I think once people have been through the process they would be much richer...”*

*“...A real plus yes...”*

### 5.2.10 Andragogy training

There was strong, consistent opinion expressed that training of lecturers in andragogy was inadequate and that the informal processes currently followed were not enough to prepare all lecturers for their respective roles. Furthermore it was felt that such training was needed and could add value to the academic offering.

*“...so no, there isn’t, that’s the short answer. They do learn by example...”*

*“...it’s not one formalised thing...”*

*“...So it’s very informal, there’s no – nobody goes for specific ETD training...”*

*“...There’s a fair amount of informal mentoring happening with the faculty...”*

*“...Not enough, but we get more than most universities...”*

*“...but I don’t think the lecturers are conscious about syndicate processes...”*

*“...maybe they teach you to do a lecture and how to mark, but nobody gets to think about adult learning...”*

*“...It’s just through osmosis (LAUGHING) as opposed to any you know I have had no formal training in that area...”*

Discontinuity in even informal training of lecturers was evident.

*“...So the newer faculty wouldn’t have been exposed to it, but those of us who’ve been around a long time, would have seen it...”*

### **5.2.11 Improvements**

Many suggestions were made regarding ways in which improvements could be made to the current academic offering of the MBA model as offered at GIBS. They are listed here *verbatim* for the sake of completeness. Some of these suggestions will be explored in Chapter 7.

*“...every lecturer being an expert in adult learning...”*

*“...So you each reveal a learning opportunity to the group and you contract with each other that you are going to help each other learn their softer skills or it could be technical skills but generally listening skills, speaking skills,*

*assertiveness skills...*

*“...reflect on who are you in the classroom...”*

*“...it’s the mirror to who you are and the map for your way forward and every syndicate and we almost force some sort of feedback process at the beginning of every syndicate you say I am wanting to learn this...”*

*“...We need a learning captain for each MBA here and I am responsible for it and this process I am responsible...”*

*“...So I would say we need an intervention, I would say halfway through your second set of subjects...”*

*“...runs a process with the lecturers for the next hour and a half to think about andragogy, how do people learn and what can we do to maximise people’s learning would be hugely useful...”*

*“...But so instead of teaching a 27 hour course we are each teaching 25 hour courses, but the learning captain owns those hours and actually deals with maps and mirrors and personal growth...”*

*“...I am sure it wouldn’t be you know there has been criticism that what we do front end with the students is then repeated by the same Lecturer later in the course or whatever so there is obviously some capacity there so why don’t we then use the lead concept or whatever to usefully apply that process...”*

*“...I’m not sure where in the MBA we teach the things like performance measurement and that sort of thing but in a way this would be an ideal practical application of that so you know...”*





## Chapter 6

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions that MBA students hold of the educational value of group learning and the intention of lecturers with such activities. In so doing, an association between group dynamics and experiences with group learning activities was sought, the perceived value of group learning in skills transfer was investigated and the degree of active management of the group learning process by lecturers was evaluated. The initial premise held that a better understanding of the factors affecting educational value of group learning would enable business schools to sensibly adjust curricula and academic processes to answer the needs of a diverse set of constituencies and promote the programme in the marketplace.

#### **6.1 Factors related to the sample**

The sample collected was biased towards males. While none of the statistical analyses have revealed a gender difference, the possibility that it may have influenced the results cannot be excluded. Similarly, such an effect of gender on perceptions of group learning within the context of MBA education could not be found in the literature.

#### **6.2 Educational value of group learning**

The model of Gabriel and Griffiths (2008) found application in the results of the current study and allowed a broad classification of the perception of educational

value of group learning to reside in: (1) skills transfer in the learning environment and (2) group dynamics.

### 6.2.1 Skills transfer

The study confirms the findings of many workers (Hay, 2006; Sturges, *et al.*, 2003) that the educational value derived from an MBA and group learning in particular, is multifaceted and subtle. The finding therefore that students valued group learning equally for its contribution to technical, soft and integrative skills was perhaps not unexpected if one takes into consideration the heterogeneity of approaches followed by lecturers when designing group assignments. The lecturers clearly indicated different professed intentions with the group assignments. These intentions did not always correspond to the subject area in which the lecturer taught. As an example, some of the lecturers that were involved in composite courses aimed specifically at integrative skills had a very firm view that group learning was aimed at developing interpersonal skills. Without educational management oversight into the processes of setting group assignments across the programme, it could easily lead to misalignment between teaching intentions and outcomes, which according to Jaarsma (Jaarsma, *et al.*, 2008) could impact negatively on students' perception of learning. As shown by Bruce (G. Bruce & Edgington, 2008), the perception students hold of the educational value of the MBA program influences their word-of-mouth recommendation of the business school. Bruce (2009) has also shown that the strongest predictors of perceived educational value of an MBA programme was satisfaction with the degree and satisfaction with the school or program. Ivy (Ivy & Naudé, 2004) identifies positive student perception of learning as a critical element of success in the MBA marketplace. The idea of a

“learning captain” as posited by one of the interviewees may be a helpful idea to explore in this regard. Such a person would take overall responsibility for ensuring that the learning outcomes are met through the assignments set and that instruction method chosen best suits that specific need.

In agreement with the study of Sturges (2003), the questionnaire in this study explored the relative importance of the knowing-why and knowing-how competencies, however it neglected to specifically interrogate the respondents regarding possible value that might have been seen in the so-called knowing-who competencies. Since these latter competencies enable their possessor to build social capital, it is regarded as an important outcome of the MBA programme. It is suggested that future investigation of the knowing-whom competencies may add better understanding to the value that MBA programmes add to graduates.

### **6.2.2 Group dynamics**

Although students expressed an appreciation of the educational value of group learning, it is abundantly clear that there is a high level of dysfunction among groups in the programme. The three major reasons in the current study to have been associated with negative experiences of group learning were; (1) team members not doing their part, (2) dominant or difficult individuals and (3) leadership issues. Some of the factors to be associated with a positive group experience included mutual respect and agreement of task significance. This confirms the findings of Gabriel & Griffiths (2008) in international learning groups as well as those of Kelly (2009) dealing with multicultural business education. Furthermore in the current study, a discrepancy was shown to exist with regards to language skills in groups. No respondent indicated that English

proficiency impeded their ability to contribute to group discussions, yet several respondents believed that English proficiency was a problem in the group. Gabriel & Griffiths (2008) however found in their study that English proficiency was a factor that contributed to dysfunction in international learning groups. It is therefore uncertain what role English proficiency would play in group learning in the current context, and could be an area where students would benefit from assistance.

While the comments of students mirrored the themes outlined above, it also introduced a worrying element of possible racism into the analysis. The one respondent wrote: “...*Racial imbalance and some groups (engineers and whites) thinking they were superior than (sic) other groups...*” while another also referred to “*whites thought they were educationally superior and formed allegiance to each other...*”. It has to be taken into account that the emotive nature of the comments may indicate over-exaggeration, but the possibility of racism in the learning groups should nevertheless be taken very seriously. The South African context is all too familiar with racial issues, but it is also possible that racism becomes a convenient proxy for explanation of behaviour that is actually rooted in culture or purely individual in nature. Within an international setting, a similar problem could exist where classrooms and learning groups assume a multicultural appearance. Watson & colleagues (1993) reported increased group dysfunction and conflict within multicultural groups. Interestingly, they reported that groups with a diverse ethnic and cultural background tended to have negative effects on individuals and group outcomes early on in the life of the group, but that this diversity of views became an advantage over time. They suggested “*it takes some time for group members*

*to get over interpersonal differences on observable dimensions that tend to be associated with lower levels of initial attraction and social integration*". The possibility that groups should spend longer periods working together during the MBA programme need to be investigated in an attempt to increase the performance and function of teams. Yet another possibility that could be considered in an attempt to deal with the issues of culture and diversity as more subtle manifestations of race, emanates from the work of Doherty (2008). She refers to "student subsidy" of an international curriculum to reflect the attempt made at incorporating cultural context into teaching of management practices. This idea is already incorporated in the current programme and was referred to a couple of times by the lecturers. Given the demonstrated need to address tolerance in groups, it is suggested that this component of the current programme is pursued and developed to a greater extent.

The allocation of team members was only briefly addressed by one of the lecturers, referring to Belbin roles (Belbin, 1981) being important in such allocation processes. However, the literature regards such approaches as quite antiquated and presents a substantial body of work indicating that far more dynamic and successful approaches can make a meaningful contribution to group dynamics and support more effective group learning (Kelly, 2009). The positive correlation between the perceived educational value that syndicate composition added and the general perception of group learning in the current study confirms the importance of allocation of team members to the educational outcome. The work of Kelly (2009), building on Watson (Watson, *et al.*, 1993) suggested that the criteria used for group allocation is very important within such a multicultural setting.

The role that lecturers and administrators play in forming and shaping perceptions of group dynamics and functioning should not be underestimated. The marked difference between the first year and second year students on various aspects that influence group dynamics provides some evidence for this. Items dealing with regular feedback from lecturers and the role of feedback in identifying areas for further learning directly reflect education management. It has been shown that education management strongly influence the perception of education value that students hold (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2006) and that the feeling of equality in the group is the strongest predictor of group performance (Glew, 2009). The contribution that feedback can make towards learning seems to be well recognised by lecturers, as reflected in the statement “...*all the evidence suggests that feedback is better when there’s a chance for you to change your behaviour...*”. However, there is also realisation of the fact that more often than not there are “administrative failures” which leads to suboptimal, delayed or incomplete feedback. While the modular structure of the programme is advanced as the major reason for delayed feedback, this fails to address suboptimal and incomplete feedback. Lecturers and administrators appear to rely on lecturer evaluations by students to indicate whether there is a problem with the education style and practices of lecturers. According to Martell (2007) this ignores the education opportunity that timely feedback could offer. Furthermore, modern academics have shown that incorporation of students in assessment constitutes a learning opportunity in itself (Fluckiger, *et al.*, 2010). There is still some academic debate as to whether student involvement should include self-assessment, but the evidence seems to be quite clear that peer-assessment adds value .

While it is possible that the difference between the two student groups is related to the students themselves, it is proposed that it is more likely the difference between the two groups is the result of the longer experience of the senior group with group learning and the manner in which it is managed. An area of further research to refute or confirm this would be to evaluate the current first year group in a year's time on the same measurements.

The introduction of a peer assessment component to group learning in the current first year may also have influenced the generally more positive perceptions surrounding aspects of group learning in the group. Yet another possible explanation for the difference between the two groups could be an identified factor or a combination of the aforementioned two options.

The perceptions of peer assessment and the role it plays in group dynamics needs special consideration. The respondents indicated strong support for peer assessment, a position that also seems to carry favour with the lecturers. In the current study it seems that peer assessment is looked upon as a mechanism to deal with individuals who do not contribute to syndicate assignments yet get awarded the same mark as the rest of the team members. This can be seen in the greater importance attributed to peer assessment by second year students when compared to first year students. Peer assessment would add credibility to education management's attempt to ensure equality in treatment of students (Glew, 2009). However, as mentioned above, this ignores the potential educational value contained in the peer assessment process (Elliott, 2008). Some lecturers see the peer assessment process as an opportunity to practice "having tough conversations" and this would align the process to support reinforcement of management principles through incorporating an action

learning model. The finding that support for peer-assessment and the desire to be in a syndicate group with friends was positively correlated, is not surprising. It is suggested that this points to the underlying frustration with the members of a syndicate group and the unsubstantiated belief that a syndicate group with friends would be a more positive experience.

Interestingly, despite this statistically highly significant difference, it did not influence the overall general perception of the educational value of group learning, suggesting a willingness from students to participate in such activities despite its obvious problems. While the association between education practices and perceptions of educational value is not new, the marked difference between two cohorts of students reported here is.

#### **6.4 Intentions of lecturers with group work**

There was a definite strong feeling among lecturers that group learning provided students with an opportunity to learn to work collaboratively and that this is an accurate reflection of the current real-life workplace. However, no monitoring of the learning process takes place. Furthermore, while aware of the problems in group learning, very few interventions are instituted and students are not taught explicit methods of dealing with dysfunctional behaviour in groups. A 20-year review of a number of longitudinal studies on the added value of the MBA has revealed that emotional, social and cognitive intelligence can be developed through proper graduate management courses and their benefits last as far out as seven years (Boyatzis & Saatcioglu, 2008). This would lend empirical support to the suggestions of some of the lecturers that a more formal process of dealing with group functioning should be instituted. Not



only will this improve the perceptions of self, but also that of different creeds and cultures through building greater emotional and social intelligence. The one lecturer referred to this as the “map and mirror” process, implying introspection and focus. Given the outspoken drift in perceptions of the value of group learning witnessed in the current study, the change in attributes of graduates should be monitored and researched, especially given how long these attributes are reported to last. This will add to our understanding of the impact of such a programme and possibly of the perceptions underlying dysfunctional graduate learning groups.

There was disagreement whether a dedicated module that equips students to deal with dysfunctional groups can serve as a differentiator for business schools who would employ it. The perception created was that the lecturers did not see any problems with the current positioning of the programme and hence it is unclear how the business school attempts to address the challenges of a globalised world and increased competition for graduates as outlined by Bruce (G. Bruce & Edgington, 2008).

A potential role for andragogical training at business schools was clearly identified. In the current study it was clear that such training happens at best informally, especially within the context of greater emphasis being placed on research. The finding is by no means unique (Norton, Aiyegbayo, Harrington, Elander, & Reddy, 2010), and bureaucracy (apart from structural problems in the programme) is another culprit that prevents proper attention being given to these aspects. Especially assessment suffers when andragogical induction of new lecturers does not take place (Norton, *et al.*, 2010). From the transcripts an innovative solution for meeting the research agenda while teaching is



forwarded, similar to the study of Postholm (Postholm, 2008). Many other innovative ideas came to the fore during the interviews and one would expect a proper forum for expression and sharing of such ideas to be established if it does not exist already.

The evidence provided in the current study indicates that lecturers achieve a diverse set of educational outcomes and the indicated intention of individual lecturers is reflected in the perceptions of educational value that students hold. However, a direct causal link between such an intention from the lecturer and the perception of the student cannot be proven given the collection instrument used in the current study. This area would be better researched with the use of controlled experiments.



## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

The present study has shown that students in the MBA programme under investigation value group learning for its contribution to development of technical, soft and integrative skills. The general perception of group learning was that it bolstered the educational value of the programme. Serious dysfunctional group dynamics are a constant feature of group learning, but seem to especially take on a racial undertone in the study reported here. There is also consistent confirmation of the negative effect that perception of inequality and unfairness has on the group dynamics. While the introduction of peer assessment in the first year group is a factor variable that could not be excluded from the current study, there is evidence that the students' perception of group learning and the associated influencing factors deteriorate over time. This has important implications in terms of the professed mission of the institution to raise leadership quality in the country. It is posited that the current individualised and *laissez faire* approach of lecturers and administrative staff to the group dynamics at play in group learning contributes to the change in perception over time. While there is clear evidence that the educational approaches reach their objectives in the broader sense, many opportunities have been identified that could improve the educational value the programme has to offer to its students.

The following suggestions for programme improvement are thus forwarded:

1. A group learning activity may not be indicated in every module and could be sacrificed in the interest of more regular interventions aimed at equipping students with the necessary skills to deal with dysfunctional group dynamics.
2. A unified, consistent educational approach from lecturers could be achieved if andragogic training was implemented. This would add academic rigour to the programme content and educational practices.
3. The appointment of “learning captains” would further support the achievement of the objective outlined above.
4. Greater emphasis on personal reflection and encouragement of a process of engaging with dysfunctional behaviour would better prepare graduates to deal with the core of management, which is people. This could also form the basis of action learning for subjects such as human resource management where topics such as performance review would receive attention.

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## Appendix 1 : Questionnaire

### Consent section

I am doing research on the educational value in MBA education of group learning. You are requested to answer a number of questions related to your attitude towards group learning as experienced during your MBA education to date. Your responses will help academics better understand the factors that determine the educational value from group learning and allow administrators to make meaningful changes to curricula. The questionnaire should not take more than 20 minutes of your time. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any stage without any penalty whatsoever. Your anonymity and the confidentiality of the data are guaranteed. Please try and be as accurate and as honest as possible in answering. By completing the questionnaire, you indicate your willingness to participate in the study. If you have any concerns, you are invited to contact my supervisor or me. Contact details are provided below:

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### Questionnaire

Theme	No.	Question
Demographics	1	Gender Age Race Citizenship Undergraduate degree Work area MBA I / II
For the following questions, please indicate your response by circling the appropriate number from 1 to 7. Where 1= strongly disagree, 2= moderately disagree, 3= disagree, 4=indifferent, 5 = agree, 6 = moderately agree, 7 = strongly agree.		
General perception	2	I found group work generally valuable to my learning
Educational outcomes	3	Group work helped me understand technical issues in subjects better
	4	Group work helped me develop soft skills
	5	Group work helped me integrate knowledge from different subject areas
	6	The assessment of group work was fair to all members of the group
	7	Feedback on group work was received regularly
	8	Feedback on group work helped me identify areas for further learning
Group performance	9	My individual mark was higher than the group mark
Group interaction	10	I would prefer to be in a group with friends
	11	I was comfortable to depend on team members to deliver on time
	12	I felt individually accountable for group work
	13	Splitting up the group was an innovative way to deal with workload pressure
	14	I still benefited from the group even if I was not directly involved in an assignment
	15	I would support an additional peer-assessment portion to syndicate assignment marks
	16	The mechanisms in place for dealing with “freeloaders” in group assignments is adequate
	17	The group assignments were a reasonable simulation of situations one would encounter in the workplace
	18	The composition of my group contributed positively to the educational value
	19	I often felt incapable of positively contributing to group discussions



For the following question, think of the group or assignment were you had a negative experience working together. Now select 3 statements that best describe reasons for the negative experience:		
Criteria for negative group experience	19	My English proficiency was poor Poor English proficiency in the group Dominant or difficult individuals Leadership issues Inherent difficulty of tasks Team members did not do their part Workload was too high
For the following question, think of the group or assignment were you had a positive experience working together. Now select 3 statements that best describe reasons for the positive experience:		
Criteria of positive group experience	20	Mutual respect Good listening skills Equitable division of work Opportunity for everyone to participate Agreement on task significance Comfortable workload

## **Appendix 2 : Interview guide**

Name of interviewer:

1. Could you give me a brief background of your involvement in teaching?  
(GIBS and elsewhere)
2. Which course(s) do you present?
3. What are the most important skills that you expect a student to have acquired upon completion of your course?
4. Do you see the group assignments as primarily for transfer of technical skills, development of soft skills (such as conflict resolution, interpersonal skills and leadership) or a combination of both?
5. To what degree do you think the assignments you give contribute to meeting these objectives?
6. How aware are you of students' problems with group learning?
7. What, if any, improvements can be made to the MBA curriculum to deal with these problems?
8. What is your view on giving feedback to syndicates?
9. What is your opinion on peer assessment

### Appendix 3 : Survey data

Sex	Age	Race	Nationality	Undergrad degree	Employment sector	MBA year	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19
1	4	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	5	2	1	1	2	Always	7	1	7	1	1	7	1	1	2	1
1	3	1	1	1	1	2	5	5	5	4	1	2	2	Always	6	2	6	6	3	6	1	5	1	2
1	4	1	1	1	1	2	5	5	5	5	1	3	3	Always	5	2	5	6	5	5	1	5	5	1
0	3	1	1	1	1	2	5	3	3	3	1	1	1	Always	5	1	7	3	1	6	1	3	1	3
1	3	3	1	1	1	2	7	5	6	5	3	3	3	Sometimes	3	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	3
0	2	1	1	2	2	2	5	4	7	6	2	3	1	Always	7	2	5	7	4	6	1	3	5	1
0	3	2	1	3	1	2	5	4	6	4	3	1	2	Sometimes	5	1	5	5	3	7	1	6	6	2
0	3	1	1	3	1	1	5	6	3	4	6	5	5	Always	7	3	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	1
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1	4	2	1	4	2	1	5	3	3	3	1	2	3	Often	3	3	7	6	3	3	1	2	1	1
0	4	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	Often	3	5	6	6	2	1	7	3	4	7
0	7	1	1	3	1	2	3	5	3	6	3	1	2	Often	5	3	5	5	6	5	3	4	3	6
0	4	2	2	3	1	2	5	5	6	7	6	6	7	Never	4	6	3	6	7	4	3	6	7	6
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1	3	1	1	1	1	1	5	6	5	4	5	3	4	Often	3	5	7	5	3	5	2	5	5	1
1	4	4	1	1	1	1	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	Sometimes	4	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	3
1	2	3	1	4	1	1	7	5	7	6	6	6	5	Sometimes	3	5	5	7	1	6	2	5	4	2

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1	3	2	1	3	1	1	5	3	5	5	3	5	5	Sometimes	3	7	5	6	5	6	3	3	1	2
1	2	1	1	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Often	1	2	7	7	2	6	1	5	1	1
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1	3	1	1	1	1	2	5	5	4	5	2	1	1	Often	4	1	5	5	5	7	1	5	5	1
0	4	3	1	2	1	2	7	6	7	7	2	1	2	Often	1	5	6	5	7	6	1	6	4	2
1	3	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	2	4	1	1	1	Often	5	2	2	6	2	2	1	1	2	4
1	3	3	1	1	1	2	5	3	6	4	3	3	1	Often	4	3	5	3	2	7	1	4	5	2
0	2	1	1	2	1	2	5	5	6	6	1	2	2	Often	7	6	7	7	7	7	1	5	5	3
0	5	1	1	2	1	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	4											
0	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	5	5	1	1	1	1	Often	5	1	7	4	3	7	1	3	4	5

## Appendix 4 : Interview transcripts

**FILE: 001-A-001 12-09-2011**

INTERVIEWER: Okay, [REDACTED], ons gaan gesels oor – my navorising is oor – we should probably do this in English, because I'm going to transcribe it.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Okay, no problem.

INTERVIEWER: So my research is about the educational value of group assignments, or syndicate assignments, as we know them in the ABA programme and I would like to get a bit of perspective from programme manager's point of view on what problems are normally associated with syndicate activities.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, that's an easy one. So what's the most common problem?

INTERVIEWEE 1: The most common problem is obviously people who hide in a syndicate and who don't cooperate and who in the end get the mark, but they didn't actually participate in the assignment. That's the one thing. Another challenge could be the fact is that, nobody is really – you can have a study leader for a subject, but everybody is peers. It's not like in – because we like to think that this is a simulation of what happens in the job, or the company environment.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm.

INTERVIEWEE 1: But ultimately, in the company environment there is the manager or the director and they can actually sort out the (inaudible).

INTERVIEWER: So there's some kind of line of authority?

INTERVIEWEE 1: There's a line of authority, while this is a flat structure. So often you have to – it can be challenging when you have to – you can't just tell someone what to do, but you have to influence and sort of negotiate and get the whole group to agree with you, if it's something that can be contentious, if it's something that there are various viewpoints about, you know, to get to one answer – one agreed answer. I think then when people don't cooperate, it might be easy, because then one person does work, which is really not what it's about. So it's also – so it can be a negative perspective, but from our perspective, that's also a positive, because you actually learn – you simulate the environment where you have to, if you're in an environment where you have to influence people. For argument's sake, somebody who's a project manager, people don't necessarily report into you, but you have to influence people to actually get to a common goal at the end of the day. So Jonathan Cook always says something great at the beginning of a programme, when there's first years coming in, saying that, "I wish you a difficult syndicate group," because the learning are just so much better because you learn to cope in these situations. Say for argument's sake, you're a very quiet person, the danger in that is that somebody who is very opinionated and loud, it's usually the person who shouts the loudest, who gets to sway the audience or the group. And also the trick then of the leader in that specific project, would be to include everybody and to get the loud mouths to stand back a bit and to get the quiet – and to get everybody to be included in the project at the end of the day.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that it would be of value to monitor that learning in some

way and do you think that you are monitoring it in some way?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Sadly, no. We're not monitoring it. I think the only time that we actually get to monitor it, is when people bring issues to our attention. We say in the guidelines we don't want to get involved unless it's absolutely necessary. So we like to people to work really amongst themselves and to try and – well, and only escalate if they get the problem, (inaudible) repetitive, somebody does not want to participate and so then I get involved. I've got a solution for – we started with – not with you guys, but the current first years, we said to them, and maybe then we will be able to see how this comes through if people apply this. We've said to them that, "Should you have an instance where people are not participating, you have an open process. You say that the job that was assigned to you, you didn't participate, or you didn't come to the meetings, whatever. So you're going to assign a percentage mark of the overall mark of that assignment." And if people start to implement this, then we'll probably be able to monitor it more. I think we shy away from it, because we don't want to appear to sort of be like – because it's not our projects. We want to leave people to solve it. So from that perspective, we don't want to get involved to that extent, because it is ultimately the student's responsibility and their learnings.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And do you think that racial issues are sometimes at the backbone of many of these problems?

INTERVIEWEE 1: I wouldn't say it's necessary the norm of the ones that has been reported to me, but it has happened, yes. I have come across it, where one or two students have – when they were in the wrong, so to speak – when they – the whole

team is complaining that this person is not working. I've had an instance where a student would throw around the race card. I don't think it is as prevalent as it is, in terms of people might have it, or have that feeling, but they don't necessarily share it with the group. So people are very piecey around that. I've seen racial tensions in the group, in the larger group in the classroom, where there's your more contentious subjects where the HBSA when you talk – you know, when you go and have those kind of political discussions, then it comes to the front, but I think in smaller groups people are a little bit hesitant to actually throw it out there, because that can really sour the whole perception and people can actually turn around, if it's more than one. If it's like a divided group, but (inaudible) usually have when it's people who actually do not participate and that's in the minority in the group.

INTERVIEWER: So am I correct in saying that the syndicate assignment, as a proportion of the total mark, is a purposive assignment? You have it in virtually every single module?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And is the idea then – because the subjects differ quite a bit. You know the softer skill, the human behaviour type versus the corporate finance, yet there's a syndicate assignment in both.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: What's the rationale behind that?

INTERVIEWEE 1: You know it is really – we do understand that not everybody –

obviously, let me just contextualise it, your syndicate assignment will always count proportionately less than your individual, because we need to – well, in your core subjects, it will always be your exam will be 60% and the rest will be divided between the individual and a group assignment. Some of them, the minority, will have only a group assignment and the exam. In your lectures, most of them will have a syndicate component in, (inaudible) exam, but your individual component becomes your exam, but then there's occasional ones where the ones, where they just do class participation, individual, and that will be your whole norm. But I think that the reason is really to foster this working in a group and not everybody is necessarily, apart the electives, but in your core subjects, not everybody is an expert. And the whole idea is about the collaborative learning. You're the CA in this group and this is Finance and I'm the marketer and I know nothing about the subject and it's really about fostering that cooperation and that sharing, but at the end of the day, because this is an examined programme, you need to also measure individual performance, so you can't only have that and it will always count less, but it is, because in business, and this is general management course, we have to work in teams.

INTERVIEWER: So would you say it's the transfer of technical skills in a subject like corporate finance?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Mmm.

INTERVIEWER: Obviously the transfer of technical skills takes place to a certain extent, but also the development of soft skills, of learning how to coordinate activities, also takes place?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: Which one would you say is the major drive for syndicate assignments?

INTERVIEWEE 1: I think for – because you will have a technical component in there, so you need to obviously pass and understand the brief and get together, but there will always be one person who is more – in the majority of the cases – who is more the leader and who understands the subject more, so I think it is really about the collaboration and working towards a common goal in a group, but obviously the skills, and depending on the nature of the assignment. I don't always necessarily agree with syndicate work in all of the subjects, because I do believe that in a subject such as finance, your core foundation finance course, it does not always – I don't think, because I do know the reality of the situation is, people don't work together on those things. There's one person who actually will submit that and next time you're in marketing, somebody else will submit. So even though we like to think that people work – and occasionally people – and in a lot of instances they do, but I think there is a lot more prevalence of people having one person, "No, I'll do this assignment, you do the next one." And then you might get people gathering or putting it together at the end of the day, but there's always usually one person who does the bulk of the work, because they are more of an expert, or either they have more time. So in reality, but I think in real life it works like that as well in teams.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that the skills you pick up in syndicate assignments, could be a differentiator for the Gibbs MBA versus other MBAs? I know that the idea of



syndicate work is – I think it sort of started in Harvard –

INTERVIEWEE 1: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And it was something that virtually every school uses.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: But my thinking around it is, and I would like to test what – how you see it.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: Is that if a module was focussed on developing those group skills, the group dynamics, how to read that and how to adjust that, would you think there's space for developing something like that as a differentiator for the programme?

INTERVIEWEE 1: I don't think so, no. I think it's really – it's the norm. This is the norm of most business schools working in syndicates, so I don't see it as a differentiator and I do think there is a place, whether it is – like I said, I don't necessarily agree with the concept in all cases, but your subjects such as your leadership modules, your HBSA, where people need to work collaboratively, your organisational development, you're going to work in those teams, this is to test your EQ and your leadership styles and yes, I think it pulls through to the others, to an extent, but it becomes more skills based and it becomes skewed, the relationship there. So I don't think it will ever be – although - it will never be a differentiator, I don't think and I don't agree it in that context.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE 1: I don't know if that answers your question.

INTERVIEWER: No, it does, it does.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: Just, to a certain extent the learning or the development of these soft skills is – it's almost incidental learning, where for a certain student it would be lot and for another student it might not be and from a pure educational point of view, you might want to be measuring that, so that you can tick that off.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: But it becomes difficult, because at a post-graduate level, that might not be exactly what you want to do.

INTERVIEWEE 1: No, because we also, from the one part, people might think that we are watching them, checking them out and it becomes to such a big job that that will be your focus. Not to say that that might not be a good study, I mean a couple of years back I did think about to measure and track it, when I – but I inherited the group in that second year, personally, but I used to have groups where I would take them through from the first year right through to the end when they qualify, so the whole two years I would be with a specific group and that was interesting for me to monitor it, from a personal perspective, because what I did was, and I don't know how good that is from an educational perspective, but I sort of tested the grounds, where I would know who the people are who did not work in groups, and I would take those people and I would put them in one group to see how they actually – now they have to rely on themselves,

and that, for me, it sounds very vindictive and I think at one level it probably was, because I felt that the other people had been punished enough to be with those people in a group, but it was also a fact that now (inaudible) also give you some work. So I would usually reserve that for the last two modules, it will be in your second year.

INTERVIEWER: And what was your subjective –

INTERVIEWEE 1: They battled, they battled, and I never shared that with students, but they knew, they instantly knew that's what I did, without me telling them and they were just, "Aah, that's funny," and people would compare notes, "Oh, he was in my first syndicate," "He was in my second," and now they're all in one group and they picked up without me telling, the whole class knew what I did and it was funny and then I knew that I was right. It wasn't only my imagination, but it was a complaint here and there, and then I realised that that was actually a good thing to do, because people knew it and they feel – the people resent syndicates, at most, because they would come and complain to me for hours about this poor syndicate that they was and then they liked that one and then they didn't like this person, they tried to all the work. So ideally, people who are not team players, it can really build up more resentment against working in teams, or the alternative is people do learn, without even realising that they are learning, how to cope in those situations.

INTERVIEWER: So do you think – you mentioned it briefly, do you think that people in general experience syndicate groups as negative?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Ja, I do, I do.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE 1: If you're lucky enough to find one that are – even though we believe that you don't learn much from that perspective, I believe that most people don't like being in it, because they feel that there are always (inaudible) who get away with not doing the work and actually sharing the mark at the end of the day. That's why I think the new method that we want to implement will work better, to that perspective.

INTERVIEWER: So that's basically a peer assessment component?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Ja, that's just a –

INTERVIEWER: I know of a system where if the mark that your peers allocate to you, differs by more than 20% -

INTERVIEWEE 1: It will be an averaged out.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly. Okay, but you haven't implemented it yet, you're just testing it?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Well, it's not sort of been implemented, we wrote it into the student guidelines, that that's an option. People are not forced to do it, it's an option, they need to obviously indicate it, so if we get the assignment back, we'll know, because they'll indicate.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE 1: But I said to them that it needs to be an open and – you can't hide

that, you need to be open about that, because that's not fair. If you're going to penalise someone, they need to know that. I've even suggested it to a couple of second years who have been battling in syndicates, they said they were going to do it and nobody actually has gone ahead and done it. I think people are very sensitive and they're scared they will either rock the boat, or are they are in the minority and the rest of the group don't agree with it.

INTERVIEWER: But even just in that, there's educational value.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Because standing up for something that's fundamentally right, has a profound impact on how you manage and how you lead people.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Ja, and it takes courage.

INTERVIEWER: It does.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Because, at the end of the day, that is a - you are right, it's an underlying principle that we don't like conflict necessarily – there are a few people up there who I suppose thrive on it, but generally we don't like it. We don't like to confront people to their face. So we'll grumble and we'll moan behind and it takes courage to follow through on something like that. If you really ultimately believe in that, you're going to follow through and I think that is a mark of you, as a manager, that you don't – it's not a popularity contest, you need to give the good feedback, plus the bad feedback at the end of the day, but it's how you do it.

INTERVIEWER: Ja. And do you think that the feedback that syndicate groups get from lecturers, what's your feeling on the contribution that has to developing the person, to growing or learning the material, do you think there is value in their feedback?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Do you mean in the lecturer's feedback on the syndicate assignment itself?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, on the syndicate assignment.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Ja, that depends from lecturer to lecturer. Some lecturers give good feedback, others give minimal and they just give a mark and it's sometimes a – and I realise the educational value in getting that feedback and I think where the feedback is probably the best, and it's not necessarily an assignment for marks, but it's when you are right at the beginning of the programme in your group dynamics, when you get that feedback, when you put together that code of conduct –

INTERVIEWER: The charter.

INTERVIEWEE 1: The charter, that's right, and that's when you get feedback and I feel – you're right, there is no consistency throughout, I mean we do try half the way through the first year in your lead two, thereafter it sort of – we don't monitor it further, although I think practically speaking you can't really continue with it, because then people go – there's a little bit then for the last of it, say seven, eight months when you do (inaudible) foundation, then going into individual various groups in your letter, so it's always not very practical to – you can't really implement it, if you're all in those various syndicate groups.

INTERVIEWER: Because the idea around feedback is that it completes the loop.

INTERVIEWEE 1: The circle, ja. So ja, the first six months, that's the only feedback from your beginning to your lead two.

INTERVIEWER: And the feedback – lead two feedback was specifically for a number of people that I know very beneficial. It was probably one of the highlights of the programme.

INTERVIEWEE 1: I'm glad to hear that.

INTERVIEWER: And the premise of the study is actually that, to a certain extent the experience that your students get from the MBA, becomes your advertisement for further MBAs.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: And somehow there seems to be from the feedback – the questionnaire's feedback, it was a very strong marker that the students all felt - it was very consistent, felt that the feedback from lecturers is lacking.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And that they miss out on a learning opportunity in that way.

INTERVIEWEE 1: It doesn't only go for syndicate assignments, it go for your exams, your individual assignments, and I think we're all guilty of it, as programme management staff, I think, at the end of the day, up to core modules, we give you your

assignments back and you're lucky if somebody at the faculty really get involved in writing, but your less content-based faculty, like your finance guys, they won't necessarily give you that much feedback. You don't know where you've gone wrong. You're not the first person who's mentioned that to me. I think reality is we go back for feedback and we literally insist that at least feedback for people who failed, so they can know why they've gone wrong and then the rest there is no feedback, which is, I agree, not a very good – it's an educational opportunity that we are sort of pushing by the wayside. With electives, again, I think it's really also practical – what is timeous, what time is there for, but what I've done now, I probably could be a little bit more proactive from that perspective is, I encourage my faculty on the electives to write more feedback, especially my new ones who don't know any better. The other ones have gotten used to the fact that they get away with few comments. The others I insist, if it's new faculty, I insist that they give me at least two or three paragraphs, just to capture the gist of where they've gone wrong and then ultimately I say to students that I'm not going to post the feedback for them, I'm not going to leave in the security office for them to collect and this is also where the student comes in. If a student is really serious about getting is feedback, believe me, I'll know about it, because they'll contact me for it, and I will make it available on an individual basis, but I don't advertise it widely, because what I've done is, previously this – earlier this year, I would make it available and one or two people collected and the rest are just not interested, the reality is, some people just want to collect their certificate at the end of the day and graduate and write MBA.

INTERVIEWER: That unfortunately is true.



INTERVIEWEE 1: Which is a lack of EQ, I think, in a lot, but guys who are interested – the guys who want it, they will definitely contact us and we make it available for them.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have some kind of induction programme for people who become lecturers? Do they go through a presentation skills, some pedagogical –

INTERVIEWEE 1: Not to my knowledge here, and that is the EDT principles in terms of how to frame your aims and objectives, verbs and this is – I know I come from a training institute, so this was quite shocking for me that there is no standard. Some people who – they come from – they are academics, or some of them are more from your corporate, they have no experience of it, they just know their subject, so no, there isn't, that's the short answer. They do learn by example. What happens at the moment is faculty meets very informally, they go to colloquiums, we invite them to – it's not one formalised thing, but we invite them to – for the research, we invite the supervisor to come to workshops. Like you guys have workshops, I invite faculty to come to workshops as well. So people share – the head of research, Kerry, she does a presentation of how we want this specifically for the research, we'll make available how we want the referencing to happen or how they must monitor that, and they have like the colloquiums on various subject matters or our fulltime faculty, every Monday they meet and they also share ideas. So it's very informal, there's no – nobody goes for specific ETD training, where this is how you frame an outline, this is how aims and objectives should be set out. So no, it's not a formalised system.

INTERVIEWER: And do you guys have any restrictions according to the National Qualification Framework or the HEQC and SACWA?

INTERVIEWEE 1: We are –

INTERVIEWER: Those have requirements that you must have this amount of contact time for credits and –

INTERVIEWEE 1: Oh, no, absolutely we have those. It's difficult for – look our MBA and our PDBA – our POSK, and our DBA, there are specific and it's through the HEQF.

INTERVIEWER: Higher Education Qualification Framework. It's via them, it's not just through – it's not like your training institute, where it goes through the CITAs or – so it is apart, so we are accredited from that perspective. More and more companies insist on it. So we have our contact hours for MBA and PDBA. I think for MBA it's about 120 credits, so yes, it is a specified and you have to have that. So there is no negotiation around that.

INTERVIEWER: And that's where the research component comes in as well?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You have to have it in order to be a Masters Degree.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Absolutely. Although strictly speaking it's not a Master's level, it's an Honour's level, because then the research component needs to count more for it to be a real Masters, so strictly speaking it's an Honour's but it gets accepted as on a Master's level, unofficially.

INTERVIEWER: It's quite difficultly positioned, because it's more than an Honours.

INTERVIEWEE 1: It is more than an Honours, because I did an Honours and it's totally different from an Honours. Okay, we also – we had about 20 subjects in the one year, so from that perspective and we had a research component when I did my honours, but it's not to the same level. I suppose, as a business school, we are more homed in, people say we over-exaggerate the research component, for what it's worth, or what it counts in the end, but I don't think so, because it's really – it's to instil more thoughts, publication, journaling and it's really ultimately people don't understand why the research is a compulsory component of a Masters and it's only in Africa, elsewhere it isn't, but I believe that part of researching, yes, we have to go to academic requirements, it's not business research, it's academic research, but ultimately I think for any company, in terms of competitive intelligence, it teaches you how to gather information and it's such an important skill for a general manager to have, that I don't understand why people still – yes, we have to impose academic rigour around it and not allow it to be a business, which is more informal research, but the end result is the same, ja.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Sorry, I'm not even sure if I'm answering your questions.

INTERVIEWER: No, that was exactly what I was looking for. That is about that.

INTERVIEWEE 1: As ek nou 'n celebrity was, kon ek vir jou gevra het om vir my die vrae voor die tyd te gee, dan kon ek dit voorberei het.

INTERVIEWER: Dan kon jy voorberei het.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**FILE: 001-A-003 12-09-2011**

INTERVIEWER: [REDACTED], Professor at Gibbs. You're managing Faculty, that's right?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Executive Director of Faculty.

INTERVIEWER: I'm very sorry, Executive Director of Faculty. Interviewee 2, so we're going to talk a little bit about my research project. I just want to make you aware that, of course, at any time when you wish to withdraw, you can do so without any penalty.

INTERVIEWEE 2: I've got it, I'm familiar the FX process.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I just had to do it, because Helena reminded me that I forgot it, so I just picked it up from that. Can you give me little bit of background on your involvement in MBA teaching? How long have you been doing this?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Okay, I've been teaching MBAs, this is now the 12<sup>th</sup> year of teaching MBAs. I've supervised about 110, 120 research proposals, ja, I've taught over a 1 000 MBA students and I teach HR strategy, I teach international business.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. How do you see the syndicate assignments fit into what you expect a student to get from an MBA?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Okay, the syndicate assignment is a slightly more difficult assignment than the individual assignment, but I'm looking for something that is more – how would we call it, ambiguous, and were you take theory and putting it into a context. And so what I'm relying on in the syndicate assignment is they're tapping onto real life experience and I'm aware that they probably going to look who's got what contacts in the syndicate. They'll pick the one individual who's got the best contacts and then they'll learn from that. Now, the benefit you get from that is that the people who don't work in that individual's company, or aren't familiar with it, are getting exposed to a whole lot of different – to different contexts and they're able to take the theory that they're supposed to be looking at and place it into that context. So that's one of the big learnings as far as I'm concerned.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so if I would be paraphrasing, then it's at a higher cognitive level, maybe a bit of integration.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think that it has any role to play in terms of the transfer of the transfer of technical skills.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Oh yeah, absolutely. You're actually beginning to see the ability to do analysis and you people are coaching each other in the technical skills, absolutely, and I would use a group assignment to reinforce some of the teaching in the class and also to stretch them a little bit further.

INTERVIEWER: So you don't think that, let's take a technical subject, such as

corporate finance, do you think that often it's one or two people that are working in finance environment, do you think that they – where is the technical skill? Do they teach their syndicate members how to do a DCF, for example? Do you think that's what you're looking for?

INTERVIEWEE 2: That is indeed what one is looking for, because we use the Socratic method and we heavily reliant on the learning that happens in that syndicate. If you design the syndicate project wrongly, a bad syndicate assignment is where one individual of the syndicate can own the whole assignment and he can just run with it. Now, that's a badly designed one. A badly designed one is where they can use a textbook and then they can solve the problem, without having to go and explore and take the full value of the richness of that group of people. Ideally you want them to be debating, you want them to be testing thoughts, you want them all to be having an input into this thing.

INTERVIEWER: So what quality control is there in place to ensure that a group assignment is not a bad assignment? Is it up to the individual lecturer –

INTERVIEWEE 2: Or badly designed?

INTERVIEWER: Or badly designed, yes. Is it up to the individual lecturer or is there a faculty process of approval, how does it happen?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Okay, the assignments and course outlines get approved by Shereen Changadoo and myself, and what we've done over the last – with the first years this year is, on all their syndicate assignments, each syndicate member rates the

other members' contribution. So that's beginning to help.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE 2: So that's beginning to help.

INTERVIEWER: So you brought in peer assessment?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: And was that – how did you get upon this idea, because it wasn't like that for our group, for example, peer assessment? Was it feedback from syndicate groups that sort of –

INTERVIEWEE 2: Pretty much, pretty much. When you change your syndicates, you start picking these things up. So the group dynamics change and so this comes back, especially where you've got a bright guy, who now – his marks drops dramatically, because he's outsourced the whole syndicate assignment to a guy who's not as – how would one say it – not diligent.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I pick up the euphemism there, yes. Okay, so let me just check through here. This peer assessment, though, does it influence the final mark?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Yes, for the individual, ja.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so it's graded at that level as well?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so do you think it's sort of analogous to a 360 degree

evaluation?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Same intention, but obviously not 360, because you haven't got 360 degrees of assessment.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Do you think that syndicate assignments reflect real workplace situations?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Yes, oh yes, particularly in the Gibbs context. What's interesting is, a lot of the fulltime faculty are now beginning to pick up the value of that, when you marry it to your research project – your research agenda. So, for instance, this year I've gone and asked the MBA to do their syndicate assignment, find a company that's doing something that's unique or a uniquely modified version of a Western HR concept, that's modified to the South African context. So there's 40 syndicates out there doing it. I'm hoping to get 10 good case studies. They've got to right these things up as case studies. I'm hoping to get 10 good case studies and then we've got a really nice research article that will flow from that. So faculty are beginning to figure out that you can –

INTERVIEWER: It actually strengthens their hand, in terms of what they have to produce.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja, and that also sorts out quality. So you get rid of the bullshit.

INTERVIEWER: And to what extent – what I think is different between the simulated environment of a syndicate assignment versus the real life workplace is the hierarchy. Do you think a hierarchy develops in a group?



INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja, but we try, with the group dynamics, we try sort that out, through the Belvin, where everybody's contributing their particular role. That's why you do that Belvin process. Firstly, I think we should be doing the Belvin with every time they reorganise the syndicates, so everybody can see what their contribution is. The problem is, and I'm thinking back to my MBA experience where it was exactly the same, where these aren't minions that you can order around, but what does happen is, there are natural roles that different people fulfil and if it's an HR assignment, obviously I'm expected to take the lead, because I'm the HR expert, as opposed to the other guy who's the finance expert and so on, but it's temporary, it's a temporary hierarchy.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that forcing people, or at least for the purposes of education, forcing people to assume different roles, adds or detracts from the education value they derive from the activity?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Oh no, it adds tremendously. Our philosophy and our core – what's the word I'm looking for? – our philosophy, let's stick with that, at Gibbs is we're a general management school. So our assumption is we're teaching people to become general managers. This is what distinguishes us from a main campus. A main campus will teach you to become an HR practitioner or a marketer or so on. We teach you to become a general manager. So you should have a wide variety of skills and knowledge about all of these functions. So a good general manager is somebody who gets things done through people and that's what we're looking after, or that's what we're hoping to get. So the syndicate and syndicate work are a fundamental – an absolute, absolute fundamental. So you've got to learn how to compete, but collaborate at the same time.

A perfect syndicate is if there is a dependency and a trust relationship that's built on and in that way you can share out the work a lot easier and there is a lot of co-learning. So, ja, in short, we're teaching them to become general managers and these are critical skills, (inaudible) general managers are (inaudible). I see you quoted Minsburg, managers, not MBA's. Absolutely, that's our philosophy. We have an advantage where our MBA student looks very different to that soul that Minsburg is talking about. What Minsburg is talking about is somebody who's just finished his B Degree, who now does an MBA. Our guys have work experience, and so it's a very different context. Our guys know how to play. The downside of that is, the more senior the guy is, the more minions he's got, the more he thinks he can bark orders, he has a problem adjusting to this lot.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think it's the job of the school to look after these things and to have mechanisms in place to deal with it? The reason why I ask it, to give you some insight into what the questionnaire said, students consistently commented that a negative experience in group work was associated with leadership issues, and with that they mean that you had a dominant individual that didn't give other people a voice, or didn't allow other people a voice, that just drove his agenda. Do you think it should be your job to worry about those things?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Oh, certainly, but subtly, it's got to be very subtly done. Once you prescribe it, you're going to mix those dynamics up totally. We're hoping that through enough group dynamics training, as it were, the group will be able to sort itself out.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE 2: My view, we've got to do group dynamics at least three times a year, just to sort this kind of problem out, but that – you've hit the nail on the head. When syndicates collapse, it's when one individual dominates, ja, absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: And with group dynamics training, you're referring to the lead programme, as well as something like human behaviour and performance. That also had some –

INTERVIEWEE 2: Yes, they've all got some components of it, but I'm speaking something way more basic. So the basic – you use the basic technology you use in team building, and you use that. You redo the Belvin process and see what the roles are and what the strengths of the different teams are. Running through the performing, norming, storming and all of – running through that technology.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Where do you see faculty feedback on group activities as contributing to the learning derived from it? How does it fit in?

INTERVIEWEE 2: I'm not sure I understand what you want to know.

INTERVIEWER: So we do a group assignment and we get feedback from you, for example, and the feedback is 74%, do you think that students derive value from the fact that they get 74%, or would they derive value from a one-pager on where they did something really good or really bad?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Okay, my concern is if a student gets an assignment back and it just says 74%, that means faculty is not doing their job, and the programme manager has to report it to me and I have to take it up with him. Okay, so that means there's been an

administrative failure. We require comments on how they did with every assignment, meaningful comments, so people can improve. With exams we don't require it, except when people fail, there needs to be a justification. So ja, your question not – ja, I didn't understand, but let me give you an anecdote of where it has helped a group. Two years ago there was a group, they did a syndicate assignment, but it wasn't a syndicate. They gave it to one guy to do it. He ran out of time. He plagiarised my own work and he didn't even acknowledge me, he'd cut and paste, he'd cut and past tables and everything, straight out of an article I'd written and planted it in there. I failed them really badly and sent it to the disciplinary committee. And so, the syndicate wrote back to me and some of the characters in the syndicate, some of the participant of the syndicate afterwards said that this was a good thing. Thank you, it brought the dynamics to the fore and it helped them clean up their syndicate afterwards. So that's a different kind of spin off.

INTERVIEWER: That's interesting. Again, I'm a bit biased, because I had the questionnaires priming me for what the issues are from a student perspective. The students comment strongly on the fact that they feel the feedback is inadequate.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Isn't enough, ja.

INTERVIEWER: So they feel they miss out on a learning opportunity in terms of feedback.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Okay, but they're always going to say that. The problem is how much is enough, so it's very, very difficult, but I think to overcome that, is faculty need to

have a rubric of sorts, and when they brief the students, they need to tell them I'm looking for content, I'm looking for theory, I'm looking for writing style and that's the breakdown.

INTERVIEWER: I think if you have some kind of consistency in terms of feedback, that would already contribute to the perception change, maybe.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. We talked a little about that students' problems with group assignments is mostly the dominant individual. The counter side of that coin is also the free riders.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: How do you see the handling of free riders? Is it something that's the responsibility of the faculty or of the business school, or is it the responsibility of the –

INTERVIEWEE 2: Look, if the syndicate doesn't tell us about it, there's no way we can pick it up. There is absolutely no way of picking it up, and I sit on the marks committee too. So you see a guy who has scraped through his exam, has failed his individual assignment and he gets 80% for the syndicate assignment. What's happening here? That's your free rider. But that's how the system is.

INTERVIEWER: That's life.

INTERVIEWEE 2: This guy from having a syndicate. The syndicate must clean that up. They mustn't complain afterwards. An attempt to fix that is, what was the

contribution in the syndicate assignment? But when I was studying – I was doing my MBA, I was in three different syndicates and the first syndicate was fantastic, we all worked together on every project and we did phenomenally well. The second syndicate was less structured and was just – we ended up having beers after each syndicate meeting, which was great, but it was sort of – we carry some, but everybody contributes. It was actually quite a mature syndicate. The third syndicate was, “Okay, what are our subjects for this year? Okay, you pick up the assignment, you pick up,” and we just allocated the assignments to each individual. There was no way faculties could have picked that up. And then your syndicate assignment was as good as the individual. The guy who was trying to stay on the Dean’s list, he would be quality control, but for the rest of us, not bothered, just get through this stuff, farm it out and then send me a copy before we go into class, before you hand it in. So there’s no way a faculty can pick that up.

INTERVIEWER: Ja. Do you think that the model of 20% individual assignment, 20% syndicate assignment and 60%, like you are doing it currently, is one size fit all for all types of modules?

INTERVIEWEE 2: No, not with the electives. With the electives of course you know there’s flexibility there, but with the core, in terms of CHE, we could have 60% for the exam.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And if you could change that without the CHE implications, would you increase or decrease the syndicate assignment component?

INTERVIEWEE 2: It would depend very much on what the topic was.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and for HR?

INTERVIEWEE 2: If I'm looking at context, okay, the individual assignment I gave you guys this year, was to take those four suggested amendments to the Labour Relations Act and they had to go find out business's point of view, labour's point of view and then take their own point of view. A phenomenal assignment, really the stuff that came out of that was superb, but quite honestly, that, as a syndicate assignment, would have been even better, because let them debate it, let them get into and take a stand on that, because it's highly, highly charged. So one of the issues, for instance, measuring your affirmative action, your representative team on regional or national basis. You recall that issue?

INTERVIEWER: Ja, I do.

INTERVIEWEE 2: The banning of labour brokers. That would have been – that's a syndicate assignment. That debate is syndicate. Because I'd would be very upset if my partner, my colleague went and gave a view that I totally disagree with, because these are emotional, but they're factual and they're context. So you'd have a different view if you were a Coloured in the Western Cape or an Indian in KZN, you'd have a different view to a Pedi sitting in Limpopo on regional or national. So it's a phenomenal, phenomenal debate and discussion.

INTERVIEWER: So essentially, I understand what you're saying correctly, then it's really about –

INTERVIEWEE 2: Sorry, that I would have made syndicate assignment worth a lot more. I would have probably put that – I'd have moved it up to at least 40%, because that's the context for the rest of HR in this country and that's the debate, those four bills captured the debate for the next three years. That's how you're going to do HR in this country.

INTERVIEWER: So is it correct in saying that you almost want to instil a method of thinking or a way of thinking, an approach to things, rather than the detail whichever model is fashion of the month, now.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Exactly. That's what I want in a syndicate assignment, exactly right. They've got to be teasing out – they've got to be making sense of their environment, they've got to be dealing with – you don't want assignments that you could get out of textbook, okay, because you want something more ambiguous that they can tease and play with, that's my orientation towards it.

INTERVIEWER: I have two more questions. The one is, do you think that some pedagogical background or training –

INTERVIEWEE 2: Andragogical, because we're working with adults.

INTERVIEWER: Because it's not with kids.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that would add value to faculty, do they get some kind of training in educational approaches?



INTERVIEWEE 2: Not enough, but we get more than most universities.

INTERVIEWER: Because it sounds like you have a fair background in education, you're talking about rubrics and I think –

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja, my wife is a teacher, but you learn a lot of this. We have in the past had lots and lots of workshops in this stuff, we've spent a lot of time on it, we have colloquia once a month and they vary between teaching research and context. We had more of it about two years ago, but the last 18 months or so, the focus has been on research at the school. So the newer faculty wouldn't have been exposed to it, but those of us who've been around a long time, would have seen it. And what we did was we've had people in teaching you how to write cases and all of that kind of thing. There's a fair amount of informal mentoring happening with the faculty. Let's see, what else did we do? We had colloquia and workshops on designing curricula and things like that, but not enough. More than what you're going to see anywhere else, but it's not enough. It's not, for instance, the level that you're going to find at the University of Washington or Ontario or Harvard. Not at all.

INTERVIEWER: Where the business becomes teaching, ja.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja, exactly.

INTERVIEWER: But it's also driven to a large extent by what you can charge for your MBA. The MBA there is quite a bit more expensive, so you know, and I know for Gibbs you don't really make your money out of the MBA, you make it out of the Executive Education, to a certain extent.

INTERVIEWEE 2: I'm not answering that question.

INTERVIEWER: The funding is different, the funding model?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, the last question, Interviewee 2, is –

INTERVIEWEE 2: But wait a minute, there's another piece to that that needs to be put into this puzzle.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

INTERVIEWEE 2: The role of evaluations. Now, faculty evaluations are incredibly important in this place.

INTERVIEWER: You mean you're referring to students evaluating –

INTERVIEWEE 2: Students' evaluations of faculty.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE 2: If you get bad evaluations two or three times in a row, you will never teach on that programme again, okay.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm.

INTERVIEWEE 2: And my role, when somebody gets a bad rating, I've got to start doing remedial action and then we do have the discussion on rubrics, on learning outcomes and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I see.

INTERVIEWEE 2: And we start looking at structure and so on, but it's not necessarily – we're not focussing on the syndicate assignment, but we're focussing on the ability to structure teach and things like that. And that's essentially Shereen, Jonathan and myself who are driving that lot, because we work with an internal labour market here. So the guys who get the ratings, they really work. They guys who get the bad ratings, well Interviewee 2 has to walk around and try find them work. Okay, they're high risk in this model. Okay, so ratings critical, critical. You bomb three or four times, nobody uses you.

INTERVIEWER: That's interesting.

INTERVIEWEE 2: If you switch that thing off I can actually tell you about somebody to give you the detail.

INTERVIEWER: We can talk about that, yes.

INTERVIEWEE 2: You'd appreciate it, because you're head of faculty.

INTERVIEWER: The last thing is I found this very interesting and it's comforting to know that there is really a thought process behind this, the risk, of course, with a vanilla model 60-20-20 across the core is that people say, "Oh well, we have to do it, let's just go through it," but the value that a syndicate assignment actually adds, do you think that some discussion or open forum where faculty shares the philosophy around syndicate assignments, may alter the perception that students hold -

INTERVIEWEE 2: Shared with who?

INTERVIEWER: With the students. So faculty actually telling them this is why we do this and this is what we think you will learn from this, to sensitise students to – because otherwise the learning becomes incidental and it's not necessarily picked up as, "Wow, this adds value."

INTERVIEWEE 2: Ja, you see I think we do that in the beginning, but we don't reinforce it throughout. I do, when I do my lecture, I say it in day one, but they probably don't remember it, but what's interesting is, at least from my experience and talking to guys at graduation, when three months after this whole process is over, the guys are talking about their learning and their syndicates. The alumni look back and they realise just how much learning there is and they will always be telling people there, so when you call in an alumni to come and talk to current students and everything, they say, "No, the learning was in that syndicate."

INTERVIEWER: It's a very interesting process, because for us currently, the students are quite negative about many things, but if you go to an alumnus, they will tell you go to Gibbs. And it's quite interesting and I suppose that's when turn introspective, after you've gone through this entire process and you sit back and digest what happened to you, you can pick out the value.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Do you know why you're negative? It's pressure and the MBA is designed to simulate the real world, so you're under pressure. So you'll see some of your assignments, you have to make decisions quickly. We look at this all the time, so

we discovered, for instance, last year we discovered that our students are great at analysis, but they can't make decisions. So then this year we've been shifting. You may have noticed, if you look back from January at your courses, you look at your assignments, you look at your exams, make a decision, rather than just analysing and apply a model, make a decision. You'll see that particularly where you've been taught by full timers, you'd have seen the emphasis has shifted a little bit. And that's why you're negative, because it's pressure. It's real world, and there's a debate whether you're under enough pressure or not, but when the pressure is off, you'll look back and say, "Hey, -

INTERVIEWER: It was good.

INTERVIEWEE 2: But, ja, that's probably why. And we monitor this. Can you believe it, we actually monitor it. When we see you guys complaining about the food and muffins and stuff like that, that's an indicator of the pressure. And what we do is we shift you out of the restaurant to the lawn and we do things like that, but we're monitoring, what's the pressure cooker like there, because we believe MBA should be a pressure cooker.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE 2: That's part of the design, and syndicate is a critical component of that.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely. No, it's clear from the questionnaires that syndicates, it's a major pressure cooker. People experience it as - it's quite interesting how polarised

they are about things they feel really negatively or really positively. It was really an eye opener and people responded, when that survey went out, in a flash. I had 65 responses in one day.

INTERVIEWEE 2: But I guarantee you, you go ask Julia for a few alumni names, randomly select them, ask them about their syndicate experience, they're going to say it's the best. You'll hear the same stories, but they'll say it's the best. And ask them a question, "Should you take syndicate out?" You'll see no, no chance. And that was my experience too, that camaraderie, even though you're under pressure and you hate this bastard who dropped you –

INTERVIEWER: But sometimes, ja, it's not real life, but, for me, when I'm under pressure and there's a little bit of a light at the end of the tunnel, it makes you push through, where otherwise you might say, "This is enough for me." And maybe some kind of light would help and I agree that more regular feedback, such as more regular lead sessions, might be that little light. It may or not be. Thanks, Interviewee 2, that's it.

INTERVIEWEE 2: That's it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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INTERVIEWER: Unfortunately you have to speak in English, yes. Thank you very much, Interviewee 3. I appreciate it. Could you give me a brief background on your involvement at Gibbs and in MBA Education?

INTERVIEWEE 3: Okay, I'm a professor at Gibbs. I teach in a variety programmes. I teach on the doctoral programme, the MBA programme, the pre-MBA, the PDVA. I teach on companies specific programmes. So I pretty much run the gamut. Every now and again I have a little bit of involvement with designing programmes other than the course I teach – overall programmes. Obviously I design my own courses, but I have a bit involvement in courses. I am quite in the research agenda, ja.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Currently you present Managing for Results, which is a composite course, if you can call it that. What other areas do you present in specifically?

INTERVIEWEE 3: Innovation, research methodology, retail – I have a background in retail. So it's a fairly wide array of subjects.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What do you think are the most important skills you expect of students when they finished your module?

INTERVIEWEE 3: I think it is about an understanding of questions. It's about an understanding that management is evolving and that, as managers you need to engage with questions, as much as with answers.

INTERVIEWER: That's very interesting. So how do you see group or syndicate assignments filling in into what you eventually expect a student to be achieving from your module?

INTERVIEWEE 3: I think that people have opinions and management is about managing those opinions and I think peer opinions are the hardest to manage, because peer opinions are – there's no formal authority, so you can't say, "Okay, my opinion today is more important than yours." So you have to have those voices and they get raised in syndicate teams, so syndicate work profiles questions. People come up and you're ready to close and move on and they say, "But what if?" and they want to go back and explore the question. You have a model that you think works quite well to explain it and somebody else from another context just says, "It doesn't ring true to me." So it's enactment of the process of questioning.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and how do you think it mimics the corporate environment currently, especially considering lines of authority and dealing with, let's call it, delinquent behaviour or inappropriate behaviour.

INTERVIEWEE 3: I think that the hardest form managing is the management of peers where there's no form of structural authority and that's what you find in an MBA syndicate group. So if you are able to manage your peers in a syndicate group, managing when you are in a hierarchy, where there's some form of official authority, is that much easier. So I think what a syndicate group does not do, is it does not prepare you for managing upwards in any explicit way, all it does is it teaches you mechanism of managing through asking questions, through listening. So essentially it's an artificial



environment, if you wish, where there's artificially not really a hierarchy, and that relatively hierarchy free – because I do think hierarchies evolve in groups, but that relatively hierarchy free environment is a useful experimental space in which you can experiment with different cells, if you wish, different styles of managing.

INTERVIEWER: So do you see syndicate assignments as addressing primarily the development of soft skills or do you think that there is a certain amount of transfer of technical skills? And do you think that the way in which we do syndicate assignments necessarily speaks to that, because different subjects aim to achieve different things.

INTERVIEWEE 3: I don't think it's about transferring technical skills. I think, firstly, technical skills get acquired by an individual who is motivated to learn them or not, and a syndicate member can as little transfer a technical skill as I can. Firstly, the responsibility is on the person who is on the other side, who wants to learn or not. Secondly, I think technical skills are quite – they grow old – perishable and it truly, my personal bias is that the technical skills matter less than a set of interpersonal skills. So, for me, most of the syndicate assignments are mechanisms to force people to engage with each other.

The reality is if you teach, what students care about is marks and if you create some form of assignment, you start in motion a process which the participants regard as having some consequence, which means that they enter a certain journey. The outcome of that journey, I don't think is a set of technical skills transfer, it's about learning to deal with dissidence, if you wish, with people who are not thinking what you one should be thinking, not doing what you think they should be doing, which is closing

things when you want them to be opening, or opening when they're closing. So that, for me, is the value, but you won't get that if there are no consequences. So if you just say to them, "Okay, now go off and discuss this for five minutes, you don't have – there's a kind of value that makes people actually care about it.

INTERVIEWER: How do you think the feedback that faculty gives to students with regards to syndicate assessment – syndicate assignments contribute or detracts from the learning that they can potentially derive from it?

INTERVIEWEE 3: I think one of the big disadvantages of the Gibbs model is that you get the feedback from me once you've stopped seeing me. So you know now what I notice, or care about, or whatever, but now you're dealing with a different customer. So, I mean all the evidence suggest that feedback is better when there's an opportunity for you to change your behaviour and one of the disadvantage of the modular format is that that it's a process, it requires time to unfold, and that's not really possible.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, okay. What do you think are the biggest problems that students in the MBA experience with syndicate assignments and do you think that there are mechanisms in place for dealing with those?

INTERVIEWEE 3: The problems that I typically hear about are non-performers, people who are free-riders, and the other one that I get are amongst, I think my MBA here, there was a guy who introduced himself at the beginning of the year and we didn't the SWOT overs, and he said I am planning to be the top student and I expect for you to operate at an acceptable level of – so it's basically a disconnect in terms of

expectations. So people who will do as little as possible and a group that wants to get a C, or a group that wants to get a C and single member who wants to get an A, it's a disconnect in terms of expectations and how do you get a group consensus about what expected behaviour should be. That's the stuff that I keep on hearing about.

INTERVIEWER: Do you agree with the statement that peer assessment in syndicate assignments, might smooth out some of the group dynamics, but not necessarily be a fair reflection of the workplace?

INTERVIEWEE 3: It's a very complex question. The first thing is I'm very much in favour of peer assessment and I think that it could be extended to the workplace as well. So I think something like a 360 is an attempt to introduce peer assessment into the workplace. So I think that there's a lot of evidence saying that the best people to judge you, are the people who work side by side, not the people who look from the top. So I think that peer assessment is quite valuable. The one thing is that peer assessment needs to be extraordinarily – it's a very complex form of assessment, because they did a study about the average time spent by different MBA students on an MBA project and when they added it all up, it was a 147%, so people are always inclined to overstate their contribution and how important it is. That's human nature.

The other thing is, how many of the students – so I teach my class and my real goal is to make people understand there is no closure, closure is not possible, that this is an ongoing process where you take snapshot and you make a decision based on information at hand. I can't say that to students. I need to give them some kind of deliverable that is – or assignment with a clear deliverable. So what then do I assess?

At the moment I don't assess my real teaching goal at all, at all. I'm relying on it to take place and what I'm assessing is a deliverable that I know people care about. And one of the reasons for that is, you know, I always think the best managers are the managers who don't think they know everything, but you can't really ask them and then give your top MBA student prize to the student, who says, "Hell, I don't know what I'm going to do, I've got real –". So it's extraordinarily hard. I do think that peer review generally, what it does is it reflects a worldview where all participants are equal partners or are valued partners and I think for that reason, both in a teaching context and in a workplace, I'm a very strong proponent.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Interviewee 3, that covers mostly what I wanted to speak to you about. The last question just is that do you think that if we would take the learning from group assignments that are spread over a number of subjects and incorporate that into one module and call it Group Dynamics, do you think that would add to the development of the MBA graduate or do you think it would detract?

INTERVIEWEE 3: Detract, because it needs to be a process, because the weakness of our model is the very fact that we don't have me coming back and say, "This is what I'm observing," and you then able to change or not, and me saying, "This is what I'm seeing." That kind of feedback process is critical. So one of the consequences of our choice to go for a modular design is that we lose that iterative – or some dimension of that iterative process and making it more modular, I don't think will solve it.

INTERVIEWER: They sometimes refer to it as reflects of learning and I think that's very important, but the logistically it means that you can't do it with a modular

programme. The premise of the study is actually that if you can show the value to the student or the student has a better appreciation of the value from the programme, it might carry forward a stronger positive message of this specific programme and act as some kind of a differentiator that sets the Gibbs MBA apart from the UCT, Stellenbosch, Wits MBA.

INTERVIEWEE 3: I don't think that knowing that it matters necessarily translates into action. We know that it matters to have better have racial relationships in our country. So in other words, there's a difference between an awareness and a capability.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think some kind of pedagogical training of faculty would contribute to maybe optimising or maximising the learning from some of these activities?

INTERVIEWEE 3: I think so. So I think there's definitely, of course, understanding better what you're trying to do, helps you do it better. I think that - and I mean we have the group dynamics courses. To a certain extent – I mean Nickelway says if the students learn more than 30% from you, something is going wrong. The other 70% is coming from the rest of the syndicate and it is not, you know, how do you do a balance sheet? Because that you could get from John Ford, but it is the messiness of people, because it's the only part about management that will never change.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

## **INTERVIEW WITH INTERVIEWEE 4**

INTERVIEWER: Good morning this is Interviewee 4 and we are going to do the interview this morning here at Gibbs. Interviewee 4 let me just inform you of the ethics process, I am sure you are well aware of it, but at any stage during the interview if you feel that you wish to withdraw you can do so without any penalty.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Thanks.

INTERVIEWER: Of course as you know. Can you give us a brief background of your experience around the MBA programme?

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Ja, well I have been an academic at business schools for 20 years, so it's a lot of time. I was at Wits Business School for 14 years. There I didn't teach on the MBA but I taught on the MM which is a Masters, a lot of Masters [0:00:37] but also using syndicate work. I also ran their post graduate diploma in Management which is a one year post graduate course full time, all syndicate based and I was head of that. So I dealt with a lot of syndicate issues and then obviously I have been at Gibson now for six or seven years. So 20 years' experience of thinking, well being involved in syndicate processes ja.

INTERVIEWER: Okay at Gibbs the model of a syndicate assignment and an individual assignment and an exam is sort of followed straight through. What do you think the

syndicate assignment brings to the table that none of the other assessments do?

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Okay so certainly very few people in this world work on their own, most of our work is done through teams, even as a lecturer you very much work on your own, there still is a team aspect to it. So the reality of the working world is it's team based. So that is the one aspect and obviously getting people to work in teams, hopefully sharing their knowledge because I think we try and put our syndicates together, and I am not sure if you have spoken to the programme managers who do the syndicate putting together, but the idea is certainly originally that we would have one finance person, one HR, one engineer, one whatever. So the idea is that they could pool their different backgrounds and so technically they could pool their different backgrounds and because of my sort of [0:02:07] is obviously culturally or gender wise or all those sort of things also have a diversity around them. So I think that is the intention is to reflect more the workplace than just individual exams or assignment would do, but obviously we will fletch that out as we go along.

INTERVIEWER: So you presenting in human behaviour and performance.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Yes, ja.

INTERVIEWER: And the Aids component of sustainability or what is called environment business. So at the end of having gone through your modules what type of attributes or skills do you wish students to have acquired?

INTERVIEWEE 4 : By the group work?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, by the group work.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Well I think in our first course, because that is a unique course possibly in the world, you know it's a very strange course, as you know we are not sure, there is no syllabus, there is no text books, I can't say we don't know where we are going with it, we know what we are wanting from it, but I think what that course does, the human performance and behaviour course does it unfreezes people to start thinking about who they are, their cultural roots, how they actually deal with other people and I think it's your first syndicate which are always, I also think are very different and we might want to explore because that is what your initial life boat and your initial socialisation system for getting into a business school. But we hope that the sort of syndicate assignments we set there, well that is very different to many of your other ones, but that there would be some openness between you in terms of oh my goodness I hadn't realised what my great grandfather did matters to who I am today. So probably more open conversations amongst the group than possibly you would have if you started off with finance and economics. So we would like to do that, as you know the syndicate assignment for human performance is a presentation. So that puts a lot of pressure on you, it's very visible, it's almost, we just watched the Haka downstairs like saying this is our syndicate look at what we can do, as your very first presentation you ever do on the MBA. So we think it should bond your syndicate by doing a presentation. As you would have seen some of them are very creative, so you try to say everybody this isn't just writing academic papers, this is about creativity and impact. But I think it is dealing with some very tough issues as a syndicate. Whether you have chosen Affirmative Action or diversity, or I mean disability or, some of them this year did, quite a few of them did AIDS in the first year course. So I think it is to get people talking about



sensitive subjects, hopefully particularly through Jonathan's lectures becoming comfortable in talking and listening and risking a little bit of your own thoughts and perceptions which maybe you don't risk in the workplace, very few of us do. So I think it's very different on that sort of course. On the AIDS one in the second year programme I am much more cynical about the syndicate process by that stage. It is sort of one of your very last syndicate assignments and I know there is just, let's get this damn thing done. So I want to talk about an issue there, so I think maybe – you know I hope the topic makes people reflect on HIV/AIDS in the workplace, but I would think it's very a very expedient, very efficient process of getting their syndicate project done. I think with your first syndicate assignments you might be very effective and my guess is as you go through the 16 months of syndicate work, and you move from effectiveness to efficiency, unconsciously or consciously and I mean I know at Wits Business School they paid one of their syndicate members in the latter stages not to come to meetings because she was highly disruptive and they actually gave her money and said disappear we will put your name on the project and that is what happened. So I think that is what happens, that is my guess.

INTERVIEWER: Okay so from what you have said now, am I correct in saying that the syndicate assignments are actually an attempt to develop the softer skills.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : It is an attempt to develop management skills, yes actual management. So whether we start at the old fashioned theories of management around delegation, planning, organising and controlling, yes, I would think that the intention is that every syndicate project is planning and led and organised and controlled to some

aspect and then part obviously of your management is getting people to work together as a team and so that I think is the intention. So whether you say softer skills, okay so that is my whole beef that I want to get to, so I don't know if you want to pre-empt something.

INTERVIEWER: I don't want to stop you, so carry on.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : So I think and I don't know all the business schools of the world and so when I am saying this it's of no critique of Gibbs because it is certainly applies to Wits Business School, we don't teach students at any point how to manage syndicates, or how to learn from syndicates and that is my passion right now and so if I could spend my remaining couple of years of employment in getting people to think about how to learn from the syndicate process, I think that is completely and utterly missing. They don't teach you how to manage this, because a syndicate to me is either, well it is a leaderless group, but it also reflects metrics organisations which is what most of us are working in now as we don't have a direct boss, you know, or a subordinate but you are trying to influence people over whom you have got no power. So none of the power basis applies and so it's a very interesting way to work but we don't teach people. We don't also get students to hold up a mirror and say after your first my dream will be two blocks, somebody like myself or Jonathan would come in and have a good hour with a class and saying, or maybe two hours, how do you think you have done in your syndicate, have you learnt softer skills, have you learnt management skills, have you learnt to work in the leaderless group, have you thought about matrix. So hold up a mirror so you could say this is how I think I am doing, then to send you off in trios in

your syndicate to give each other feedback, well actually you are so domineering, you maybe intimidate me or you have never said a word or you don't come to meetings, where you actually through a facilitative person by somebody like me or Jonathan get them to think through who they are. Because I think the beginning of a MBA you are so disorientated, you know where is the toilet, what does an assignment look like and what is the standard. So you don't know what you are doing, so we can't teach it also until you have been through two cycles I believe. Because the first cycle you have got no idea what you are doing, you don't know what a syndicate assignment is and it's just coping. The second one you are beginning to get on top of this a little bit but you are still, you know it's going to be in the same syndicate. So I think we need to say to the students who are you, go and get some feedback and then it's just because I have been on a staff course here by, it's called Whale or Wheel anyway it's an action learning certification worldwide and they teach you how to run action learning groups and how each of those meetings start, it's just this big wow for me, is everybody says, you go around the table, obviously you are here for a purpose as you would be for a syndicate assignment. You know I am Interviewee 4 and my intention through this syndicate assignment is I want to learn to be more assertive and how I know I would be more assertive is if by the time we hand in our project I will feel I really guided some of that project and then you would say well you know I am not that good with Word and so my need with the syndicate project is that I am going to type this thing up. So you each reveal a learning opportunity to the group and you contract with each other that you are going to help each other learn their softer skills or it could be technical skills but generally listening skills, speaking skills, assertiveness skills. So to me that is the dream

where we actually, I mean this is complete side line but I have got to put it out there, is I think we need to do it with the classroom behaviour equally to say to people at the beginning of the second or third courses who do you want to be in this classroom. Do you want to be the person who is always distracted and working on your laptop over there, do you want to be a person who has never spoken in public, but you want to learn to ask questions and to you know, we don't even get people to reflect on who are you in the classroom. How are you managing your brand, because this is a big cohort of people who forever will give references on you or talk about you positively or negatively, as is the syndicate process? But we don't make any of this conscious to the students and therefore we are missing out on I think one of the greatest learning opportunities of the MBA which is who am I in a syndicate. What do I do when Interviewee 4 doesn't hand in the work?

INTERVIEWER: It's very interesting that you mention this because a number of the other interviews also said this.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Right.

INTERVIEWER: And there is some kind of feedback and that in lead to, but it needs to be on a more regular basis.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Ja, ja.

INTERVIEWER: I would think. The students also in the interviews commented on two things in terms of their problems with syndicates. The one is the mechanisms to deal with freeloaders ...

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Which is totally real and we know it happens all the time ja.

INTERVIEWER: And most people feel very strong that the business school shouldn't be involved in that.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Shouldn't.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Okay.

INTERVIEWER: But that underlines in my mind even more the necessity of the process that you outlined.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Because so if we developed that, that would be my passion as well is to say okay, well what – because I have got all my titles for people in syndicates, it all involves going on a bus trip, but it's the passengers who is sitting in the bus and they paid their fee, their academic fee and they are not doing anything they are just sitting there going wherever the bus is going and they will get to the destination but having done nothing with it. So I think we need to coach the class through what are you doing at work when Interviewee 4 has not performed. Are you just tolerating that because and one of my passions and I don't know if I would have spoken to your class about the issues with diversity, I think one of the biggest problems with diversity is we don't give feedback across diversity. So you would feel uncomfortable because I am clearly older than you of coming to me and saying Interviewee 4 your language is appalling or you have come late. So I think if we even made that conscious to make people think about is it, is diversity stopping you saying something to somebody else, culture, religion, you

know, a Hindu girl who wears Saris and a red dot on her face, oh I am not sure if I can really let her have it because she looks like a spiritual being. We tell ourselves story, I think, because my real passion what I really lecture which I never get to lecture on the MBA is performance management and the biggest problem with performance management is dealing with underperformance and this is where you can learn how to do it. This is where you have got to learn to be comfortable and to say Interviewee 4, you know, you have let us down on the last two things, let's put in a performance management process, what coaching do you need. Is it that you don't have a computer, is it that we don't let you speak, but take them, you know through a proper disciplinary process where it is coaching at first, and training and all those processes and get them to think through that and again hold up a mirror to yourself. If Interviewee 4 is not performing are you the one who is whipping the whole syndicate up into this froth of hating Interviewee 4 but never coming to tell me about it. Because that is what happens a lot, we get these, everybody – and I mean so you are complaining about somebody but never giving them a chance to improve. So you are actually destroying them and their reputation but we don't even get the students to think through what is happening when you are doing that and the PDBA I teach strategic human resource management and that is halfway through the PDBA which is a one year course and there I deal with it a lot because my course, they swop syndicates halfway through that year and I am the first course in their second grouping. So I run the group dynamics, it's just a one hour process, but then I am very conscious as I go through my course is to talk about what is happening in your syndicate. So I am trying to feed it in there, but we need it much more.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think this kind of training in my mind it is massively beneficial because it speaks to the core of what a manager does every single day.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Ja.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think something like that can ever be a differentiator for an MBA programme at Gibbs versus any other place.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Ja, and I, because as I was saying to you before you put on your recorder, I am just on the EDP programme where you are putting syndicates and once again it's never mentioned, the EDP starts with lead with the 360 feedback, my life story, the same exercises, so you reveal a lot to the syndicate. In those syndicates they do a simulation where you run entrepreneurial company and it's very complex and every day you are making decisions on about 70 variables, pricing, supply and demand, marketing spent, I mean a whole business plan and it's very pressurised and every afternoon the share price comes out, so it's very visible how you are doing it, so there is huge group dynamics on the go and then in that they ask you not to play your roles. So I couldn't be human resource manager for my company, I was marketing director. And then going through the process and then the two guys who run it, the run it very successfully but nowhere do they say well how you doing as a syndicate. You know again halfway through the EDP we should be saying well now how are you doing as a syndicate you know Day 1 which was only five days ago, you revealed all of this to each, I mean in our syndicate one of the ladies, she you know had very tough feedback from her 360 feedback and she said she is not assertive enough and she never gets her voice, well the same thing happened in our syndicate. She was HR Manager. She never

got over, she never sold to us the importance to increase the pay of the factory workers so they went on strike. So she had had the whole experience all over again and at that point she should have realised and have been able to say to us, I need to practice being assertive for the next half of this week. I am not being assertive enough, help me be assertive. So I think it's way beyond the MBA and I believe that if we can get this right, it can be a huge point of differentiation and you know Nick's whole thing about maps and mirrors, I don't know if he has ever spoke to you about it, but that is what it is, it's the mirror to who you are and the map for your way forward and every syndicate and we almost force some sort of feedback process at the beginning of every syndicate you say I am wanting to learn this, in my last syndicate I battled with that, and then at the end of each block you have a 7 minute whip around. Because also we don't, I don't think the students thank the people who carry the syndicates enough, because that is what happens, you two carry the syndicate and we got 80%, when do we say thanks. So learning to thank top performance, I don't think that happens. So I think that it's a huge opportunity to differentiate a business school, but it's very hard to know who would know that and understand it, I think once people have been through the process they would be much richer. But you wouldn't know that Wits or Cape Town doesn't offer it. So I think it's hard to say, so I am not sure how we would market the differentiation but in terms of learning and this is a figure out of my thumb I would say we could increase student learning by 40% by using the syndicate processes as a learning opportunity. I think what is missing at Gibbs is an owner of each MBA programme. To do this I think you need, because we have Shireen who is an academic strategic director and clearly has grown this and its fantastic and we have Adele who is the admin guru and it all



happens and she deals with tough conversations and you know, is good at caring for students individually when she has to, or throwing them off the programme when she has to. But she is not the person – and then we have the Sazi's and the Mariska's and those people but they are also not owning the learning. We need a learning captain for each MBA here and I am responsible for it and this process I am responsible. So I am actually there in a way and the other huge component to this is and now my mind is really running, is somebody needs to teach the lecturers about it. So if you, the marketing lecturer and there is an opportunity to do this in January, if you are the marketing lecturer you should think about talking to the class how you are managing your brand in this classroom, how you are managing your brand in the syndicate. If you are the ops lecturer, you should be thinking about that. You know whatever, okay obviously finance unless you are paying each other to do the syndicate projects, but I don't think the lecturers are conscious about syndicate processes, because becoming a lecturer, I mean you are one yourself, it's not a – you are not taught ...

INTERVIEWER: Not at all, you are a technical expert and ...

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Ja, and maybe they teach you to do a lecture and how to mark, but nobody gets to think about adult learning and so that is one of my passions is around adult learning and so this I think will be a huge point of differentiation but more so just in the difference it would make to our students' lives, the map and the mirror philosophy.

INTERVIEWER: How do you think the feedback opportunities are an assessment, let's say syndicate individual or even an exam contributes or detract from the learning?

INTERVIEWEE 4 : If I was learning captain okay, I would insist, well first of all when you come in for your next set of lectures, that each, so I have just finished the course, I have marked it or probably haven't got the results yet, it doesn't matter, but usually the marking is all done by the time you start up again which should be. But the lecturer has to go in for 10 minutes and say, I just want to give you some feedback. You know most of you misread this question, when I looked at your syndicate projects there were clearly ones who really read the brief and those who hadn't read the brief, there were clearly ones where you hadn't worked together because every second page was in a different font, just so I think there should be more one on one feedback, a lot of you missed the boat with this question or I realise that I hadn't explained this properly because most of you got it wrong, because that is also what happens as you mark. So I think this cold giving out of marks isn't ideal. It's getting marks in rather than seeing it as a development opportunity. So I think, I mean obviously also the students have to own their own learning, but I don't think, as I say in a class of 60 or 70 maybe one or two people have even thought about their own learning, they just come here and they do, because as you know you are so pressurised. You know six deliverables in two subjects in sort of three and a half weeks. So you are not sitting back saying am I learning, how am I learning, who am I being, what am I a learning through the syndicate process and I think that is our job is to make it explicit. So I just trying to think when you said the students you have interviewed don't think his belongs to the business school, the problems. Who do they think would do this?

INTERVIEWER: Oh I actually meant the interviewers, so the lecturers feel that they

shouldn't be involved in ...

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Oh okay, sorry, I misunderstood. Okay ja, I don't think if I am teaching human performance and behaviour. You see it's difficult when you teach human performance subjects because everybody runs to you, every tea time and lunch time someone wants to discuss a problem somewhere in their life, but let's say I am teaching Ops, I don't think it's the Ops lecturer's job to have the winging syndicate. I think it is the Adele, it is the learning manager and I think that is, it's the learning manager's job and then of course if it gets out of hand and it's a disciplinary process then it goes to Adele and eventually to Shareen and eventually to the University of Pretoria, but certainly there should be somebody who is owning the learning and I don't believe that has happened.

INTERVIEWER: It seems from the questionnaires that the students feel that the process in place for dealing with people that do not pull their weight in syndicates is not good enough, they comment on that.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Ja, so the one is we haven't given you the skills. We haven't taught you what the processes are.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : So if it's our third assignment and I still contributed nothing, do you as a student have the option of leaving my name off the project and what are the consequences and do you have to go and serve a warning document that he has or she has to sign as you would in the work place, a verbal warning or written warning and get

it signed. So I think absolutely that we need to make it explicit. I also don't believe we can do it until the second or third block, group dynamics I always say it's like the wedding, when you have a wedding service and the priest is telling the bride and the groom how to lead their lives, the bride and groom listen to nothing, because they are thinking about their dress and I am so nervous and what if I drop the ring, they hear nothing. The Priest must speak to the congregation to say how to support these two people. So they are not ready to learn. I don't think they are ready to learn how to write assignments or exams until the second set of assignments, in other words now they have been through it.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : So I would say we need an intervention, I would say halfway through your second set of subjects. So you come in and do your four day block and the next block, I never know what a block [0:24:36] that somebody then sits you down and says no go back to your syndicates and have an honest discussion. As you are going to have to do at the workplace, they are tough conversations. So let's have tough conversations.

INTERVIEWER: And I think in general South Africans as a society we tend to avoid confrontation.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Oh absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: And we can't have these tough conversations.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : And across diversity it's much worse.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : And where there is now power relationship it's much worse, because once I am your boss I can tell you where to take a hike.

INTERVIEWER: In my opinion and from the experience in the MBA the fact that we can't deal with these conversations across diversity reinforces our mentality to stay in our little group that we are comfortable in and in terms of nation building it would be so great if we can get people to cross that.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : I am sorry that I didn't know about your project six or nine months ago, but I think looking at recommendations for future research which you have got to do in your last chapter and I don't know how we do this sensitively but I would suspect and this can't be attributed to me in your report, that racism gets more entrenched through our syndicate processes because we don't teach people how to do it, we don't make it overt and I think there is, so I would have always liked somebody, because I was involved in a project 28 years ago when a lot of British people were still immigrating to South Africa and I was a research assistant on the project and what they did was that there is a social distance scale, international research scale which in terms of white or black, would I like a black person living in my suburb, do I want them living next door, do I want them at the same school, would I invite them into my house, would I want them to marry my child and we tracked them in England before they came here, because it was a whole government process of bringing them up. So they filled in the scale there and six months after arrival and 18 months after arrival and they become racists by coming here, because obviously Britain doesn't have the issues we have and so because of

that project I have always been interested in does the reverse happen here, when people it becomes more entrenched, or gender issues or whatever. But I think the potential for more diversity problems is very real and it's just because we don't tell people how to handle it.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely and being able to adequately deal with diversity is probably the most important thing that a manager in South Africa should be able to do and ...

INTERVIEWEE 4 : And here is your chance to practice it.

INTERVIEWER: And currently it seems that that learning may or may not happen. So from an educational point of view one approach would be put measures in place for measuring this.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : For measuring you, an individual.

INTERVIEWER: For measuring the student at meeting certain criteria in terms of his or her development. It becomes very difficult so a more regular intervention like you suggested sounds like a better idea to me.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Ja, because I have learnt to measure soft skills is always hard, but I think to develop a mirror, I mean for part of what I am thinking about is lead is in the wrong place. I mean currently, I think this year's first years had a six day group dynamics, it leads two days is it, so you come in for two days in like November, then you come for six days. I think it's a complete and utter overkill. I would have lead moved into January as the first two days of group dynamics, so and you do it in your syndicate. So here are people you are going to be working with, because else you are with people

from the evening group, the Pretoria group, but I think bring it in and then talk and then tie it more, okay so now here is your syndicate and then go and do the amazing race or something or whatever, now go and perform as a group, reflect back, oops you know people said I am too domineering in my 360 and look at what I did it all over again, now please guys in the next five months tell me every time I am interrupting you, being domineering, thinking I am better than you and really making this a very safe little group to take people through that process.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any processes in place to look at the andragogy approach in the syndicate assignment? Let's take corporate finance versus human behaviour, is there any overarching control of that?

INTERVIEWEE 4 : At Gibbs?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Absolutely not and I don't believe – I mean I have spent a bit of time chatting to Melvin Business School and they thought much more about the learning process. I mean at the end of their MBA it's very interesting, they take the MBA's, they don't do international trips, but they go away on a boot camp to [0:29:03] Magaliesburg and they prepare you for your career. So part of that is the top recruitment headhunting agencies coming in, you preparing for interviews, you doing dummy interviews with them, so they are really thinking about it at a very different level. But in terms of what I see at Gibbs there is absolutely no communication or discussion around it. So I mean I would say corporate finance, you know Mike Ward used to be my boss, and you know

he made the Wits Business School the top business school in South Africa, so superb leader and academic. So I am just projecting, I don't think he thinks about your syndicate process. So if your CA in your group hijacks that or is told to hijack it and go and do it and gooi it in, there is no saying of it. I think John Ford in some of his assignments asked people at the end to add a paragraph on what they have done. Of course whether it's truthful or not it's a trust mechanism.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : How comfortable do you feel lying, saying I did my share when you didn't do your share. But there is no mechanism, so earlier I referred to January. In January we have a two or three day lecturer's workshop where we think through lecturing issues. So I am just thinking for January you know it will be great, I am just hypothesising, that you came and actually spoke to the lecturers for 20 minutes saying this is what your research has found and then Gavin, me, Jonathan or somebody then runs a process with the lecturers for the next hour and a half to think about andragogy, how do people learn and what can we do to maximise people's learning would be hugely useful, because I know at the moment we are thinking, as I am sure you have almost every year, what are we going to do with this workshop, what are we going to gooi in the workshop this year.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : And I think this would be a great topic, because I don't think most lecturers, you know the HR, the Mandla's, people who deal in this field I think we think



about it more because it's our passion, but for the rest I don't think so.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think that that might mean that the vanilla approach of 60/20/20 might depending on the content of the specific module change? So greater individual component in something like corporate finance, because I struggle and it might be because I don't really apply my mind to it, to see how a corporate finance being so technical really adds value to what you want to achieve from syndicate assignments.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Okay I would disagree because in the dream what is happening in the corporate finance syndicate assignment is the accountant is helping the other five people get this assignment together and acting as a tutor and coach. So remember when Mike said if you pull this lever this happens to the balance sheet there.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : A tutoring process would happen and you would be a bit better prepared for the exam, the non-finance people, so that is the dream of what happens. As I have said when you move to and that is why students need to be taught efficacy versus efficiency in that second or third because that to me is what it is about, it is much, it's an efficient thing as give the HR person the HR assignment to do, but then you are not learning and to get people and it is a trade-off, it's a paradox, a dilemma, the balance between the two but I am very happy with the 60/20/20, I don't have a problem with that. But we need to coach, so it's almost going back to the psychological contract. So you are the CA, you owed me big time, you know you are the engineer, you

are going to help do a bit of stats tutoring here, you are not going to hijack that stats project entirely. Maybe you are going to do it, but you are going to come back and give us two hours of explaining that project. Where did you get your data from or something.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, many people have commented on the pressure cooker in the MBA. That it's a purposive approach to trying to get people out of their comfort zones and to grow them.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Right.

INTERVIEWER: Is that monitored because my concern is and some people have mentioned it, that when the pressure is really high people start looking for escape routes and one escape route ...

INTERVIEWEE 4 : The escape route is efficiency.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Right ja.

INTERVIEWER: So again saying listen we are under so many pressure with two big modules so corporate finance the CA is going to do it, and we don't care about the feedback because we just want to achieve it.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Get it out ja.

INTERVIEWER: And if there was some way in which the pressure could be monitored so that it doesn't affect the learning opportunities to all students, I mean, do you agree

with that?

INTERVIEWEE 4 : No, because I think having very high pressure and obviously the Gibbs one where you are all full time employed, hopefully you have got a family life that you somehow are managing to keep going for the two years which is a huge pressure, and it should be, if it isn't it is a problem. I believe we make people more confident by the process, jeepers I manage that, I actually could do it. I think you know to succeed in the workplace you have often got to take high pressure where you are actually not coping and how are you going to deal with it. So I don't think we should take the foot off the pedal in fact I think my observation of our electives is that it puts far too much off the peddle, that it just becomes – I mean some of them you do a three hour exam on the Sunday afternoon, you know there are no assignments, there is nothing. So I think we make it much too easy by the elective process, other than the few, you know [0:35:34] and those ones where you really work. So no I don't think you need to do that, I think you need to make people conscious. I think we are over-teaching. I am not sure we need 7 half days and an individual assignment and an exam, I think we could take three hours of every two subjects and devote those to personal learning to actually, these sort of issues that you actually give up three hours of one class or maybe on day one of your first block back there is a 11:00 until 15:00 process where this happens, so there is lunch included. But so instead of teaching a 27 hour course we are each teaching 25 hour courses, but the learning captain owns those hours and actually deals with maps and mirrors and personal growth and what happened in that last syndicate assignment and what you are going to do this time around to make sure that you are developing as

a person and you are conscious about managing a legalist group, because that is never made explicit, it is never made explicit that I have no power over you but in the workplace it's how we work all the time, is trying to get people to work over whom we have no power and once we can sell it to people that this is a skill to develop and how to have, you know so we would have a specialist to talk about tough conversations. Now go and have a tough conversation with somebody from the last syndicate and really go and do it, and we are all here to learn and if you mess up well it's just a learning process, it is not life damaging but it can be life enhancing.

INTERVIEWER: Our interview was very interesting in a sense that I had nine questions to ask you and we have dealt with all of them.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Oh have we okay.

INTERVIEWER: Without me actually having to ask that, which to me just confirms that you were the right person to speak to, thank you very much.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : In fact on our EDP programme we have got an individual assignment and my individual assignment is on, not necessarily the syndicate process but on learning at Gibbs because I don't and it gives nothing against Gibbs because being at Wits for 14 years I don't think most business schools have learnt, have actually got a learning model, actually understand that.

INTERVIEWER: And it sort of a balance between you know getting the job done and also looking at learning as the business of the business school.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : Exactly and every lecturer being an expert in adult learning. So to

me that is ja, I think we should put this on our agenda for and I will speak to Albert who is putting the agenda together because he is faculty head you know, he took over from me and I think we should really think this through, ja.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much.

INTERVIEWEE 4 : All done, okay.

**[INTERVIEW ENDS]**

INTERVIEWER: We are having a discussion with Interviewee 5, Interviewee 5 as a matter of fact the ethics process requires me to inform you that if at any stage you wish to withdraw during the interview you may do so without any problem. Can you just give me a brief background of your involvement in Business Schools over the last couple of years, how long have you been doing this?

INTERVIEWEE 5: I first joined Wits Business School under Andy Andrews in 1983, I had previously been a Partner with an Accounting firm in computer audit education and I became a Lecturer there and I was there from 1983 to 2004 as eventually being an Associate Professor. I then left Wits Business School, I was part-time Lecturer then at Gibbs, at Henley and at UCT for the eMBA and I also still did some stuff at Wits Business School and then at the beginning of 2005 I became full-time here at Gibbs and as a result that precludes you from teaching at any other Business School so I can no

longer teach at any other Business Schools but now I am an Associate Professor here at Gibbs.

INTERVIEWER: Okay and you mainly teach Management Accounting, Financial Accounting and Corporate Finance.

INTERVIEWEE 5: Correct yes it is all of those, it's (GREETING ANDREW), so it's those areas yes I think my primary focus historically has been Financial Accounting and Management Accounting, also to some extent a little bit of Tax way back when and then more recently Corporate Governance as well, so that's really the areas that I currently teach.

INTERVIEWER: Interviewee 5 so at the end of having gone through some of your programmes what do you expect a student to have gleaned from spending time in an MBA programme in your areas?

INTERVIEWEE 5: Well I guess if we just take Management Accounting I think what you would want the student to recognise is the importance of Management Accounting and the fact that Financial Accounting isn't appropriate for day to day decision making within the company and as such the student needs to acknowledge that I need to look at things from a different perspective depending on what the decision is that I need to make, and so that for me is the most important thing. To that end I teach them marginal costing, contributonal costing, I look at direct and indirect costing and control and non-controllable costs because to my mind those are the three sort of major things which then enable you to do the full array of decision making that User Managers would

typically be involved in. On the Financial Accounting side I guess it is easier in a way it is really to enable the student to understand what goes into a balance sheet, what goes into a financial income statement, what a cash flow is about and what some of the rules are in regard to getting those numbers and I guess also to realise that Accounting isn't a science and there is a whole lot of judgemental aspects and I think students come into the class with the supposition that Accounting is a correct science so that is really what would be in the curriculum.

INTERVIEWER: Okay and Gibbs supplies the traditional model from a number of Business Schools, the sixty percent exam, twenty percent individual assignment and twenty percent syndicate assignment to what extent do you see something like the syndicate assignment contributing or detracting from developing those types of skills in these subjects specifically?

INTERVIEWEE 5: Well I think it helps in a sense because people can highlight different perspectives whereas if you are doing an individual assignment it is really hard to look at alternative perspectives so I do think that the use of the syndicate enables different perspectives to be highlighted and as a result it should enable the learning to occur. And just as an aside one of the problems that we had, not here but certainly at Wits, was if you had knowledge of the subject you were allowed not to be involved in the lecture, you were given an exemption. And I found that was particularly problematic because what that meant was there was now no knowledge in either the class or in the syndicate and so in a sense the entire effort had to come from the Lecturer in that subject. So again I think if the syndicates are made up properly and there is a diverse

group of people in a sense from backgrounds I think the syndicate can be a very useful concept, I also think it is useful in a way of forcing people to adhere to deadlines, be considerate, communicate better, understand how [REDACTED] can occur, so I think there is a whole lot of other learning processes which come through.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely and a number of the interviewees so far have commented on that and the students certainly in their questionnaires have also commented on that so certainly what is new in what you are saying is that certainly the syndicate assignment can serve as a conduit for transfer of more technical skills in something like Financial Accounting or Finance.

INTERVIEWEE 5: Correct because the chances are there is somebody there with better skills than the other and so in that way that person can then really assist with the ground level learning occurring.

INTERVIEWER: And in that respect then obviously the composition or the method for composing groups would be very important to ensure that there are people with those skills?

INTERVIEWEE 5: Indeed I am not sure how the groups are always put together but I mean if it is a case of you know one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight are in syndicate one and then nine till eleven then that is inappropriate but I think if there is some attempt to balance it, to look at not from a male female or age perspective but rather from a work experience, what do those people bring to the syndicate, that for me is the key thing. So if you could have a diverse experience group then in a sense that is



fantastic. And then what I would suggest is that the more Finance orientated person doesn't do the project but oversees the project and so in a sense can bring it all together, help the weaker student focus on certain things, re-look at some of the questionnaires that maybe they have been looking at or whatever as opposed to the person who knows going and doing it because I think that can be a weakness of the syndicate. This is where at the beginning of the year you say Jo's into Marketing, Pete's into Stats and as a result all the syndicate tasks are parcelled out, then there is no learning in a sense so I would be critical of that process. So that's up to the syndicate which is hard because the Lecturer can't always drive that.

INTERVIEWER: That would have been my next question, do you think that there are mechanisms in place from Gibbs's side to try and measure the contribution of different people to a syndicate assignment and in a sense the learning then derived from it?

INTERVIEWEE 5: I am not sure that Gibbs does do that, I certainly know that at Wits for example there was a form that every student had to complete where he would rate how his fellow syndicate members their participation level and contribution towards the thing so that is quite a nice concept. Because we don't have that at Gibbs what I do is I request that the syndicate and the individuals forming the syndicate attach a one or two page contribution from their perspective what they have learned from participating in the particular assignment. Now that's not ideal but in that they have got to put them altogether, if any one person sort of over-states it excessively I am sure some of the other guys are going to be a little bit upset as to well that guy hardly did all of that in a sense, and because it is known ahead of the time I think that causes a different

behaviour in a sense.

INTERVIEWER: What's interesting from what the student feedback so far has been is that they feel that the mechanisms for dealing with so-called freeloaders or free-riders in the syndicate assignments is not adequate and to a certain extent there is a learning from that, how do you deal with individuals such as that and to...

INTERVIEWEE 5: Because it happens in life as well!

INTERVIEWER: Sure. So do you think that in your case you set up assignments to reflect a real life work place?

INTERVIEWEE 5: Absolutely I don't see any point quite frankly in a group assignment on a Harvard case you know in a sense there that would almost be class work so I don't think that for me would be appropriate for a syndicate assignment. I would like to believe the syndicate assignment is a practical work orientated, issues focused concept and that's how you learn the best I would have thought.

INTERVIEWER: Many Business Schools use the syndicate approach or group learning as a way of addressing these interpersonal relations, how to work round that, how to work together as a group because that's Management essentially and also to reduce contact time with the Lecturer do you think that there are things that Gibbs or a Business School do that would differentiate their syndicate approach from other Business Schools?

INTERVIEWEE 5: You know if we take the analogy of the work environment why don't we every quarter, given that they change syndicates half way so maybe at each quarter,

so on two occasions the syndicates do like a 360 or whatever so in other words we replicate in the syndicate what might be happening out there in the work place in a sense, and so you learn about feedback, you learn about taking and giving criticism, you learn about not just being soft in a sense but being here's a particular situation, we are doing a 360, there is no down side of it so what would be the real perspective that you want to talk about etcetera and I think it would be very useful because I think in the real world you don't always complete those forms appropriately, in fact my experience with Standard Bank was that they were always complaining about the fact that the Managers never were very harsh on people, that they recognised that there were hugely weak people but that would never come through in the 360 so maybe this would be a wonderful learning opportunity for how you do that.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think it would be particularly difficult to set up such as that?

INTERVIEWEE 5: I am sure it wouldn't be you know there has been criticism that what we do front end with the students is then repeated by the same Lecturer later in the course or whatever so there is obviously some capacity there so why don't we then use the lead concept or whatever to usefully apply that process, you know I'm not sure where in the MBA we teach the things like performance measurement and that sort of thing but in a way this would be an ideal practical application of that so you know, and again I am a great believer in putting appropriate effort in so if the syndicate is faced with two quite different assignments you know maybe they could target the same company but with a view to looking at the two different assignments, then at least they

just have a single effort in terms of understanding the company and then they drop it down to the two things. So too here we could have an assignment specific to a company and the other assignment is effect your performance review or whatever on each other and so in a sense we are not double doing things and we are really effectively utilising time.

INTERVIEWER: It's a fantastic idea and I am just wondering do you have formal training in [0.15.15 name?] or?

INTERVIEWEE 5: No, not at all.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, not even informal in terms of your involvement at a Business School over time?

INTERVIEWEE 5: It's just through osmosis (LAUGHING) as opposed to any you know I have had no formal training in that area.

INTERVIEWER: Because it seems that the competition for graduates between Business Schools it's actually quite stiff, there is a lot of competition and something like this where a concerted effort is put into what exactly do we want our graduate to go away with might set the programmes apart. Now being able to deal with that messiness of Management sometimes I would think that that is quite a differentiator.

INTERVIEWEE 5: A real plus yes. And I think it is difficult out there you know you talked about the freeloading and I think the very essence of Management now out there in South Africa is about how do you handle the freeloaders, people who are there for a variety of reasons other than because they are competent maybe so how do you handle

that. More importantly how do you handle the other people who are pissed off at the fact that there is freeloading.

INTERVIEWER: Yes to ensure that they don't stride into the...

INTERVIEWEE 5: Yes or get fact full and maybe leave and suddenly you have got another issue in a sense of [0.16.50 unclear] or whatever it happens to be.

INTERVIEWER: So do you think that Gibbs is innovative enough in terms of programme content and methods of presenting that content?

INTERVIEWEE 5: Yes I think you know Gibbs certainly tries I think they spend a lot of time and effort re-looking at the programme where it should be focussed. I think there is effort front end, I think there is effort back end in terms of the global trips and that sort of thing so I do think it is not just a case of you know what happened last year just being replicated in a sense and I guess always key would be to sell whatever it is you are doing to the student, you know what is in it for me and I would have thought that something like a 360 would be a really useful one because I think your point was that students often feel that they want to tell somebody about this, well there is the mechanism in a sense and if we stay with the concept of switching the class and switching the syndicates halfway through the year it really would allow two times to do it and then another two times over the first year, because it would probably only really be appropriate in the first year to have four goes at that.

INTERVIEWER: So one part is the opportunity to give feedback from a student perspective the other area where students surprisingly commented quite consistently on

is they feel that their feedback from Lecturers is quite often not ideal, the comments would be that they want to know where they went wrong to get the mark that they did where they maybe got a sixty and not a seventy. And from my perspective feedback is a very important part of the learning process, it sort of completes the circle, any ideas on?

INTERVIEWEE 5: It is really hard to give good feedback in a sense I think one tends to mark relatively and so you know you have the ten assignments, there are ten syndicates so you have got ten assignments and so you mark the one and that's perhaps the benchmark so now you have got to mark as a result of that and then certainly in my case I then mark the other nine better or worse from that basis. Quite what you know to say to the lecturers so what more could they have done to get from sixty to seventy five, my response quite frankly would be go to the one that scored seventy five in a sense as opposed to really trying to sort of write copious notes about this is a bit thin or whatever but in a sense what else they need to do. And I think you are right I guess maybe the Lecturers are delinquent anyway, but it is a very difficult one in a sense.

INTERVIEWER: But it also reflects to a certain extent two different perspectives, on the one hand students come here because they want to reach a goal and on the other hand Lecturers are here because they want to instil that this is actually a journey and that you know our times demand life long learning and maybe that is part of it, so there isn't a right or wrong but there is a road to improving over time.

INTERVIEWEE 5: Sure and in a sense maybe they have got to do the work as well to

look at it, you know let them go and seek out the better one and then see from their own perspective gosh you know we let the side down in a sense. So ja, but I must say I am very conscious of trying to find something to say when sometimes there isn't, you are bereft of anything!

INTERVIEWER: You have got to make it up of course, just one last question Interviewee 5, what do you think students' perception or experience of syndicate work is, do you think it is positive or negative?

INTERVIEWEE 5: I think it is a negative, I think the very nature of the MBA person is they are not necessarily about learning things or whatever it is about getting the MBA, getting a good mark or whatever and in a sense they want to get from here to there and really I think they perceive the syndicate thing as just being an irritation in a way, they have got to put up with it in a way. And yet whenever in the past students have moaned to me about syndicates my response is there are very few of us who in a work environment are absolutely in isolation, I mean even us here as bloody Lecturers you might think that is the case, it is not true, it's not true, everywhere you go there is some requirement to interact to depend on other people etcetera so you know I think generally more and more now I am seeing projects at work and that sort of thing so the more those things are floated out the more critical it is for the syndicate. And the point I also try and make to them is in different areas you will have different roles and that is exactly the same at work, at work that will be your Department doing something where you might be the leader but then your Department has to be subsumed into something else where now suddenly you have got to put up with some other guy leading and how do

you now contribute when you don't really like what you are doing but that's what he is doing so you have got to somehow do it. So I try and sort of get them to recognise those attributes and their argument is always well but at work then we'll fire somebody, well I guess increasingly you can't (LAUGHING).

INTERVIEWER: That's absolutely true!

INTERVIEWEE 5: So it's even more like the syndicate assignments!

INTERVIEWER: And even increasingly so we manage according to matrices so you try to influence someone's behaviour who doesn't report directly to you and then the lessons that you learn especially if you learn them well in syndicate assignments are actually tremendously valuable.

INTERVIEWEE 5: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much Interviewee 5.



