

THE MBA LEARNING PROGRAMME: ISSUES OF CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

Even a cursory reading of Gordon and Howell's *Higher Education for Business*, the report on the state of business education in the US funded by the Ford Foundation and published in 1959,¹ shows the striking similarities between the MBA then and the MBA today but it also shows the differences that separate the three generations of MBAs, as referred to in Chapter 3. When Gordon and Howell's report appeared business education was, as we saw in the previous chapter, at a crossroads. It had to decide in which direction to move. In the authors' own words:

But it [business education] is an uncertain giant, gnawed by doubt and harassed by the barbs of unfriendly critics. It seeks to serve several masters and is assured by its critics that it serves none well. The business world takes its students but deprecates the value of their training [...] It finds itself at the foot of the academic table [...] It is no wonder then, that 'Schools of Business Administration across the nation are trying, sometimes almost desperately, to find their souls'. They are 'bedevilled by the problem of whom to teach and what to teach'. They seek to clarify their purpose and to find their proper place in the educational world. They search for academic respectability, while most of them continue to engage in unrespectable vocational training. They seek to be professional schools, while expressing doubt themselves that the occupations for which they prepare students can rightfully be called a profession.²

The fact that more than half of the 1959 report (10 out of 18 chapters) focused on issues of programme and teaching and learning shows that then, as now, the content of business education and the ways in which it was transmitted constituted the crux of the existence of business schools. More recently, the international debates on MBA learning outcomes have been focusing on a number of hard and soft skills expected from MBA graduates. The issue of the selection of optimal methods and pedagogical situations to facilitate the development of these skills constitutes a central aspect of the MBA debate which is particularly relevant for South Africa.

The weight attached to the accreditation criteria focused on the learning programme in the HEQC re-accreditation of the MBA – 8 out of 13 accreditation criteria were centred on this – is both consistent with these international trends and sensitive to local challenges. Of particular relevance among these latter is the development of adequate support mechanisms for students who, owing to historic disadvantage, do not comply with the stipulated assumptions of learning.

1 R. Gordon and J. Howell, *Higher Education for Business*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1959. Hereafter Gordon and Howell, *Higher Education for Business*.

2 Gordon and Howell, *Higher Education for Business*, p.4.

The analysis of the results of the re-accreditation process showed that the quality of the learning programme depends to a large extent on the academic governance of the programme itself, i.e. the mechanisms used by programme directors to guarantee the intellectual integrity of the programme and the consistency of the students' teaching and learning experience. In turn, the relationship between content, pedagogy and academic governance varies from programme to programme depending on how long the business school has been in operation, its mode of delivery, and the market niche within which it operates.

Taking all of this into account, this chapter is focused on the learning programme criteria, which, as seen in Chapter 2, include the following elements:

- The processes that guarantee the integrity and intellectual coherence of a programme and the mechanisms to monitor and review it.
- The actual intellectual coherence and appropriateness of the programme content in relation to its purposes.
- The structure and articulation of the teaching and learning processes, including the assumptions of learning that guide the admission of students, assessment, and research education.
- The availability of adequate human resources (academic, support and administrative) to fulfil the objectives of a programme according to its specific mode of delivery. This includes the translation of the national goals of equity and redress into institutional- and programme-level policies for appointments.
- The manner in which programmes guarantee students access to sufficient and adequate physical and educational infrastructure according to their specific mode of delivery.

This chapter examines the MBA learning programme specifically from the point of view of the articulation between admissions, content level, teaching methods, assessment (including the MBA dissertation) and learning outcomes. It looks into how the quality of faculty – their qualifications, teaching abilities, actual business experience and research acumen – is essential for the overall quality of a programme. It is based on an analysis of responses to the baseline questionnaire sent out by the HEQC before the beginning of the re-accreditation exercise, the 37 programme submissions, and all the expert panels' reports. It argues, first, that the realisation of learning outcomes depends very largely on both student selection and the programme's academic governance; second, that the trend in some programmes to dilute research training and diminish the importance of the MBA dissertation undermines the standing of the MBA as a postgraduate degree at the master's level; and, third, that most specialist MBAs offered in South Africa have too thin a sector-specific content to be interpreted as more than exercises in search of comparative market advantage. Finally, the chapter argues that weak or non-existent faculty research production compromises the relevance of the MBA for the South African business world.

With this in mind, Chapter 4 is organised into three sections. The first section deals with the relation between admission requirements, assumptions of learning and programme outcomes, and offers an analysis of typical curricula. The second concentrates on teaching and learning from the students' perspective and discusses the importance of the MBA 'total

experience' pedagogy and the role that the composition of faculty has in sustaining a programme. The third analyses the matrix mode of programme organisation.

THE CONTENT OF THE MBA: TEACHING WHAT TO WHOM?

In the previous chapter we mentioned the struggle of business schools for acceptance in the academic world. We saw that the process of branding the MBA, together with the actual contributions of the programmes to business, and the growing importance of business in the globalised society, have made the MBA into one of the (if not the) most reputable and popular postgraduate degrees in the world. The manifestation of this popularity and reputation in South Africa has been the mushrooming of MBA programmes in the country during the last decade. The expansion of the MBA in the country sharpened competition between business schools and heightened their need to find acceptable and profitable market niches. One plausible market niche is constituted of individuals who do not have the necessary academic background and/or work experience required for a professional master's but who are eager nevertheless to obtain a degree which is seen as an open door to success. Another consists of individuals who work in a particular economic sector or industry and who are interested in applying a management approach to their industry. Although this makes sense from a marketing point of view, it seems to have been translated, in some cases, into a relaxation of admission requirements, the thinning of the curriculum content, and the devaluation of the research work in relation to the MBA. Evidence of these processes was found during the HEQC re-accreditation.

An analysis of business schools' submissions to SAQA, on which part of this chapter is based, indicated that there was general confusion about the forms in which fundamental and core modules related to each other in the structure of a programme. Schools' submissions were also characterised by the allocation of credits which often did not reflect the actual notional hours that students invested in the programme. Taking this into account, and in order to avoid confusion, for the purpose of this report we have conflated fundamental and core modules into 'obligatory modules' and distinguished them from modules that are elective. We do not analyse the number of credits attached to each module but rather the relation between the content of a module, the way in which it articulates with other modules, and the level at which these modules are taught.

The point of departure of this analysis, as in the re-accreditation process, is that a higher education programme is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that lead to a qualification. A programme, then, implies the existence of a structured progression between contents and learning experiences that is designed to facilitate the attainment of learning outcomes.³

The attainment of learning outcomes is predicated on a student having a range of prior skills, competencies and knowledge which constitute the necessary antecedent of the learning experiences he/she is about to embark upon. For example, master's programmes require students to have an honours degree or equivalent to enrol. However, some programmes are

³ See *HEQC Accreditation Framework*, September 2004.

structured in such a way that students who lack the necessary assumptions of learning may acquire them through the programme.

Quality in any programme is the result of the interaction of a range of elements: the content of the programme, the academic/professional standing of lecturers within their field as well as their ability to teach, and students' readiness to engage with the content and pedagogical experiences offered to them. This section looks into the interactions between admissions, programme content and learning outcomes of the MBA programmes evaluated during the HEQC re-accreditation.

Admission requirements

The MBA is a professional degree taught at the master's level. All accreditation bodies take this statement as a point of departure from which to state the requirements students must meet to obtain the degree.⁴

In South Africa the MBA as a professional master's degree is situated at Level 8 PG 2 of the NQF. The table below shows the applied competencies and autonomy of learning that graduates from a professional master's should have acquired during their studies.

Table 1: NQF Level descriptor 8 PG2

<i>Applied competency</i>	<i>Autonomy of learning</i>
A comprehensive and systematic knowledge of a field/discipline and a depth of knowledge in some areas of specialisation.	Capacity to operate effectively in complex ill-defined contexts.
A coherent and critical understanding of the theories of the field/discipline; and ability to critique current research and advanced scholarship and ability to make epistemological judgements based on evidence.	Capacity to self-evaluate, exercising personal responsibility and initiative.

⁴ The MBA is a postgraduate degree at the Master's level and must correspond to minimum intellectual and academic standards for such degrees. Admission to an MBA programme will normally require a first degree or equivalent. This requirement can only be lowered exceptionally in the case of candidates with substantial and proven professional experience. The MBA is a post-experience degree seen as a career accelerator or a means to make a career shift after a minimum of two or three years' professional experience. Programmes designed to help young graduates prepare for their entry into professional life should normally carry an alternative title. The MBA has a minimum length of one academic year of full-time study or the equivalent when the programme is offered on a part-time basis. The MBA will require a minimum of 400 hours of classroom study or structured contact. In all, the programme should require a minimum of 1 200 hours of personal work. An MBA programme should be intellectually demanding and require a substantial personal investment in terms of commitment and effort. Admission to an MBA programme should be through a rigorous process of selection to ensure that only qualified participants are given access to the degree. Participants in an MBA programme should be rigorously assessed through a regime of examinations and graded work in order to ensure that learning objectives are being met up to Master's degree standards. European Quality Link, European MBA Guidelines. www.efmd.be

Table 1 continued

<i>Applied competency</i>	<i>Autonomy of learning</i>
An understanding of a range of research methods, technologies and techniques. The ability to select them appropriately for a particular research purpose.	Capacity to manage learning tasks autonomously, professionally and ethically.
Ability to identify, analyse and deal with complex real-world problem issues using evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments.	Capacity to continue to learn independently, for continuing academic or professional development.
Efficient and effective information retrieval skills; the identification, critical analysis and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data; an ability to engage with research and current scholarly or professional literature.	
An ability to present/communicate academic professional work effectively, catering for a range of audiences.	

The acquisition and development of these capacities is predicated on students having the prior knowledge, skills and competencies that will support and facilitate their learning process at the master's level. Thus the main purpose of entrance requirements to programmes is to ensure that all prospective students have the necessary assumptions of learning to succeed in a programme. The standard admission requirements for entrance into an MBA programme are an honours degree or equivalent in a relevant discipline and a minimum of three years' relevant working experience.

In South Africa the NQF has introduced the possibility of using admission criteria other than those usually stated. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a way of opening higher education to individuals who, for a variety of reasons, have acquired professional experience without having a higher education degree. Similarly, the concept of alternative admission (AA) through the discretionary power conferred upon higher education institutions' Senates acknowledges the circumstances of individuals who, despite not meeting all of the necessary academic requirements for entry into a particular degree, show the potential to succeed in it.

Taking this into account the following table sets out the different admission routes into the MBA as a professional master's at Level 8 PG 2 of the NQF.

Table 2: Admission routes into the MBA

<i>Standard admission</i>	<i>RPL</i>	<i>AA</i>
Honours or equivalent in relevant discipline.	No higher education degree.	A higher education degree.
Minimum of three years of relevant working experience.	Substantive working experience.	Some work experience.

In reality, however, the MBA programmes' admission procedures are quite different from those which Table 2 suggests. As we saw in the analysis of the re-accreditation results (Chapter 2), 52 percent of the programmes offered by public providers and 71 percent of those offered by private providers needed to improve their admission practices. Two of the most typical reasons for not meeting minimum standards in relation to the admission criterion were admitting more students than the accepted 10 percent of a cohort via RPL or AA and using poor methods of testing whether students had the necessary assumptions of learning. These admission practices, as we will see, have important consequences for the way in which programmes are structured and the progression students make through them.

Programmes that met minimum standards or were commended in relation to admissions required students to have an appropriate higher education degree and relevant work experience, as in any other professional master's. Over and above this, for these programmes students had to fulfil a number of other requirements, including psychological tests to ascertain their potential in the field, interviews, letters of reference, essays, etc.

Some of these programmes required students to complete the GMAT, administered by the US-based GMAC,⁵ which assesses numeric and communication skills, reasoning abilities, and other competencies and knowledge regarded as necessary for doing an MBA.⁶ Most of these programmes admitted students via RPL and AA within the stipulated 10 percent proportion. Some of these programmes put together bridging courses, which are not credit-bearing for the MBA, in order to help students acquire the assumptions of learning underpinning the MBA programme. In another variation, some programmes invited candidates thought unready for the MBA to an alternative programme which included some MBA courses, where the candidates' performance was closely monitored to ascertain whether they could actually be admitted into the MBA programme. Fundamentally, what distinguished these programmes' admission practices is that admitting students via RPL or AA did not affect the structure and rules of progression of the MBA that they offered and therefore the standing of the degree at the master's level.

⁵ www.mba.com/mba.default.htm

⁶ Some South African programmes, although they recognise the standing of GMAT as the standard international admission test for entrance to the MBA, see it as culturally biased and prefer to apply their own in-house tests.

Conversely, some of the MBA programmes assessed by the HEQC were structured in different ways to allow for the admission of students via RPL or AA. Unfortunately, as can be seen in the table below, the manner in which this was done often had serious consequences for the location of these MBAs at Level 8 of the NQF.

The programmes represented in Table 3 are structured in building blocks. This means that the MBA is splintered into intermediate degrees which act both as feeders to the MBA and as part of the MBA programme itself. Thus, instead of providing the necessary bridging courses for RPL and AA students to enter the MBA, these programmes made bridging courses part of the MBA. By following this approach these schools were conferring MBA degrees that had not been taught at the required level.

In the case of programme A in Table 3, students were admitted via AA with a three-year undergraduate degree but they were not subject to any form of skills test to ascertain whether they possessed the required assumptions of learning. Instead, students were admitted into a programme at which eight MBA modules were taught (in all probability not at NQF Level 8). A minimum 65 percent mark for all these modules gave students entrance into the MBA as well as credits towards it.

Programme E is a good example of a programme planned around RPL needs. The building blocks towards the MBA were designed with multiple exits and entries (including obtaining three qualifications after completing three years of study). The MBA programme admitted three different types of students without any entrance requirements. The first admission route was via RPL for students who did not have prior degrees but had five years of working experience. These students were admitted into a programme the successful completion of which allowed them to proceed into the first year of the MBA already having 50 percent of the credits (which could not have been taught at Level 8 of the NQF). The second admission route encompassed students who had higher education degrees but no professional experience (a particular form of AA). This programme allowed students in these circumstances to obtain a postgraduate diploma in one year, to exit the programme in order to get experience, and then come back to complete the MBA. Finally, the third route was for those candidates who were closer to possessing the necessary assumptions of learning and could be admitted directly into the MBA. However, if these students did not possess or acquire during the programme the necessary research skills, the programme allowed for an intermediate exit.

Table 3: Entrance requirements in South African MBA programmes structured as building blocks

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Degree required</i>	<i>Experience required</i>	<i>Standard tests</i>	<i>Additional requirements</i>	<i>Building block programme structure</i>
A	Three-year tertiary degree.	Three years' management.	None.	Letters of recommendation, CV and two essays.	Executive development programme includes eight MBA modules. If 65% is attained in each module student is admitted into the MBA.
B	B degree.	Three years minimum.	Numeracy, speed, comprehension.		Management development diploma acts as a feeder to the MBA.
C	B degree.	Two years' experience.	None.	Graduate record, two references, interview, CV.	If student has less than five years' experience must take a pre-MBA course.
D	B degree or Higher National Diploma from provider.	Three years minimum, one year supervisory experience.	None.	Recommendations, transcripts, CV.	National diploma students must complete middle management programme and then apply to Senate to obtain bachelor status for admission into MBA.
E	Varies.	Varies.	None.	None.	<p><i>No prior degree, 25 years old and five years' experience.</i></p> <p>Entrance to management advanced programme. The completion of this takes the student into the first year of the MBA with 50% credits. Student proceeds to MBA second year.</p> <p><i>Student has a degree but no experience.</i></p> <p>MBA level 1 gives a post-graduate diploma. Student exits to get work experience and comes back to MBA level 2.</p>

Table 3 continued

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Degree required</i>	<i>Experience required</i>	<i>Standard tests</i>	<i>Additional requirements</i>	<i>Building block programme structure</i>
					<i>Degree plus three years' experience.</i>
					Can enter MBA first year and exit with a postgraduate diploma, or continue to MBA2 and obtain MBA.
F	B degree.	Three years.	Psychometric test.	Recommendation, interview, CV, computer literacy.	Advanced business programme functions as the MBA first year. Students progress to MBA second year. BTech management accepted as MBA first year and progresses to MBA second year.

Table 3 brings to the fore two worrying issues about the provision of the MBA in South Africa. On the one hand some programmes advertised as MBAs failed to provide content and learning experiences at a master's level. On the other, some of these programmes, apparently more concerned with enrolment numbers than with the soundness of the learning programme they offered, introduced intermediate qualifications that have no real currency in the market, with obvious consequences for their graduates. Despite claims by providers about the contribution programmes such as these make to broadening access to postgraduate education, there can be little doubt that access to poor quality renders the democratisation of higher education empty.

The re-accreditation exercise has shown that several MBAs had admission practices which, contrary to accepted practice, allowed more than 10 percent of students per cohort to access the programme via either RPL or AA. The fact that students were admitted into modules which were both feeders to and part of the MBA implies either that the programme was taught at a level that students could not reach and therefore they dropped out/failed and left the degree, or that they were carried by the programme, which was taught below the appropriate NQF level with the result that, if students actually graduated, whatever their certificates say, they did not obtain an MBA.

When students are admitted into a programme for which they are not prepared they undermine the syndicate work and the discussions that take place at lectures and which

constitute the centre of the MBA pedagogy as ‘total experience’. One variation of this problem was voiced by students during the site visits that formed part of the re-accreditation process. They remarked on the difficulty of dealing during discussion time with students who had no work experience because these students did not have the context necessary to participate in these discussions productively.

The next subsection will explore the relationship between admissions, content and rules of progression within the MBA programme.

Programme content and articulation

The nature of the relationship between admissions, the content of the learning programme and the achievement of learning outcomes is a major differentiator of good MBA programmes. The following table presents the required content of an MBA programme according to the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), which was the standard incorporated in the re-accreditation Criterion 9 used by the HEQC.⁷ The table presents both the core functional areas that must be taught and the knowledge that must be included in the courses/modules.

Table 5: Content of the MBA European standard

<i>Main functional areas</i>	<i>Areas of knowledge underpinning management</i>
Accounting	Concepts and applications of accounting
Finance	Financing of business
Marketing	Concepts, processes and institutions in the production and marketing of goods and services
Operations management	Change management
Information systems management	Management information systems, including information technology
Human resources management	Organisational theory and behaviour
Economics	Impact of environmental forces on organisations
Quantitative analysis	Quantitative methods

As mentioned earlier, a higher education programme is based on the purposeful articulation and progression between modules. Not only is the MBA no exception to this but, as we saw in Chapter 3, the multidisciplinary character of the MBA requires ‘summative’ courses that

⁷ The MBA is a generalist degree in business administration. In line with the previous guideline it is a broadening programme. As a result a specialised Master's degree should not be called an MBA. It is important that the MBA be clearly identified with a certain type of content. The MBA curriculum provides broad coverage of the main functional areas in management, namely accounting, finance, marketing and sales, operations management, information systems management, law, and human resource management. It is also expected to provide basic instruction in economics and quantitative analysis. The curriculum will normally be highly integrative and will include courses in business policy and strategy. Beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge and technical skills the curriculum is expected to put theory into practice by focusing on the personal development of participants through such competencies as decision-making, team work, leadership skills, entrepreneurial potential, negotiation skills, communication and presentation skills. The later part of the programme should make provision for electives and may include the possibility for participants to choose a major area of study. www.efmd.be

Table 6: Examples of poorly articulated general MBA programmes

Programme	Admission criteria	Obligatory	Electives	Learning outcomes	Dissertation
MBA General 1	<p><i>No prior degree, 25 years old and five years' experience.</i></p> <p>Entrance to management advanced programme. The completion of this takes the student into the first year of the MBA with 50% credits. Student proceeds to MBA second year.</p> <p><i>Student has a degree but no experience.</i></p> <p>MBA level 1 gives a postgraduate diploma. Student exits to get work experience and comes back to MBA level 2.</p> <p><i>Degree plus three years' experience</i></p> <p>Can enter MBA first year and exit with a postgraduate diploma, or continue to MBA second year and obtain MBA.</p>	Strategic management, two courses.	<p>Information management.</p> <p>Strategic marketing.</p> <p>Advanced marketing.</p> <p>Advanced human resources management.</p> <p>Project management.</p> <p>E-commerce.</p> <p>Advanced financial management.</p> <p>Supply chain management.</p>	<p>Understand and be able to evaluate the concepts and theories of the academic disciplines underpinning management practice.</p> <p>Analyse and diagnose complex and uncertain situations.</p> <p>Effective decision making; ability to implement decisions; effective communication skills.</p> <p>Formulate coherent strategic policies in collaboration with stakeholders.</p> <p>Develop action learning skills; integrate theory and practice.</p>	25 000 words.
MBA General 2	<p>NQF Level 6.</p> <p>Five years of relevant experience.</p> <p>Psychometric test.</p> <p>Interview.</p>	<p>Human resource strategy.</p> <p>Quantitative techniques.</p> <p>Strategic information management.</p> <p>Management economics.</p> <p>Financial management.</p> <p>Strategic management.</p> <p>Organisational dynamics.</p> <p>Research methodology.</p>	<p>Project management.</p> <p>Entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Management of technology.</p> <p>E-business management.</p> <p>Sector 1 management.</p> <p>Sector 2 management.</p> <p>Sector 3 management.</p> <p>Overview sector 2.</p> <p>Business ethics and corporate governance.</p>	<p>Identify and solve complex business problems.</p> <p>Acquire grounding in generic management.</p> <p>Manipulate information to meet goals using appropriate technology.</p> <p>Develop and analyse business strategies.</p> <p>Manage organisations within international context.</p> <p>Demonstrate and apply business research ability.</p>	Research project.

make sense of previous learning in an integrated manner. These courses, the capstones of the MBA programme, are usually some form of strategic management. Table 6 shows two examples of poor articulation and lack of coherent rules of progression in two archetypical general MBA programmes.

Programme 1's main feature was a learning programme structured around only two levels of strategic management with no introductory modules to give the student the tools with which to make sense of management, and with a number of elective courses which by definition do not have a logical progression between them. As can be seen in this case, students were neither forced nor given the option to take a module on research methodology to help them tackle the preparation of the dissertation, which in this particular model of programme still has considerable weight in the overall structure. In this case, the poor content of the programme in terms of obligatory courses corresponded with the very low admission requirements and the splintering of the MBA qualification into two others.

Programme 2 is also a general MBA. Its fundamental characteristic was the lack of logical progression between modules. No module was a pre-requisite for entry into more advanced modules. This programme was not based on the principle that knowledge needs to be built systematically: no logical sequence can be discerned in this structure. A set of admission requirements that met minimum standards was completely undermined by the fact that students enrolled in the programme could start and finish the MBA at any point. Thus, the fact that, unlike Programme 1, this programme offered more or less all the necessary obligatory subjects made little difference. What sense is strategic management as the capstone module going to make for students who have as yet taken no other subject?

Both programmes used multiple-choice questions and essays or a case study in their assessment of students' performance. A further characteristic of both programmes was that they had very few permanent faculty to count on for teaching obligatory courses. Thus they depended on contracted lecturers, usually professionals, to teach different modules. One implication of this arrangement, which we will examine in detail in the last section of this chapter, is that modules were offered when lecturers were available. Hence progression could not be enforced.

Table 7 shows the structure of an archetypical specialist MBA. This programme had three main distinctive features. Firstly, it only offered three of the modules considered the basis of any MBA (financial management, human resource management, statistics, research methodology, management accounting, operations management, strategic management and marketing management). Secondly, there was no evidence of any module acting as a capstone either in the first or the second year. Thirdly, the second year was concentrated on the specialisation, and the dissertation which was on the area of specialisation. A specialisation in the management of a sectoral industry can hardly be taught in four modules, one of which is on policy.

Table 7: Example of poorly articulated specialist MBA programme

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Admission criteria</i>	<i>Obligatory</i>	<i>Electives</i>	<i>Learning outcomes</i>	<i>Dissertation</i>
MBA Specialist 1, distance.	Degree or diploma. CV, letters of reference. Interview. Computer literacy. 30% of students admitted through alternative admissions.	<i>Level 1:</i> Management and organisational behaviour. Financial decision making. Marketing and the environment of economics. Quantitative methods. <i>Level 2:</i> Specialisation. Services marketing. Sectoral policy. Sectoral economics and finance.	Not stated.	Not correctly stated.	<i>Level 3:</i> Three-hour workshop on research methodology, and dissertation.

The curriculum of MBA Specialist 1 gives no indication of how practical issues related to the specific sector were addressed in the modules. The fact that this MBA was offered as a distance programme raises the issue of how to deal with applying the modules. A three-hour module on research methodology prior to undertaking the dissertation casts some doubts on the importance attributed in the programme to both research methodology and dissertation. Once again, it seems that the low admission requirements were matched by a thin MBA that offered a limited introduction to the fundamentals of business management and a minimalist approach to the area of specialisation. However, understandably, a programme like this, aimed at middle management in a particular industry or economic sector, is quite sought-after by individuals looking for promotion and companies implementing staff skills development for newly appointed managers.

The structure of the MBA Specialist 1 brings to the fore the purpose of specialisations in the context of the MBA, and the ways in which they should be integrated into the foundation programme. This programme seemed to lack a capstone for the foundation and to offer neither structure nor progression in the second year focused on the specialisation. Should there be an integrative module to make sense of the specialisation in the context of the MBA? The ways in which these programmes were presented and marketed seem to confirm that specialisations are mixed with the search for comparative advantage in a rather well-supplied market. It is interesting that, as seen in Chapter 1, specialist MBAs were offered by the newer providers amongst both private and public higher education institutions, who had

to compete with the well-established, older schools, whose reputation in the MBA market had been fairly secure for several years.

Table 8 presents the final archetype: a well-articulated general programme. The programme had three clear components. The first part situated organisations in the socio-political environment in which they operated, and introduced the idea of interaction with the environment in a managerial fashion. The second part was concentrated on the principles and operations of management and provided the students with the necessary tools and techniques to develop management skills. The last part focused on practically oriented training and on a coordinating course centred on the functions of top level management. As can be seen from the table, all elements of management were part of the programme as obligatory modules. There was no obligatory research methodology module and the dissertation was replaced by a management report, which was designed to demonstrate that the student had achieved all the learning outcomes.

The number and variety of elective courses was not too broad and fitted the generalist character of the programme. The MBA General 3 seemed to offer a balance between theory and practice that would enable students to attain the learning outcomes. This programme had quite sophisticated assumptions of learning and specific skills which were tested in-house. It articulated upwards with a PhD in business management. It had a large number of full-time academic faculty to teach the obligatory modules and to supervise the preparation of the management report. This type of programme structure is characteristic of older and well-established programmes. However, we will see in the last section of this chapter that it is not only the older model with a large full-time faculty that runs a good MBA programme and that there are in fact comparatively new programmes that have an excellent curriculum structure.

Looking at the results of the re-accreditation process and at the schools' submissions it seems clear that the schools with the best structured programmes have the highest admission requirements. Programmes structured according to coherent rules of progression and whose overall intellectual integrity is maintained throughout the teaching and learning process are predicated on students possessing the necessary assumptions of learning to succeed in a master's degree, and therefore on the careful selection of their candidates.

From the analysis of the learning programmes of the 37 South African MBAs that entered the HEQC's re-accreditation process, it emerges that besides the subjects corresponding to the AMBA and EQUIS standards, business schools also offer a number of courses considered locally relevant, such as leadership, entrepreneurship, change management, corporate governance, business ethics and project management. It is noteworthy that business schools are increasingly focusing on core management skills, critical thinking, leadership, implementation and environmental awareness as part of the hard skills required from MBA graduates.

Table 8: Example of a well-articulated general MBA programme

Programme	Admission criteria	Obligatory	Electives	Learning outcomes	Dissertation
MBA General 3.	B degree. Three years' experience. Tests management competency profile, numerical reasoning. Communication skills. Bridging programme (without credits) to address gaps.	<p><i>Year 1</i></p> Foundations of business. Logics of management. Management accounting. Organisational behaviour. Operations management. Management of finance. Introduction to entrepreneurship. Human resource management.	Investment management. Technological management. Advanced marketing. Labour relations. Etc.	Understanding of comparative business frameworks and applicability. Knowledge of conceptual and analytical fields of business management. Ability to apply analytical frameworks. Ability to work alone and in teams. Problem solving skills. Leadership skills.	Management report. Vertical articulation to a PhD.
		<p><i>Year 2</i></p> Financial management. Marketing management. Management dynamics. Information management. Enterprise resource management. Business strategy. Management report.			

A comparison between current requirements and Gordon and Howell's 45-year-old suggestions of core content for the MBA indicates that the core areas of knowledge for management have not changed substantially.⁸ What seem to have changed radically are the spread of the elective courses and the possibility of specialising in certain areas or industries. Internationally, most of the new industry-focused and process- (or technology-) oriented

⁸ Gordon and Howell suggested the following core contents for the MBA: organisational theory and management principles; market environment and functional management (finance, marketing, industrial relations, human relations, production or operations management); information and control systems (managerial accounting and statistical analysis and related topics); advanced economics (aggregative economics and managerial economics); legal environment of business; and integrating the management viewpoint (business policy). Gordon and Howell, *Higher Education for Business*, p.209.

specialisations available today are a response to the influence of globalisation and the IT revolution on business in the last two decades.

In the South African case, the range of elective courses offered by each programme differentiates business schools in terms of focus and resources as well as in terms of access to networks. The more established schools offer a variety of electives that provide the opportunity for some form of specialisation in fields such as investment finance, property and human resource management. Other electives are tourism management, e-commerce, health management, small business management, global marketing, knowledge management, and managing HIV/Aids. Yet it is interesting that older and more established schools have a narrower variety of electives while at the same time they offer opportunities for students to undertake electives at other business schools abroad. Chapter 5 explores the issue of course content and the local social relevance of the MBA.

Technikon-based programmes, on the other hand, have drawn on their historic experiences with the manufacturing and production industries in the organisation of elective courses for the MBA. Thus, examples of elective choices at the technikon-based MBAs are world class manufacturing, quality management, management of technology, the economics of the motor industry and supply chain management.

Private institutions tend to offer a smaller selection of electives, relying largely on sufficient student interest to offer them. Yet, interestingly, the largest concentration of specialist MBA programmes was found at local private providers. Possible reasons for this are advanced in the section below that focuses on the matrix model of programme organisation.

The minimum standards of the learning programme criterion state that no more than a third of the qualification should be in the area of specialisation. Yet one of the most common reasons why South African specialist MBAs failed to meet minimum standards in this criterion during the HEQC re-accreditation was not that they taught more than a third of their courses on the specialist area but that they taught less. The case presented in Table 7 supports this argument. Given that the trend internationally is towards significantly higher percentages of the programme in the area of specialisation, with functional and generalist subjects occupying minimal space, it seems legitimate to wonder to what extent, at least in some cases, specialisations in South Africa are actual responsiveness to market needs.

International trends in specialisation raise the broader question about the nature and purpose of the MBA discussed in the previous chapter. Is the MBA a generalist qualification? Is there a need for specialists with generalist knowledge, in which case would provision be moving towards the 'bespoke MBA' with the programme designed with the flexibility to allow for diversification in the elective streams as the bases for specialisation? Is the future of the MBA in the development of sectoral-specific programmes? If the answer to the latter is yes, how would sector-specific programmes produce the 'ideal MBA' according to Neelankavil's description?

The ideal MBA would be creative, intelligent, hard working, well-organized, socially responsible, ethically oriented, mature, flexible and able to understand the functional interplay among finance, human resources, marketing and operations management. In addition, such an individual would have a strong analytical background, extensive business experience and work well with people. The ideal MBA would be, in short, a well-educated and well-rounded individual who could tackle the myriad problems faced by managers in all business.⁹

The place of research education in the MBA

The question of what the 'ideal MBA' is cannot be settled without tackling the dichotomy between the 'professional' MBA and the 'academic' MBA. In 1959 Gordon and Howell reflected that many business schools, regardless of their specific orientation, would define their MBA as a professional master's in the sense that their programmes prepared for practice rather than for teaching and research, and because the majority of the programmes did not build on an undergraduate base in the same field.¹⁰ This old debate is current in South Africa where programmes that define themselves as practitioner-oriented see in this focus a reason to minimise the role of research in the overall programme.

The currency of this debate seems to be partly related to the societal focus on entrepreneurship and the growing perception of the MBA both in the public and private sectors as the best approach to the training of new management cadres from historically disadvantaged groups. These local drivers operate in a changing business context where complexity, internationalisation, knowledge management and flat organisation structures accentuate the need for skills that could enable middle managers, and also future business leaders, to make strategic decisions in an ever competitive world.

Practitioner-focused programmes place less emphasis on the research component of the MBA than do their more academically oriented counterparts. But perhaps it could be that, at least in certain cases, the practitioner label offers an elegant way out of the difficulties caused by the lack of academically trained faculty either available for or capable of supervising research projects. Could it not be, as the analysis presented in the previous section suggests, that practitioner programmes are enrolling students who are in no position to comply with the research requirements of a master's level degree, and who are not provided with the necessary support within the programmes either?

The analyses of the programme archetypes presented in Tables 6 to 8 give a sense of the wide differences in the ways in which programmes deal with the research component of the MBA. Against this backdrop the issue of the MBA dissertation needs to be tackled from two different perspectives. One is the definition of the master's degree. As we saw earlier, the

⁹ James P. Neelankavil, Corporate America's Quest for an Ideal MBA, *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 13 No. 5, 1994, pp.38-52, p.38.

¹⁰ Gordon and Howell, *Higher Education for Business*, p.248.

MBA, as a professional master's degree, is pitched at Level 8 PG2 of the NQF. Table 1 indicates that half of the applied competencies of professional masters, are in the field of research. This does not mean that the aim of the qualification is to turn the student into a researcher. No accreditation body expects MBA programmes to turn out researchers and academics; this is the function of doctoral programmes. But there is a general acknowledgement that research skills are among the enabling tools for independent learning.

An examination of a sample of research reports and dissertations approved at some of the business schools whose programmes were part of the re-accreditation process signalled the existence of a wide, possibly too wide, spectrum in the level and scope of these works. While some of these dissertations could hardly stand comparison with master's dissertations in other disciplines, even with mini-dissertations from coursework master's, others showed the kind of integration between theory and application expected at a master's level (professional or not).

Taking into account both international debates and South African trends in this regard, it seems important to point out that even if a fitness for purpose approach akin to the one taken by the AACSB were to be applied in South Africa, defining a school as practitioner-oriented only means that the faculty is not primarily engaged in research, not that students do not have to acquire research skills and competencies in order to be awarded an MBA. This approach, of course, begs the question as to how faculty that is not active in research can teach research methodology and supervise master's dissertations. We would like to argue that the location of MBA programmes within higher education institutions, whether these are universities, the now universities of technology, or private providers, defines the need to have a research function. This need not constitute the primary focus of the school's mission, but it cannot be minimised to the point that a master's degree is stripped of its defining features.

From the point of view of research skills alone, few MBA programmes actually match the level descriptors of the professional master's degree. However, this is a problem manifested also in non-professional disciplines in relation to the structured master's or master's by coursework. A master's degree without sufficient research methodology, theoretical grounding and analytical skills seems misplaced at Level 8 PG2. The issue of research in the MBA is not limited just to a matter of standards but is fundamentally related to curriculum content and knowledge production. We mention in Chapter 3 that research is a fundamental aspect of business school accreditation by the AACSB and EQUIS.¹¹ The AACSB highlights the role that research plays in achieving curriculum renewal and relevance. There is, moreover, a general agreement that globalisation and the changes it has brought about in terms of governance, markets, and the relations between macro and micro economic policy

¹¹ See EQUIS, *Criteria Satisfaction Checklist* (pdf), and *The Dynamic Model for Quality Development. Guidance Notes on the EQUIS Quality Criteria* (pdf); www.efmd.be AACSB International, *Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Schools*, adopted on 25 April 2003. Revised on 1 January, 2004 www.aacsb.edu/accreditation

have heightened the need for research that helps us understand these changes and their implications. The AACSB argues that business schools have a responsibility to respond to the need for research on business. As we will see in the next chapter, in a developing country such as South Africa the areas for research and, by implication, for curriculum renewal are at the intersection of the global and the local. Orienting students towards current and locally relevant research areas is a fundamental aspect of research training at the MBA programmes, not because students should develop an academic interest but because on their actions depends the renewal of business practices in the country. This, however, is far from being the norm.

The fact that research-intensive MBAs are not the norm does not mean that there are no research-intensive business schools and programmes in South Africa where the staff's research talent and experience play a role in the renewal of the MBA curriculum. A good example of the relation between research and renewal is staff involvement in the development and preparation of case studies for the programme courses.

MAKING SENSE OF CONTENT: TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE MBA

As the analysis of Criterion 10 in Chapter 2 showed, teaching and learning have various interrelated components: the transmission of content, the development of skills and competencies, the integration of knowledge, and the demonstration of the capacity to apply knowledge, competencies and skills in appropriate circumstances. Integrating these – far from an easy task at the best of times – is further complicated when the subject matter involved in the teaching and learning process is of a multidisciplinary nature.

We argued in Chapter 3 that the multidisciplinary character of the MBA poses the greatest challenges to teaching and learning because multidisciplinary does not just happen when many disciplines are taught as part of one programme. For teaching and learning to be effective in a multidisciplinary context there needs to be an epistemological convergence which sees the object of study with a different lens from each individual discipline. The construction of multidisciplinary and the development of specific skills and competencies depend directly on the practice of teaching and learning. This section discusses the skills and competencies expected as outcomes of the MBA and how they relate to pedagogies and modes of delivery.

Making managers: The quest for skills

From the 1924 introduction by Harvard of the case study as the main method of teaching the MBA, engaging with real problems in the world of business has been the teaching method at most schools. In 1959 Gordon and Howell identified three different emphases in teaching: the descriptive, the analytical, and the managerial clinical, and pointed out that too much emphasis was being placed on the description of institutions, procedures and practices when the stress should rather be on analysis.

Greater emphasis on an analytical approach means giving students a command of useful analytical tools, seeking out significant generalizations, and in general developing in students the kind of sophisticated understanding of the relevant underlying relationships that will enable them to cope with concrete problem-solving situations. The kinds of problem-solving situations which are important to the businessman are those which he encounters in an administrative capacity. Hence, there is need for managerial and clinical emphasis in which problems are considered not only from the viewpoint of the detached observer, but also from that of the manager who must cope with them and reach a workable solution within the limitations imposed by his immediate environment.¹²

The pedagogical modalities that have accompanied teaching at business schools have been the straight lecture, the discussion method, and a combination of the two. In all cases teaching required small classes where contact between students and lecturers was possible. While Gordon and Howell found that most American business schools in the late 1950s practised all of these methodologies, they remarked upon the uneven results of the teaching. While the main reason given for this was that 'teaching by the Socratic method is an art which some teachers never acquire', over and above unsatisfactory teaching the two main difficulties were the quality of the students and the quality of the materials used.¹³

Almost 50 years later the issue of the outcomes of business education is still a vexed question, although what is expected from an MBA graduate has changed, following the changes experienced in business organisations and the global economy. A much-quoted 1999 article by Kretovics¹⁴ summarises the outcomes of an assessment pilot study that measured the learning outcomes of an MBA programme, using a learning skills profile which measured 12 learning skills important in business and management education. The article is important not so much for the results of the assessment as for the systematic identification of the skills. Kretovics grouped the 12 skills in four areas: interpersonal skills, information gathering skills, analytical skills and behavioural skills, which in turn represented four ways of interacting with reality: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation.¹⁵ The table below shows the actual skills required in each area:

12 Gordon and Howell, *Higher Education for Business*, p.360-1.

13 Gordon and Howell, *Higher Education for Business*, p.365.

14 M. Kretovics, Assessing the MBA. What do our students learn? *Journal of Management Development*, Vol.18, No. 2, 1999, pp.125-136. Hereafter Kretovics, Assessing the MBA.

15 Kretovics, Assessing the MBA, p.128.

Table 9: Business education learning skills profile

<i>Concrete experience</i>	<i>Reflective observation</i>	<i>Abstract conceptualisation</i>	<i>Active experimentation</i>
<i>Interpersonal skills</i>	<i>Information gathering skills</i>	<i>Analytical skills</i>	<i>Behavioural skills</i>
Help skills	Sense-making skills	Theory skills	Goal-setting skills
Leadership skills	Information gathering skills	Quantitative skills	Action skills
Relationship skills	Information analysis skills	Technology skills	Initiative skills

Source: Kretovics, *Assessing the MBA*, pp.128-9.

It is generally agreed that in order to facilitate the development and enhancement of these skills MBA programmes have to provide students with experiences of team and individual work, research and library work, IT usage, analysis of case studies, and lectures grounded in theory. This is, at least in theory, predicated on the reinforcement of skills across different programme modules. Harvard Business School's explanation of the way in which they use the case study method remarks upon not only the preparatory work that students do but also the fact that every section of the programme is taught by a team of faculty that works together to integrate ideas and themes across various classes.¹⁶ This speaks of Harvard's resources and its large number of enrolments and also highlights the importance of the integration of subjects and skills development by faculty.

The 'total pedagogy' of the MBA depends on establishing an optimal balance between syndicate work,¹⁷ discussion/lecture sessions and individual work. Much of the MBA pedagogy depends on the lecturer's ability to use the Socratic method, and on his or her ability to ground a case study in theory.

A lecturer in an MBA programme has to be able to transmit the contents specified in Table 5 and at the same time help students to develop the applied competencies and autonomy of learning indicated in Table 1. Bringing real-world experience and academic scholarship together within a particularly demanding pedagogic framework requires lecturers who cannot be either academics without business experience or professional managers without theoretical grounding. Moreover, both academics and professionals need to learn to teach in a particular way.

¹⁶ www.hbs.edu/case/case-print.html

¹⁷ It must be noted that syndicate group work is not a methodology used exclusively in MBA programmes. Other professional master's programmes such as the master's in clinical psychology also use this methodology successfully in the discussion of clinical cases.

International standards for business school faculty are much more stringent than the HEQC's re-accreditation criteria.¹⁸ EQUIS, for example, suggests 25 professors as the adequate staff number for a business school.¹⁹ International standards require higher qualifications, international exposure, research production and scholarly work, and fundamentally that all core subjects be taught by permanent full-time faculty attached to the school.

South African business schools, even well-established large schools, are far from achieving this. Only 5 of the 27 business schools assessed during the re-accreditation process have more than 10 academic staff primarily dedicated to the MBA. In terms of programmes, only 4 of the 7 fully accredited MBAs have more than 10 full-time academic staff. One issue that emerged quite clearly during the site visits was the shortage of competent full-time faculty teaching financial management and related subjects at most schools. Whatever the reasons for this, many programmes have resorted to hiring part-time staff to lecture and develop materials in this area.²⁰ This dependence on part-time staff has different implications depending on the academic status of that staff and the course in which they lecture. Yet one general implication is that part-time staff is seldom available for staff development and that whatever research production they might be engaged in happens outside the business schools.

The total learning experience pedagogic model proposed internationally by the big business schools is based on the existence of both full-time students and full-time faculty. As has been mentioned, both locally and internationally there is a growing number of part-time students. *Management Education at Risk* indicates that business schools have responded to the broad range of consumer needs and preferences by developing a number of programme formats that run alongside the traditional two-year full-time MBA.

Part-time MBA programmes at AACSB member schools represent 58 percent of the enrolments at these schools, while only 24 per cent of the students enrolled at MBA programmes at the AACSB's schools attend traditional full-time programmes. The variation, of course, does not end here; modes of delivery also vary in order to respond to student needs. The introduction of distance education and more recently the use of IT platforms to deliver programmes or to supplement teaching have introduced a new variety of opportunities but also pressing pedagogic challenges. Can interpersonal and behavioural skills be developed through a distance mode of delivery (even if IT could allow for real-time communication between syndicate group members)? Can some of the analytical and behavioural skills be taught without contact time? The case of UNISA, which adopted a mixed mode of delivery in relation to the MBA and still has a high drop-out rate, should give

18 See AACSB International, *Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Schools*, adopted on 25 April 2003. Revised on 1 January, 2004 (pdf) pp. 16-17 www.aacsb.edu/accreditation, and *The Dynamic Model for Quality Development. Guidance Notes on the EQUIS Quality Criteria*, (pdf), pp.23-4. www.efmd.be/

19 The school should recruit, develop and manage its faculty in accordance with its strategic objectives and have sufficient core faculty to cover the major disciplines and constitute a viable body of distinctive expertise (e.g. minimum 25 professors). EQUIS Standards www.efmd.be

20 Evaluators mention the telling story of the same finance lecturer being interviewed during five different site visits.

pause for reflection about the pedagogic effectiveness of distance modes, particularly correspondence and e-learning, in relation to the MBA programme. In the last section of this chapter we will see the consequences that this decision has had in terms of the funding of UNISA's Master's in Business Leadership (MBL).

While the issue of the content of the MBA seems to be more or less settled, pedagogical issues are being debated. Most heads of school would concur that the integration of syndicate learning, guest lectures, complex and dynamic case studies and, in some schools, very advanced assumptions of learning are what make possible the MBA as a total learning experience. The areas of disagreement are: to what extent this combination can be provided by part-time faculty, and whether distance or e-learning are adequate modes for delivering a professional master's such as the MBA.

With regard to staff issues, the analysis of best practices in student admissions suggests that only those programmes which have sufficient full-time staff (or adequate resources and structures to coordinate part-time staff) can provide bridging courses to guarantee that students admitted via AA or RPL can profit from the learning experience. Once again, it seems that well-established schools are in a better position to offer access with quality.

The next section will look into the antecedent conditions for programme integration to take place and the extent to which this actually happens in the South African MBA.

THE MATRIX MODEL OF THE MBA: WHO HOLDS THE CENTRE?

As we saw in Chapter 3, the beginnings of most business schools were characterised by the application of the 'functional silos' model. According to this, business schools' needs for specialist faculty were resolved through the recruitment of personnel from other academic units within the university where the business school was located. This was the history of the establishment of Wharton in the US as much as that of the Graduate School of Business at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. As business schools acquired the academic credentials necessary to stand on their own they attracted full-time faculty at the doctoral level, which in turn helped them to move up from the 'bottom of the academic table', to use Gordon and Howell's expression. This situation, however, is changing again. Increasingly, business schools are relying on part-time faculty and on non-academic faculty to teach some of their courses. This trend, which as we saw figures quite prominently in the AACSB's latest analysis of the field of management education, can be explained through the confluence of a number of features, among which are demands for relevance from the business environment, competition for full-time faculty which pushes academic salaries up, rapid changes in business technology and organisational structures, and student demands.

The results of the re-accreditation exercise show that South African business schools are relying more and more on part-time faculty to teach the MBA. We have called this mode of operation the matrix model. The matrix model is a form of organisation of the learning programme and of the teaching and learning that relies on a large number of part-time

faculty coordinated administratively and/or academically by a small core of full-time staff. The capacity of a matrix model to provide an integrated programme and the proverbial total learning experience depends to a large extent on whether the nature of the coordination provided is administrative or academic, and, in the latter case, on the extent and scope of the academic coordination.

Part-time staff in a matrix model is hired to do any or most of the following tasks: teaching, curriculum development, assessment, external examination, and preparation of learners' guides and other materials. In other words, the matrix model is based on academic outsourcing. This section identifies different varieties of the matrix model in South African business schools, looks into the advantages and disadvantages of the model, and puts forward some of the implications that the application of the model might have for the learning programme and the research activities of the school.

An analysis of the organisation of the 27 business schools that participated in the HEQC's re-accreditation process identified three types of matrix model:

- Schools where there is almost no core academic staff and where the elements of the matrix (lecturers, and course and material developers) operate almost independently, without visible control mechanisms to assure the quality of the individual course or the level of integration of each module's learning outcomes.
- Schools that have retained academic capacity in the core areas of the MBA but use outside academic expertise for specific modules. The quality of the programme is maintained through the employment of full-time academic staff in the core disciplines.
- Schools that have a small core of full-time staff and offer modules of a high international standard through employing professional lecturers (as opposed to non-academics) who facilitate the preparation of material and the lectures. These schools have tight quality control mechanisms for integrating the learning outcomes of modules and evaluating the quality of the lecturers and their courses.

Each of these varieties of the matrix model represents a different kind of governance within a similar framework and has different consequences for the programme. In general, from a financial point of view, a matrix system reduces a school's overheads by sub-contracting areas of responsibilities while at the same time avoiding potential human resources problems by entering into contractual relationships that allow the rapid and uncomplicated replacement of unsuitable lecturers. From the point of view of the learning programme and the teaching and learning processes, schools can source experts from various disciplines and students are exposed to a wide variety of lecturers with diverse backgrounds in business or relevant fields. From the point of view of the management of the programme, schools have the flexibility to ensure that the courses are meeting the students' demands. However, this depends to a large extent on how the matrix is controlled.

This cost-effective picture leaves out some of the problematic effects of the matrix model on the learning programme and on teaching and learning. As we saw in the two previous sections, the multidisciplinary nature of the MBA programme requires epistemological integration. At the same time there are a number of soft skills and hard skills which need developing across courses/modules. A good MBA programme requires integration and monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning processes to ascertain their success in facilitating stipulated learning outcomes. The most extreme matrix model, which separates out curriculum development and teaching or teaching and the preparation of materials, undermines not just the integration of the programme but the effectiveness of the teaching.

All the literature revised during the preparation of this report remarks on the importance of business schools' faculty from the point of view of their standing in academia and their standing vis-à-vis the world of business. In this sense, it seems that the most serious danger of the matrix system is that it depletes a business school of 'localised' intellectual capital, i.e. academic staff whose ability to teach, to analyse problems and to produce knowledge has an effect on the business school beyond the actual module they facilitate, and regardless of the specific contractual arrangement they have with the school. The over-utilisation of non-academic lecturers to teach part or full MBA courses/modules is one way in which schools contribute to their own lack of localised intellectual capital.

The matrix model's reliance on non-academic faculty has a further negative effect on the achievement of the applied competencies expected of a master's degree. Practitioners outside academia seldom have the scholarly training that allows them to analyse the actual experiences they are transmitting theoretically, or to critique theory taking experience as a point of departure. In this sense what might be interesting and powerful as a seminar or as a guest lecture becomes an impoverished module from a theoretical and methodological perspective. Yet a well-coordinated matrix model that carefully selects its non-academic staff has the potential to enrich sessions with the experience of the practitioners and decision-makers. Part-time non-academic staff can act as a conduit for the interaction between MBA programmes and the business world, creating dynamic opportunities for the identification of research topics, innovative management practices, and a possible training ground for students.

A further issue that the matrix system compromises is the actual pedagogy of the MBA. First, there is the issue that part-time faculty seldom participates in staff development programmes. Second, there is the issue of a non-academic staff which has no pedagogic training at all. Poor pedagogic training not only undermines the transmission of knowledge and the development of competencies and skills that takes place in the classroom, but also calls into question the quality of the assessment. The assessment practices highlighted as sources of concern in Chapter 2 included: the actual level of the assessment; the use of multiple-choice questions, inadequate at a master's level; the lack of assessment experience of staff; the lack of guidelines for assessment; the lack of an external examiner system; and the fact that lecturers who taught a module were also acting as external examiners. While some of these issues speak of courses not being taught at a master's level, a problem to which we have

already referred, others point to the effect that the lack of programme coordination has on the ways in which the learning process takes place.

However, the third typology of MBA matrix suggests that it is possible to run a good MBA programme relying on some part-time faculty. What are the antecedent conditions for this? Firstly, most faculty has both high academic degrees and experience of the world of business. Non-academic faculty is not invited to anchor modules but as guest lecturers. Secondly, successful matrix model programmes are based on the development of tight quality controls to oversee the content, delivery and materials of each course. Thirdly, they create structures that allow for communication among staff and the integration of the programme. Lastly, they rely on student evaluations to ascertain the quality of the teaching and learning experience that takes place in the classrooms and in the syndicate groups. Presumably one of the conditions for all of this to happen is that part-time faculty sign contracts that bind them to participate in a number of programme coordination activities beyond the facilitation of a specific module.

However, there is an area in which even those successful business schools based on a matrix model are found wanting, and that is research production. Academic part-time staff, according to the business schools' submissions, does not produce research in the context of the programme, while non-academic part-time staff simply does not produce research. Thus programme renewal and innovation of the discipline based on in-house research are very rare features of programmes organised on a matrix model. By implication, mentorship of syndicate groups and supervision of dissertations and research projects are also undermined by the lack of research-active full-time academics.

The highest research production and supervisory capacity in all the programmes evaluated was found at schools organised with a large core of full-time academic staff, capable of offering doctoral programmes. The question then is, taking into account the need for integration, the achievement of learning outcomes, the exposure of students to a variety of perspectives in the world of management, and the need to focus on problems encountered in the real world of business, what are the optimal proportions of part-time and full-time staff and how does this influence the cost of the degree?

Funding the MBA

The cost of the MBA is an old and contentious issue among public providers. MBA programmes offered by public providers are funded at the honours level. This is related to the fact that when in the 1980s the subsidy formula was calculated based on the information provided by the South African Post-Secondary (SAPSE) system there were no master's degrees by coursework. Thus the masters in public administration and the MBA were both considered for subsidy purposes as honours degrees. The argument for this decision was that a horizontally-spread master's had lower costs than a research master's which needed to be integrated vertically and demanded higher qualified faculty and a more expensive infrastructure.

Current ministerial proposals for the organisation of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) locate the MBA at Level 9, together with all other master's degrees. The document accepts the concept of master's degrees that require students to pass a number of courses at Level 9. The total credits for this degree, however, need to be equally divided between coursework and a research project written up as a dissertation or thesis.²¹ This relocation of the MBA will solve the funding dispute once the new funding formula is implemented. Yet, given what this research has shown, it is possible that several programmes offered by both public and private providers will have to sharpen their research requirements if they want to make the grade. And, as we have seen, in many cases this might imply the hiring of full-time faculty with research and supervisory experience.

An analysis of the fees charged for different programmes shows that MBAs completely staffed with full-time faculty are more expensive than those which operate with part-time faculty and a small core of full-time faculty. This observation has three implications for the analysis of the provision of MBAs in South Africa.

First, the fact that an MBA could be run with part-time staff and at a comparatively low cost in terms of infrastructure must have played a role in the expansion of private providers in the MBA market. It is not surprising, then, that new providers, both public and private, not only employed part-time faculty but also offered their MBAs in the cheaper distance mode. The case of UNISA, however, begs the question as to how cheap it actually is to offer a distance MBA programme. As mentioned earlier, UNISA does not offer its MBL exclusively as a distance programme. The realisation that a full distance programme could not deliver the sought-for learning outcomes caused UNISA to introduce compulsory study schools and to allocate 12 hours of syndicate work to each module. The introduction of contact sessions in a programme subsidised by government not only at the honours level but also as a distance programme raises serious financial issues for the business school.

The second implication has to do with the relationship between the cost of a programme and student access. Some MBA programmes which run with lower overheads, i.e. with part-time staff and in a distance mode of delivery, have lower fees, and thereby enhance access, especially for previously disadvantaged population groups. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the most expensive programmes have the highest proportion of white students, while cheaper programmes have larger numbers of black students. Yet the analysis shows that is not always the case that these cheaper programmes are offering MBAs at the master's level.

The third implication of the different costs of MBAs staffed with either part-time or full-time faculty has to do with internal cross-subsidisation. Public providers with higher overheads and MBAs funded at the honours level started developing new sources of income to cross-subsidise the MBA. This, however, gave rise to a peculiar situation. Unlike other master's programmes which are attached to faculties and function organically and therefore can be

²¹ Ministry of Education, *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework. Draft for Discussion*, July 2004, p.19.

cross-subsidised through the income generated by undergraduate programmes, MBA programmes are usually run from independent business schools that do not offer undergraduate degrees. Cross-subsidisation for the MBA has come mostly from non-degree education. Executive education became a primary source of income for business schools, with the lecturers who participate in these programmes being paid above current salaries at higher education institutions. This situation underlines a further problem: the relationship between business schools and the higher education institutions in which they are located. Issues of ill-defined reporting lines and demands for further autonomy from universities' bureaucratic procedures were coming to the fore in the form of institutional crises just as the re-accreditation process began.

If anything has emerged from the analysis of the re-accreditation results it is that there is no single model for running a good MBA programme. This said, it also seems clear that even those programmes which obtain good results from a matrix model with tight central control find it difficult to comply with some of the features, such as research production, that constitute the best MBA programme.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the fundamental aspects of any higher education programme: curriculum content and teaching and learning and how these relate to the admission practices and the contractual modalities under which academic staff is attached to the programme.

The analysis of the results of the re-accreditation process in the context of international trends in business education has shown that:

- Low admission requirements undermine the existence of MBA programmes at the master's level.
- The splintering of the MBA into intermediate qualifications in order to allow entry into the MBA by students who do not possess the necessary assumptions of learning is a fairly common practice among some programmes that defined their purpose as practitioner-oriented.
- The lowering of entrance requirements has direct consequences: the diminishing importance of research education in the MBA and the weak articulation between obligatory courses, capstone modules and elective courses.
- Thin specialisations are more often the consequence of marketing decisions than actual responsiveness of MBA programmes to the economic needs of the regions in which they are located.
- Programmes need to apply rules of progression between obligatory subjects for the integration of the MBA as a multidisciplinary degree to take place.
- The curricular and pedagogical integration of MBA programmes is jeopardised by the organisation of programmes in a matrix model without central academic coordination.

- Unresolved issues of funding and academic definition are undermining the relationships between business schools and the universities in which they are located.

Three main issues need to be highlighted for further reflection on the content and structure of the MBA learning programme. Unless programmes take admissions seriously, both in the sense of establishing whether prospective students have the knowledge, competencies and skills necessary to undertake an MBA, and in the sense of providing non-credit bearing opportunities for AA and RPL students to develop the assumptions of learning, the standing of the MBA as a master's degree will be jeopardised in the market.

It has become abundantly clear that only those programmes that are governed within a structure that allows for academic control of the content, delivery and materials of each course, and for their integration, can actually help students develop the skills and competencies expected from an MBA graduate. As Carnall puts it, apropos of the third generation MBA:

Put simply, management problems rarely emerged conveniently labelled. Managers do not face psychological problems or economic problems. They rarely face personnel problems or production problems for that matter. Rather, they face problems whose solutions can be informed by different subjects and disciplines. If a production manager is trying to achieve a more flexible production system then ideas and techniques drawn from psychology (e.g. motivation theory), personnel management (e.g. flexible hours, flexible pay systems), production (flexible technology, just-in-time management, and materials requirements-planning techniques), accounting and finance (capital appraisal technique) will be needed.²²

In this sense the multidisciplinary nature of the MBA presents an epistemological as well as an administrative challenge to the business schools.

Finally, we would stress two areas for further debate and research: the extent to which distance education can deliver the training needed for MBAs, and the need to elevate the role of research at business schools if they are to keep their programmes relevant.

In the next chapter we explore the different ways in which MBA programmes interact with society's needs.

²² C. Carnall, The third generation MBA global reach and 'local' service, *The Learning Organization*, Vol.2, Issue 2, 1995, p.4.