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SERVICE – LEARNING IN MBA DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory meta-study was to establish a foundation for the implementation of Service-Learning as a pedagogy into MBA programmes in South Africa. Three major inter-related contexts underpinned the study; a) the business sector, with its deep need for appropriately skilled managers and leaders, b) the social sector within which is situated a considerable number of currently or potentially economically active community organisations, and c) higher education, particularly with reference to its legislated transformation imperative.

Service-Learning as a pedagogy has never been implemented in MBA programmes in South Africa, yet the literature suggests that it is one of the most effective management development tools available to educators.

The mixed methodological approach taken in this study was based on the published perceptual shift from that of analysis to one of synthesis. In this paradigm, the basic tenet was that of investigating several constructs from different perspectives (the meta-study format) with the intention of combining them into a new coherent framework to offer the field of management education. Within this framework, data were gathered from several relevant populations, including business leaders and managers, MBA students, Service-Learning practitioners and community organisations.

Through triangulation and aggregation of findings from the different sources, it was established that MBA students acting in a consultant capacity experienced real workplace learning in an authentic context, where the outputs of the work that they conducted via their academic assignments were utilised productively by the community organisations with which they worked. They were able to address at least some pressing social needs whilst meeting their academic objectives, measured using Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive outcomes. They also reported a high level of personal growth and increased awareness of the socio-economic fabric of the country.

Although the findings from this research cannot necessarily be generalised to all MBA programmes in South Africa, they do suggest that Service-Learning has an important role to play in educating South African managers, whilst addressing social, economic and educational transformation needs.

This research has established that MBA Service-Learning is a worthwhile pedagogy on which to conduct further research and implementation in South African business schools.