Chapter 10: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Conclusions

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.

The model published in Carmichael and Sutherland (2005) was used as the building block on which the further investigations in the study were built. Figure 10.1 takes the model as presented in Chapter 2 and demonstrates (the red arrows) the observed and potential shifts that could take place as a result of implementing Service-Learning into MBA programmes in South Africa.
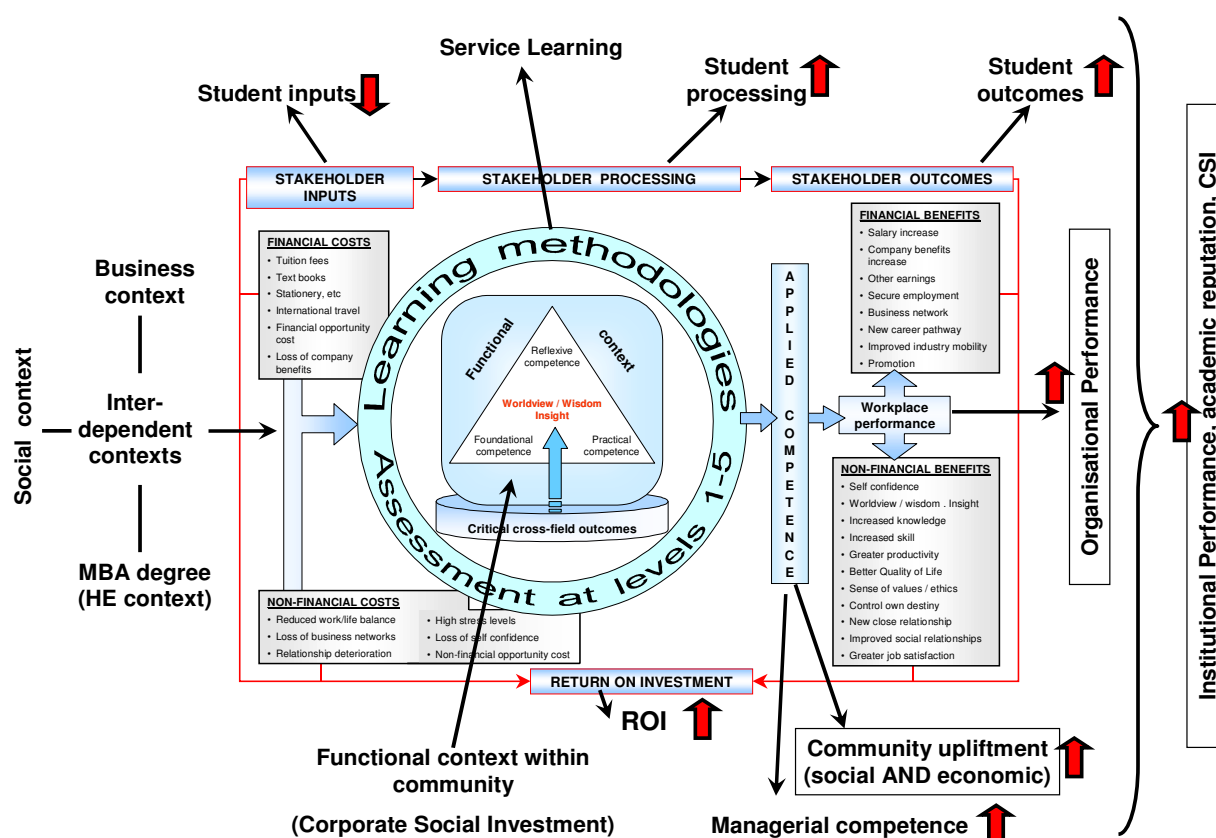

Figure 10.1 Observed and potential changes to the Carmichael and Sutherland (2005) model through implementing Service-Learning in MBA programmes

The basic assumption is that Service-Learning is added to the circle representing the learning methodologies utilised in MBA courses, taking into account the three major inter-related contexts underpinning the study. These were; a) the business sector, deprived of appropriately skilled managers and leaders, b) the social sector within which is situated many currently or potentially economically active community organisations, and c) higher education, particularly with reference to its legislated transformation imperative and represented here by the MBA degree.

Through this action learning approach, MBA students more easily acquire foundational (course content) competence, practical competence (skills) and reflexive competence (the ability to apply their learning in different contexts) as required by local legislation. MBA students have indicated a strong preference for more interactive learning environments (Carmichael and Sutherland 2005), so their "processing" through the educational system should be smoother.

This learning takes place within a functional context relevant to the community organisation, which does, through mutual understanding and agreement, benefit from the students' interventions. Should Service-Learning implementation in MBA programmes take place widely, it is possible that both social and economic upliftment could result, particularly if the MBA graduates implement CSI and CSR initiatives back in their workplaces.

Student learning is reciprocated through this pedagogy, and they have demonstrated that they acquire competence in the CCFOs, or generic management skills (Carmichael 2005; Carmichael and Stacey 2006), as well as experience a high level of personal growth and wisdom, increasing the return on their investment into their education. As a result of the real workplace learning, their applied competence will be greater and they should perform better in their own workplaces, benefiting themselves and their employers.

The results of this research have indicated that, through triangulation and aggregation of findings from the different sources, 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. Thus, because South Africa's economic growth is being hampered by the lack of managerial talent, pedagogies that build appropriate applied and reflexive competencies would help to meet government objectives for skills building, organisational performance and economic stimulation. The community engagement aspects of Service-Learning would also support the imperative for higher education transformation.

A third benefit would be to non-profit and other community organisations in South Africa. They play a large role in the labour market and have an urgent need for management skills based on increasing legislative pressure for annual reporting.

The previous paragraphs may be criticised for reflecting a wish to change the world. Clearly a great deal of further research and implementation would be required to make any practical difference, and it is strongly suggested that the suggestions made are implemented so that some critical mass may be built.

The economic background to the problem described in the introduction to this dissertation focuses on the structural unemployment and lack of global competitiveness still evident in the socio-economic matrix of South Africa. The Employment Equity, Labour Relations, Skills Development and various other Acts have not achieved that which they intended – to grow the skills and improve the employability *and* employment of South Africans, particularly in specialised and higher levels positions. Poor implementation and *resistance* to implementation has been blamed, although many blame or ignore the legislation itself. This resistance and ways to overcome it could be investigated for future benefit, particularly since similar skills development efforts have been more or less successfully introduced into other countries around the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain and other European countries.

However this suggestion does come with the caution, emphatically and graphically elaborated by Luiz (2006, in Luiz, (ed) 2006) to be aware of the circumstances under which Government intervention (to the point of interference) in socio-economic processes becomes inappropriate, lest market forces be manipulated to the overall detriment of all sectors. Such has been the case in Zimbabwe over the past four years, where such interference has lead to unprecedented economic collapse accompanied by inflation that has grown to over 3500% and is still climbing.

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.

10.2 General recommendations

1. Service-Learning as a pedagogy should be implemented widely in MBA programmes in South Africa, as both the literature and the findings from this study suggest that it is one of the most effective management development tools available to educators. Based on Furco's (2001, 2002) recommendations for institutionalising Service-Learning, one of the first steps in institutionalising Service-Learning in higher education institutions is to build critical mass. Should the pedagogy be implemented in MBA programmes around the country, this mass could be built rapidly, and the competitiveness between business schools for better local and international rankings has the potential to add impetus to the efforts.

2. Resistance to the implementation of the Government's legislative efforts to build skills and employment in South Africa should be urgently and thoroughly investigated so that current and future barriers to implementation may be lowered.

3. Because management education in general and MBAs in particular have been strongly criticised for their lack of practicality and narrow focus on functional competencies only, business schools should actively integrate the CCFOs into MBA programmes. The types of skills described as necessary for managers are not in conflict with those encompassed by the CCFOs, nor do the contradict the writings of prominent authors in the field of management education, including delivery of MBA programmes (Porter and McKibbin 1988; Boyatzis *et al* 1995; Mintzberg 2004a) A further reason for this recommendation is that the CCFOs are perceived to be important generic management competencies (Carmichael and Sutherland 2005; Carmichael and Stacey 2006).

4. Given the socio-political nature of the informal and non-profit sectors in South Africa, and the desperate need to develop skills, provide employment and boost economic participation and growth, no recommendations are made regarding trying to formalise a definition of who should and who should not benefit from Service-Learning initiatives. In fact, the recommendation is specifically *not* to conduct such research, and *not* to marginalise any particular group through academic rather than pragmatic or humane ideals.

10.3 Recommendations for further research

1. If Service-Learning is to lead ultimately to economic benefits, then longitudinal economically-based studies would need to be conducted, following the careers and activities of students who participated in Service-Learning MBA courses. This follow-up alone presents difficulties, since MBA graduates are known to be highly mobile (Carmichael and Sutherland 2005), and alumnus information is (locally at least) notoriously outdated. Should universities, in their own right, *and* business schools in theirs, take responsibility for maintaining currency in following the whereabouts and careers of their graduates, much useful information could be gleaned and utilised for both short and long-term impact studies, the creation and implementation of CSI and CSR initiatives within organisations and on numerous social sector dynamics.

2. The CCFOs need to be validated. They have high face validity and are unarguably noble competencies. However, they have not been nearly adequately interrogated, focused on nor integrated into educational efforts at any level. It is quite possible that many of them are difficult to teach, even assuming competence on the part of the teachers, which has not been researched either. Research questions that would need to be answered would include behavioural descriptors for each CCFO at each NQF level, and possibly the development of objective behaviourally-anchored rating scales. Criterion referenced assessment is conceptually sound, but leaves little room for incremental development to be acknowledged and rewarded, despite the "minimum standards" specifications attached to the educational objectives.

3. Additional research focus could take place in possibly one of the most critical of these generic areas, particularly in the African context, is that of governance and ethics (Luiz 2006), the lack of which has been included in the blame for the continued marginalisation of African countries.

4. Another of the CCFOs that warrants a special mention is that of entrepreneurship development. SMMEs are a significant force in the South African economy (DTI 2006a), and, with appropriate skills development could develop from being small or micro-enterprises into medium enterprises with attendant increased opportunities for local employment, since a positive association between entrepreneurial competency acquisition and entrepreneurial success has been established (Ahwireng-Obeng 2006).

5. Linked to entrepreneurship development is the issue of the role of technology and its impact on the growth potential of African countries. The findings from this research indicate a low level of importance assigned to the CCFO "use technology". However, the context in which this was expressed related primarily to the use of computers, probably personal computers and their use for communication and business applications. However the CCFO is intended to go far beyond this narrow focus to encompass all types of technology embedded in economic factors of production (Luiz 2006 in Luiz (ed) 2006). Research into this area could assist African countries to recognise and utilise technology in all of its applications, to their great advantage, since it has reported that they are not doing so (Luiz 2006).

6. The limits to Service-Learning's broad-based value and institutionalisation need further investigation in the South African context; the purpose of this research was to establish the merit of implementing Service-Learning into MBA courses, to answer the simple question "Can it work?" With a largely affirmative answer, further research should be undertaken to establish mechanisms to tackle deeper and wider ranging issues, particularly so that more data may be gathered for the purpose of prospective cumulative meta-analysis (Egger *et al* 2003) to add validity to this inadequately researched area.