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Re-Imagining the MBA: An Arts-Based Approach

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Abstract

The Master's of Business Administration (MBA) degree is a long-standing, globally recognised qualification that has **almost** become a requirement for many aspiring business leaders. Yet, the qualification has changed little over its history, despite substantial changes in the role and practice of business. These changes were brought into sharp focus by the financial crisis in the early part of the 21st century. However, despite much introspection, many MBA programmes **have not been transformed**. It is unsurprising that many programmes have not fundamentally changed as they are a staple of most business schools and are valuable, monetarily and reputationally, even in their current form. Nevertheless, a management qualification intended to tackle the wicked problems that now beset **contemporary** organisations requires the adoption of a pedagogy based on an epistemology of practice and the incorporation of design thinking within the MBA curriculum. Solutions also need to consider the inclusion of more responsive values, and a wider range of knowledge. This paper considers these issues and posits a solution which draws on Biggs' constructive alignment approach to programme design, and has been enacted in a new arts-based MBA programme which is used as an example throughout.

Introduction

The Master's of Business Administration (MBA) degree was developed in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century as the country moved from primary production to become industrialised, necessitating firms to seek scientific approaches to managing the increased complexity of their operations. For much of the 20th century, the MBA qualification was a rare and valuable commodity. It was delivered by a few high cost, high quality, internationally-focused, mostly research-intensive institutions. The degree was predicated

on imparting new knowledge and practices to experienced business leaders, generally senior in their organisations (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005). The award's objective was to enhance existing proficiency in professional practice by providing advanced technical skills. By the end of the last century, the MBA degree was delivered by many more institutions to many more students. Consequently, it moved from being an elite, capstone qualification to being a mass-market credential. It is now delivered worldwide by thousands of higher education institutions (HEIs) to hundreds of thousands of students, some of whom take the qualification straight after graduating from undergraduate study - and often such prior academic study is in business disciplines (Khurana, 2007). These students may, then, have no experience of the world of work upon which to test their academic studies.

The MBA qualification has received substantial prominence. For most HEIs, the MBA degree is a valuable, high quality product that still receives many student applications. Yet, it has been the subject of much criticism also. Pettigrew and Starkey (2016) point out that MBAs and MBA education are implicated in the financial crisis, and claim that an *'emphasis on the use of social science techniques in decision-making and paucity of faculty members with actual business experience'* has negatively affected business schools, as has preoccupation with maximizing profit and shareholder value (p.657). This view is echoed by Parker (2019), who states, *'we must stop teaching students that heroic transformational leaders are the answer to every problem, or that the purpose of learning about taxation laws is to evade taxation'* (p.2). He argues that, in the explicit and in the hidden curriculum, the approach taken usually means that the *'virtues of capitalist market managerialism are told and sold'*, without attention being paid to alternatives (2019, p.4). There is an *'educational crisis'* in business schools, and many link this to the dominant pedagogy practised (De Roglio and Light, 2009). Thomas, Lorange and Sheth (2013) argue that the business school paradigm, *'with its strong focus on analytic models and reductionism is not well suited to handle the ambiguity and high rate of change facing many industries today'* (p.61).

Business Schools now operate in a context where rapid technological change has triggered a fourth industrial revolution, resulting in a world of *'wicked'* problems, which have been defined as a:

Class of social system problems which are ill-formed, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing.

(West Churchman, 1967, pB-141)

Wicked problems occur in a context in which, *'periods of relative stability and minor incremental changes are constantly punctuated by shifts in system dynamics'* and where *'knowledge and actors' perceptions and preferences are always provisional and changing'* (Head and Xiang, 2016, p.5). Understanding and addressing wicked problems is challenging because it involves exploring the varying interactions between human systems and processes and between natural systems and processes over time (Head and Xiang, 2016). Such problems present *'a fundamental indeterminacy without a single solution, and where much creativity is needed to find solutions'* (Johansson-Skoldberg, Woodilla and Cetinkaya, 2013, p.125). Yet, the dominant management education paradigm is concerned with solving existing [problems that are stable that have clearly specified alternatives, addressed through the use of analytical decision tools \(Dunne and Martin, 2006\)](#). Indeed, it has been argued that many of the current problems are the result of existing individual and corporate cognitive schema (Houghton, 2015).

This may be why MBA graduates are viewed as *'obsessed with finance, analysts, and clever 'restructurers' (destroyers, some say) of companies, rather than creators of companies that are built to last'* (Pettigrew and Starkey, 2016, p.656). The critiques of MBAs as overly finance-focused add to concerns that the award, with its stand-alone disciplinary emphasis on an individual and common standpoint, is increasingly less relevant as a solution to contemporary business problems. Moreover, there is little evidence that mastery of the MBA curriculum positively affects subsequent practice, and studies find that leadership based on MBA logic is insufficient (Rubin and Dierdorff (2009), Hougaard, Carter and Afton (2018)). Solutions to the wicked problems offered in contemporary society require creativity and innovation - aspects that may be difficult to incorporate into the curriculum of a functionally-oriented MBA programme. That may be why, in response to these concerns, although some HEIs have modified the content and structure of their MBAs, there is substantial inertia in many business school offerings. It is [perhaps](#) time to revisit the master

of business administration qualification and challenge whether *the 'administration' in MBA* is appropriate for tomorrow's managers.

The discussion of the role and positioning of MBA programmes and the need to revamp the qualification, suggest there is a need to reconsider the epistemology and pedagogy of the MBA, exploring a radical alternative in order to address the perceived shortcomings of current provision. This paper attempts to *contribute to* this by exploring the assumptions contained in the current design and pedagogy of the MBA, contrasting that with the underlying epistemological and pedagogical tenets of a new MBA designed and developed in partnership between Central St Martins, University of the Arts, London (CSM) and Birkbeck, University of London (BBK). Throughout these sections, the design of the CSM-BBK MBA, which was launched in 2018, is reflected upon as an example of actioning the issues discussed. Finally, the paper presents its conclusions.

Programme Design: Traditional MBA

Most business and management schools are structured on *fairly rigid disciplinary lines* (Syed et al, 2009) partly from a desire to replicate the more traditional academic disciplines such as sociology and economics. Pedagogic practice takes a cognitive approach to learning, distancing it from experience and dividing the learning mind from the outside world (Chaiklin and Lave, 1993). This adopts the standard paradigm for higher education, which assumes the best learning takes place in minds, and is propositional, taking the form of theoretical knowledge which is considered relatively constant, with clear-cut subject divisions, and best transmitted as structured information (Becket and Hager, 2002). *Academic contexts are dominated by written work, and the 'hidden curriculum appears to be: it's not what you think or do but the way you write about it that counts'* (Eraut, 1994 p.34). Eraut also argues that academic freedom and breadth of study are given priority over knowledge use. This view is consistent with Miles' (2019) claim that, since the mid twentieth century, the business school *'has moved closer to the preferences of the university and further away from the preferences of business'* (p.17). Currie and Knight (2003) argue that the dominant element of the MBA pedagogy is a disciplinary one, organised around research specialisms, and not comfortable with alternative approaches. The preference for discipline-based specialists leads to academics with expertise in sub-sets of business, rather

than with an overview of multiple domains which is needed in practice (Miles, 2019). A disciplinary approach entails mastering a body of academic knowledge – knowledge which is *'about'*, rather than *'for'* business (Currie and Knights, 2003). In addition, because of the belief that the university has distance from society in order to ensure disinterest in any research outcome, academics having little or no experience of business is not regarded as a problem (Miles, 2019).

In the light of the foregoing it is not surprising that Rhodes (2016) refers to the existence of *'functional silos'* in MBA programmes. This critique is endorsed by Currie and Knights (2003) who claim that subject experts often *'lacked work experience that might expose them to problems in a more integrated way'* (p.36). There is therefore little challenge to the approach of technical rationality, which assumes there are general solutions to practical problems, which can be developed outside practice situations (for example, in research centres) and transferred into practitioners' actions (Hager and Halliday, 2009). A result of this focus on theoretical academic disciplinary knowledge is that other forms of knowledge are disregarded and economic and social issues are ignored (de Roglio and Light (2009), Pettigrew and Starkey (2016)). For example, managerial prerogative and social inequality are taken for granted in traditional management pedagogy (Currie and Knights, 2003). Hendry (2006) points out that managers and most writers about management see themselves as morally neutral, undertaking technical practice of rational problem solving.

A minority of HEIs have responded to concerns relating to an over-emphasis on finance and the market in MBAs by modifying the structure and content of their programmes - on occasion by introducing elements from a different academic discipline from the humanities or the social sciences into the curriculum. For example, Hendry (2006) advocates history – particularly political and social history, literature, and some social science being added to the MBA curriculum, in order to offset the focus on technical detachment. More generally, Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan and Dolle (2011) argue for the inclusion of liberal arts subjects to help students think critically. However, although possibly enriching the MBA curriculum, such approaches are very much based on a cognitive model of learning. Hager and Halliday (2009) point out this assumes that, *'a liberal education should be concerned with the*

development of personal autonomy through cerebral engagement in abstraction from the practice contexts in which people actually exercise their autonomy' (p.68).

The professional effectiveness of MBA graduates is questioned. The cognitive approach which underpins existing pedagogy and the emphasis on the primacy of theoretical models means that *'[MBA] students learn analysis, but not action. They develop skill in attacking problems, but learn little about implementing solutions. They become knowledgeable about business, but untutored in the art and craft of management'* (Datar, Garvin and Cullen, 2010, p.79). However, Miles (2019) explains *that the training of professionals is not an activity which is valued or respected within the university, unless the professionals in question are the next generation of university faculty*. In addition, when discussing management education, Bisoux (2008) refers to the *'paradigm trap'* – a situation where everyone has been trained the same way and socialised into common values, so they think the same way and take the same things for granted. Such a situation makes radical critique and re-imagining programmes challenging.

It could be argued that, from the perspective of Biggs' constructive alignment model, lack of effectiveness in practice could be expected from a programme *that* is tutor- and discipline-centred. Students on such programmes are encouraged to adopt an academic approach to practice – an approach designed to analyse and explain business practice in a way which is usually addressed to other academics. Biggs' model would indicate that the dominance of the discipline in the structure of the MBA would lead to relatively passive students, who value cognitive skills but are unable to use them effectively in practice. Constructive alignment is an outcomes-based approach which is student-centred, and is based on constructivism, which Biggs (2003) defines as *'knowledge constructed through the activities of the learner'* (p.9). He argues that teaching and assessment should be aligned to the desired outcomes of an academic programme - what the student will be able to *do* on successful completion of a course. With its emphasis on active learning and performance assessment, constructive alignment calls for curriculum objectives to identify the kind of behaviour to be developed, because *'learning takes place through the active behavior of the student: it is what he (sic) does that he learns, not what the teacher does'* (Tyler (1949) cited in Biggs, 2003, p.7). Biggs argues that in curriculum design the focus should be on the

learner, and the key questions to be addressed are: what should the student be able to understand/perform at the end of the learning experience? What on-course activities would the student need to engage in in order to learn this? How can the tutor find out if the student has learned successfully?

Drawing on a constructive alignment perspective, the CSM/BBK MBA is based on a pedagogy which has been specifically designed to address current concerns in MBA education. In recognition that *'Professional education is not education for understanding alone; it is preparation for accomplished and responsive practice'*, the signature pedagogy of the MBA is influenced by the discourses related to epistemologies of practice (Shulman, 2005, p.53). As Shulman (2005) points out, signature pedagogies *'provide early socialization into the practices and values of a field'* signaling to students the appropriate approach in practice (p.59). To achieve effective integration and recognition of the full range of knowledges required for practice demands a sophisticated pedagogy, which is collaborative and cross-disciplinary, the form of which challenges some of the orthodoxies of the business school.

Programme Design: A Re-imagined MBA

Biggs (2003) advocates the three Ps approach to programme design and delivery, which involves the Presage, the Process, and the Product. The presage is the stage prior to active programme delivery and involves consideration of the students' prior knowledge and ability, together with programme design, i.e. *'what is intended to be taught, how it will be taught and assessed'* (p.18). The process is the *'learning focused activities'* undertaken by the students – Biggs prefers the term *'teaching/learning activities'* (TLAs) to teaching method, as he believes it more accurately reflects the desired relationship between academic staff and students. The product is the outcome desired from the TLAs.

The programme designers taking Biggs' approach were drawn from two higher education institutions - neither of which offered an MBA – who partnered specifically to share expertise and design a radical new programme. The partnership brought together a business school in a traditional, though atypical, research-intensive HE institution (Birkbeck, University of London) and an arts college (Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts

London). Central Saint Martins, based in London's Kings Cross, is a world class arts and design college whose alumni include Oscar winners and Turner Prize winners. CSM traces its origins back to two art and design schools founded in the mid and late 19th century. The institution pioneered an educational approach that encouraged the removal of the barriers between design's intellectualism and production's practical skills. CSM teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses, but offers little in business and management studies. Birkbeck, University of London, based in Bloomsbury, London, has its origins in the early 19th century as an institution with a mission to provide education for working people – a radical concept at that time which led to its founder, George Birkbeck, being accused of '*scattering the seeds of evil*'. Birkbeck has provided business and management education for some decades; its School of Business, Economics and Informatics has around 5,000 students, of whom half study at postgraduate level – though its portfolio did not include an MBA. The CSM/BBK partnership represented the coming together of two different academic traditions with the mission of developing an MBA programme that encompassed the creative thinking of the arts tradition with a rigorous business and economics basis.

At the presage stage of curriculum design, consideration was given to the wider context in which the programme was being developed. Head and Xiang (2016) argue that the development of strategies to address wicked problems needs to be adaptive, participatory and trans-disciplinary, and that in a context where technical instrumental solutions cannot be applied, '*The participation of stakeholders is vital both for establishing what is known about an issue (values, perspectives and practical knowledge of context) and for establishing parameters for appropriate and feasible responses*' (p.5). Finding solutions to wicked problems which are acceptable to those involved provides a particular challenge and requires a different mindset to that currently promoted in business disciplines. As Dunn and Martin (2006) point out, '*The non-integrative thinker readily accepts unpleasant trade offs*', yet such trade-offs may no longer be acceptable to stakeholders, and a different approach will be needed – one where '*the integrative thinker seeks creative resolution of the tension*' (p.516). Such an approach is particularly important in a situation which is changing so consistently that problems are unlikely to have permanent solutions. Effective approaches to wicked problems therefore require creativity and innovation, involving the ability to work effectively and productively with a wide range of stakeholders. The design of the new MBA

programme aims to develop graduates who could cope more effectively in this context, and integrates a broader, more socially relevant concept of impact through practice. The intention was not just to disrupt existing practice, but to offer a contemporary and challenging higher education experience.

Knowledge in Practice

If they are to benefit society, MBA graduates need to mobilise their knowledge in the practice of management. The signature pedagogy of the MBA is influenced by the discourses related to epistemologies of practice. Such an approach offers a challenge to the established paradigm in higher education, where it is often assumed that practice involves the application of theory that has been previously acquired. As Boud and Hager (2012) point out:

'The nature of professional practice is greatly over-simplified by acceptance of the acquisition and transfer metaphors. It becomes virtually inevitable that practice is conceived to be application (transfer) of (acquired) theory. This elevates the theories and understandings taught in formal professional preparation courses, whilst devaluing the theories and understandings that derive informally from experiences of professional practice' (p.21)

The sophistication and complexity of professional practice is also emphasised by Eraut (1998) who argues that, *'in practical contexts theoretical knowledge has to be adapted to suit the particular demands of each situation. This requires more than the simple application of theory. Theories have to be **interpreted** in order to be used'* (p.27, emphasis in the original). For Eraut, interpretation in the process of application creates new knowledge, not a replication of already existing models. He also states that, due to its complexity, professional and managerial performance involves the *'simultaneous use of several types of knowledge and skills, which have to be learned more holistically'* (2004, p.247). With regards to the problems engaged within professional working life, Schon (1995) claims there are two distinct types:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to

solutions through the use of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowlands, problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution.
(p.28)

It is in the '*swampy lowlands*' of the real world that practice takes place, and the knowledge used in the workplace does not take the form of elegant theoretical models which have undergone detailed evaluation. Such formal knowledge may be a necessary prerequisite for professional practice, but, on its own, it is not sufficient. Eraut (2000) points out that much knowledge gained in the workplace is acquired informally through a process of socialisation which takes place with increasing participation in workplace practice, rather than through the outcome of formal enquiry. In addition, he argues that, '*If a situation demands rapid action or is too complex to be fully analysed, tacit [informal] knowledge is the only available solution*' (2000, p.118). The presence of informal, uncodified personal knowledge adds a different, but fundamentally important, element to effective professional practice, which is why the assumption that '*practice*' can be easily observed and assessed is mistaken as much of what an individual brings to their professional practice is invisible (Eraut, 2004).

From this perspective, to focus only on the explicit learning of formally presented knowledge is to misunderstand the nature of high-level learning, and to overlook important aspects of learning and practice that are often not articulated. In contrast to the academic theory '*set in the context of a discipline and embedded in a network of concepts and ideas that form part of a system of thought*' Eraut (1998) highlights Argyris and Schon's theory of action (1974), which is argued to be '*implicit in all purposeful action but rarely articulated or communicated*' (p.129). The latter '*theory*' is personal and informal, but has a powerful influence on individual practice.

However, such a perspective on professional practice and learning offers a challenge to the cognitive model of learning which is dominant in the university, because, as Kennedy (2015) points out, '*valuing of practice-based learning requires a recognition of knowledge as actively constructed within a social and cultural context*' (p.36). This social constructivist view of knowledge and professional learning sees learning as embodied, as experiential and as an integral part of the experience of practice. As Wenger (1998) states:

*Theories of **situated experience** give primacy to the dynamics of everyday existence, improvisation, coordination, and interactional choreography. They emphasize agency and intentions. They mostly address the interactive relations of people with their environment. They focus on the experience and the local construction of individual or interpersonal events such as activities and conversations'* (emphasis in the original). (p.13)

The designers of the CSM-BBK MBA based the programme design on a social constructivist pedagogy, and concur with Cook and Brown (1999) that *'each of the four categories of knowledge inherent in the explicit/tacit and individual/group distinctions is a distinct form of knowledge of equal standing with the other three (i.e. none is subordinate to or made up out of any other)'* (p.382). Bringing a range of knowledges into focus as part of an academic programme poses particular challenges, for academic staff and for students, due to the dominance of formal approaches to knowledge and learning. As Eraut (1998) points out, *'people are so accustomed to using the word 'knowledge' to refer only to 'book knowledge' which is publicly available in codified form, that they have developed only limited awareness of the nature and extent of their personal knowledge'* (p.129).

Yet personal knowledge and effective social creation of knowledge through interaction with colleagues is a fundamental aspect of successful professional practice. Eraut highlights the distinction between what Oakeshott (1962) terms *'technical knowledge'*, which can be codified and is explicit, and *'practical knowledge'* which Oakeshott claims is expressed *in* practice, and can be learned only *through* practice (1998). **The key** role that cultural knowledge, which is uncoded, plays in most work-based practices and activities – such knowledge has to be learned informally. Yet, *'informal learning is largely invisible, because much of it is either taken for granted or not recognised as learning ... the resultant knowledge is either tacit or regarded as part of a person's general capability, rather than something that has been learned'* (Eraut, 2004, p.249).

Explicit formal knowledge consists essentially of concepts, information and insights that can be codified and presented either in books and articles, or formalised as rules and procedures. Such knowledge can be readily transferred. In contrast, tacit knowledge takes the form of *'a person-environment exchange that is not articulated'* and *'shared*

arrangements that have arisen without explicit agreement or discussion' (Ericsson, Charness, Feltovitch and Hoffman, 2006, p.615). It is claimed that the *'highest levels of expertise are characterized by contextually based intuitive actions that are difficult ... to report verbally'* (Ericsson et al, 2006, p.12). When discussing specialised knowledge, although recognising the importance of the *'facts of the domain'* which are found in textbooks and journals, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) argue that:

Equally important to the practice in the field is the second type of knowledge called heuristic knowledge, which is the knowledge of good practice and good judgement in a field. It is experiential knowledge, the 'art of good guessing' that a human expert acquires over years of work. (p.104, citing Fiegenbaum)

On this basis they argue that to achieve a high level of skill in any unstructured problem area, it is necessary for professionals to gain *'considerable concrete experience with real situations'* (1986, p.108).

The inclusion of experiential learning as an intrinsic part of what Biggs would see as the process (the pedagogy for the CSM/BBK MBA) addresses the critique that too much weight is put on codified formal knowledge in supporting effective professional practice, and helps alert students to the full range of knowledges employed. The explicit identification and recognition of experiential learning, which *'involves deriving explicit knowledge through reflection on experiences which might otherwise remain in episodic memory and be used only tacitly'* (Eraut, 2000, p.124) provides students with the opportunity to draw directly on the tacit knowledge that they have developed through their professional practice. The exposure of experiential learning to formal styles of thought, which can be used as a lens through which to consider practice, enables it to be integrated into the programme as part of academic study. It also provides students with a learning experience which has direct relevance, and the potential to effect changes in practice. In addition, in supporting students to make their experiential learning explicit, an attempt is made to counteract the natural tendency to communicate and discuss the more explicit aspects of practice, while neglecting those that are tacit (Eraut, 2004). It is, however, apparent that many of these aspects of the programme pedagogy are only feasible if the participants have some

experience in the practice of management – entrants are therefore required to have at least three years' experience post graduation.

The emphasis on group experience is part of the programme design – for example, the first module entitled *'Provocation and Intervention'* focuses on group projects, all of which relate in different ways to a tutor-defined theme. Students encounter agile development methods, in which requirements and solutions evolve through collaboration between self-organising, cross-functional teams. The focus is on complex problems involving multiple themes, which lead to key questions and points of provocation. The size of the module - which is 60 credits (one third of the total credits for the award) - alerts students to the extent to which knowledge in the workplace is socially-produced through people working together. Lehtinen, Hakkarainen and Palonen (2014) point to Stahl's concept of group cognition, which refers to a *'process during which personal meaning-making processes and understanding are coupled together in social knowledge building systems'* (p.212).

The second module *'Entrepreneurship in Action'* has content that is student-led, and involves group work on an issue-based or opportunity-based project which they have identified. As Beckett and Hager (2002) point out, *'workplace practical judgement often starts with judgement about what the problem is. This is a complication that is simply ignored in theory/practice accounts of workplace practice'* (p.189). The challenge in this module is to consider the limitation of conventional business improvement processes, when faced with rapidly *shifting* technological, socio-cultural and economic paradigms.

The third module, entitled *'Effecting Change: Collaboration in Practice'*, extends the networking activities of the groups to work on a project with external partners. Students are required to find partners with whom to work. They are then asked to propose new discourses and framing of the *'problem'*, *'issue'*, *'opportunity'*, or other context for change, incorporating aspects of the *'Global Challenges'* as set by the Millennium Project.

The final module on the programme is entitled *'The Live Project'* and revolves around the creation of an intervention which draws explicitly on theoretical approaches, and on practical tools and processes encountered earlier in the course.

Overall, the programme design enables individual and group knowledge and experience to be fully integrated through the process of group project work and problem solving during the entire course of the programme.

The CSM/BBK MBA extends over 18 months, and is an innovative, low residency course, which combines periods of intensive face-to-face teaching and learning activities, with regular on-line sessions between tutors and students, and between student groups. It is widely recognised that the development of high quality on-line learning resources has fundamentally affected the way in which programmes are delivered. As Hutchings and Quinney point out, '*interactive technologies make it possible for educators to qualitatively reconceptualise the teaching and learning dynamic*' (2015, p.117). The model of delivery adopted for the MBA programme is similar to that of the '*flipped*' classroom, where interactive technologies provide:

course materials ... for students to engage with outside the classroom enabling in-class time to be repurposed for student-centred collaborative learning activity that builds on the learning resources provided. ... the flipped classroom enables a shift away from traditional information-transmission, teacher-led lectures where students sit and listen as passive learners, to offer an active and collaborative learning environment, where students assimilate knowledge through application and evaluation, more conducive to facilitating deeper approaches to learning through encouraging higher order critical thinking and creativity. (p.107)

The face-to-face sessions take the form of '*Sprints*' – there are 10 sprints across the programme – each of which will have a specific focus, for example, Systems, Complexity and Networks; Operations and Technology. A sprint takes the form of concentrated short-duration, small group activities during which time-dependent tasks are undertaken. They combine previously delivered '*taught*' content with opportunities to put into practice the knowledge and skills which have been acquired. Students prepare for the Sprints by undertaking readings, watching videos and taking part in moderated on-line small group discussions. There is a strong emphasis on group production of knowledge.

The programme uses an amalgam of the cognitive processes of creativity from the arts and design school tradition (for example, action research, conceptual prototyping and iteration),

coupled with analytical skills from business and management disciplines. The programme team brings together specialists in design thinking and design methods, business management and strategy, organisational psychology, entrepreneurship and start-ups, and the creative industries generally. Adopting a '*team teaching*' approach using members from each institution, the synergy created through the development of this community of practice between the two institutions delivers significant organisational learning. The staff, therefore, model collaborative working, leading to staff-student and student-student co-production of the knowledge and understanding on the course. The integration of reflection on practice is fundamental to ensuring that students use their experiential learning effectively, and the pedagogy for supporting reflective practice has much more in common with pedagogic practice adopted in arts education than it does with pedagogic practice used in business and management education. The hybrid teaching and learning approach enables students to develop a critical stance, both to their own practice and to the context in which they operate. The programme focuses on alternatives to the dominant value systems, foregrounding social, ethical and environmental values, and introducing students to a much wider awareness of markets and contexts. There is a requirement for students to consider cross-cultural and trans-national impacts of enterprise activity, and the ways in which cultural diversity is a source of social wealth and economic opportunity, rather than a '*problem*' to be managed and mitigated.

Further, Datar, Garvin and Cullen (2010) argue that, in order to develop effective leaders and entrepreneurs rather than individuals who are trained in analysis, business schools need to reassess the facts, frameworks and theories that they teach (what they term the '*knowing*' component), while at the same time focusing more attention in the curriculum to the development of skills, capabilities and techniques which are fundamental to management practice (the '*doing*' component). In addition, there is a need to challenge the values, attitudes and beliefs that form managers' worldviews and professional identities (the '*being*' component). The MBA programme designers have developed a curriculum to address all these elements, but this could not have been achieved within a structure driven by the needs of existing disciplinary structures. They needed to integrate elements of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity into the new curriculum.

Inter-disciplinarity and Trans-disciplinarity

In contrast to the predominantly cognitive approach taken in management disciplines, the arts tradition focuses on practice, and on the iterative and reflective experience which is involved in design thinking and practice. In addition, a *'design attitude'* sees each problem presented as an opportunity for creative invention, consideration of which includes the questioning of basic assumptions and a desire to improve the world (Dunn and Martin, 2006). Arguing that in traditional organisations *'constraints are the enemy'*, Dunn and Martin contrast this perspective to the approach taken in design firms, *'where constraints bring challenge and excitement'* (2006). The difference in perspective arises from the type of logic used to address problems, designers use *'abductive logic, which means the logic of what might be'*, whereas a managerial logic is either deductive, dealing with what should be, or inductive, dealing with what is. On this basis, Martin argues that students should be taught *'integrative thinking, the broader notion of what is salient, what the important relationships are, to look at things as a whole, not piece parts that you put together'* (Dunn and Martin, 2006, p.516). Such an approach is more consistent with the belief that explicit formal knowledge represents just a proportion of professional knowledge, and that *'knowing involves primarily active participation in social communities ... [which means that] the traditional format [for teaching and learning] does not look so productive'* (Wenger, 1998, p.10).

The intertwining of the distinct pedagogic approaches of business and the arts allow the programme to draw on the respective strengths of the disciplines involved, supporting students in enhancing their professional practice, not just enabling them to learn more *about* practice. Schoenberger (2001) refers to the *'best case'* of inter-disciplinarity occurring when people in one discipline *'realize they cannot answer their own questions without engaging in some deep way with another discipline and its culture'* (p.373). Such a recognition causes people to actively engage with the different disciplinary cultures, drawing on insights offered and using these jointly to enrich pedagogy and research, thus avoiding the risk of *'disciplinary reductionism where the insight and understandings of a discipline are boiled down to a set of facts that become data for another discipline'* (Schoenberger, 2001, p.375).

The approach adopted on the CSM/BBK MBA involves team teaching, drawing on expertise from both institutions' traditions to ensure a holistic experience for participants.

Recognising the importance of actively using formal, declarative knowledge, the established canons of knowledge are embedded thematically, rather than being dealt with in the more familiar structure of separate disciplines. This provides a *'tool box'* approach to content, whereby students are exposed to relevant information from different perspectives at critical points in the learning experience so that the material can be actively used. Problem-based learning – in which the problem defines which knowledge is needed – has been used quite widely within the boundaries of single disciplines. And there is evidence that, although students may use a narrower range of formal models when applying formal knowledge to problem solving, they use them in a richer way. The flexibility inherent in this approach, together with the knowledge for use approach, allows for knowledge creation within the programme, and reflects the fact that practices *'are emergent from the context in unanticipated and unpredictable ways ... So the directions of learning can only be characterized in broad, general terms'* (Boud and Hager, 2012, p.23). In addition, since many activities on the programme are undertaken in groups, there is an emphasis on the co-production of knowledge, by groups of students, and by staff and students working together. This aspect of the programme creates a more collaborative relationship between academic staff and students, where different expertise is combined to create new solutions to wicked problems. This pedagogic model is more appropriate for post-experience students, because, as Garnett (2016) points out, *'Particularly at postgraduate ... level[s], the student is more informed about their area of practice than the academic facilitator [advisor], but the facilitator is in a position to translate academic demands to fit the needs of the workplace'* (p.310).

Drawing on the contrasting traditions of business and the arts – of theory and of practice - the MBA programme supports students in the negotiation of different types of knowledge: the traditional, discipline-based largely theoretical work aimed at understanding how the world works (often defined as Mode 1 knowledge) and the transdisciplinary contextual knowledge which tries to get things to work in practice (often defined as Mode 2 knowledge) (Syed, Mingers and Murray, 2009). Mode 1 knowledge is produced within the academy in a manner which is consistent with the requirements of academic disciplines. In contrast, Mode 2 knowledge is produced outside higher education in a range of locations: *'think tanks, consultancy agencies, non-governmental organisations, professional societies,*

governmental and corporate R & D (sic) laboratories' (Delanty, 2001, p.109). It is knowledge which is produced by teams, drawing on a range of different expertise, and which is produced in the context of its application. As van Manen (2001) points out, Mode 2 knowledge production:

'transcends the disciplinary theories and paradigms from which it is in part derived ... What distinguishes this new epistemology of transdisciplinarity and application is that it is more context sensitive, eclectic, transient, and inventive than traditional (or Mode 1) interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research practices and methodologies'. (p.850)

The concept of transdisciplinary knowledge is particularly appropriate for the research project which occurs at the end of the programme because, as Costley (cited in Garnett, 2016) points out, *'methodologies that have been constructed for the purposes of distinct academic disciplines, do not necessarily hold effective and appropriate approaches to generate and codify a practice-oriented production of knowledge'* (p.310).

Engagement with both an arts and a business tradition gives students a distinctive perspective, in that exposure to the methods of different disciplines leads them to compare not just methods, but the epistemologies underlying the methods, with the result that *'diversity frames research orientations as particular socially constructed perspectives – not sacrosanct pathways to the truth. [so that] All methods are subject to questioning and analysis'* (Kincheloe, 2001, p.686). In contrast to a strong single disciplinary approach based on a single perspective (which often expresses concern about the potential superficiality of inter-disciplinary approaches), Kincheloe (2005) claims that familiarity with more than one disciplinary perspective supports researchers in the recognition that unilateral perspectives on the world cannot accommodate the complex reality between material reality and human perception. He refers to the ideal researcher resembling Denzin and Lincoln's concept of the bricoleur – someone who is *'intellectually informed, widely read, and cognizant of diverse paradigms of interpretation'* (2005, p.327). The bricolage approach advocated by Kincheloe (2001) is perhaps particularly appropriate in the context of an arts-based MBA in that, *'Bricolage does not simply tolerate difference but cultivates it as a spark to researcher creativity ... As researchers draw together different forms of research, they gain the unique*

insight of multiple perspectives' (p.687). In addition, such an approach has the advantage of allowing the researcher to draw on a wide range of research approaches and methods, rather than constraining them to research within a particular disciplinary tradition.

Conclusions

This paper argues that a new arts-based MBA provides a more effective and responsive model of professional business education than more traditional models of that programme. Marques (2015) points out that the major financial and ethical business crises which occurred in the first decade of the twenty-first century has challenged existing models of business education, *'leading to an enhanced call for more sustainable business models, and increased focus on a triple bottom line, with people, planet, and profit as equally important parts'* (p.1312). In addition, in an environment which is fast changing and which throws up new and different problems, *'The concept of stability has changed from remaining the same for a long time into flexibly and undauntedly riding the tides of today's corporate sea'* (Marques, 2015, p.1311). The constantly varying context, together with the requirement for more accountable business practices, has implications for the kind of leadership qualities which are required for successful performance – qualities that include collaborative skills and innovative thinking, so that problems with little or no familiar structure can be addressed effectively. Education which develops such qualities moves beyond the purely cognitive and intellectual, and includes consideration of social as well as economic value.

By combining academic disciplines with contrasting epistemological traditions, the new MBA introduces business students to the practice which is widespread in arts education, involving a *'design mind-set that doesn't worry about constraints because there is always a way round them'* (Dunn and Martin, 2006, p.513). This is an approach which may be of particular value in the current constrained economic context. The programme also alerts students to the way formal knowledge is organised, allowing them to negotiate both Mode 1 disciplinarity and Mode 2 trans-disciplinarity. Such an approach enables students to actively engage with *'creating new integrative knowledge to address the complex problems of the world ... Transdisciplinary knowledge is rooted in the messy problems of real life'* (Garnett 2016, p.309).

In addition, through supporting students in working with a range of knowledges and drawing directly on their experiences for programme content, the CSM/BBK MBA provides an MBA experience which *'interactive, integrated and individualised'* (Thomas et al, 2013), which engages students with a wider range of values than the purely financial. The combination of formal and experiential learning also impacts more widely. It is claimed that, *'this [informal learning] represents a vast untapped resource of invisible knowledge and skills and ... its increased visibility could lead to significant economic and social benefits for individuals, communities and countries'* (Cedefop 2009, p.9). The radical programme design provides for the co-production of knowledge, and encourages active engagement with creative problem solving throughout. Recognising that informal interactions play a major role in social knowledge production in context, and that *'people in organizations contribute to organizational goals by participating inventively in practices that can never be fully captured by institutionalized processes'* the programme team have worked to *'minimize prescription, suspecting that too much of it discourages the very inventiveness that makes practices effective'* (Wenger 1998, p.261).

Signature pedagogies offer a socialisation into the practices and values of a professional field, and model desirable practice (Shulman, 2005). Head and Xiang (2016) claim that the *'modern ideological focus on promoting economic growth sits comfortably with a predisposition to technocratic solutions'*, and is easily accommodated within existing disciplinary structures (p.5). However, since the 2008 crisis, the assumptions embedded in the market model have been subject to challenge, and, as Pettigrew and Starkey (2016) point out, it is inconsistent to claim to educate leaders who make a difference, and then distance the academy from alumni when the difference made is malign. Confidence in the effectiveness of business education is low, and the research produced there has little relevance to the world outside the academy. Currently, *trust in the academy is weak and the business school needs to earn trust by convincing the skeptical of its value* (Pettigrew and Starkey, 2016). It is difficult to see how that can be done using the existing model, with its preference for decontextualised abstract knowledge when, as Susskind and Susskind (2017) point out, future professional jobs will *'depend less on having great swathes of technical knowledge than on having creativity and strong interpersonal skills, such as the ability to empathise'* (p.xi). Webster-Wright (2010) claims that, *'To identify as a professional*

in a specific practice implies being within a shared and intersubjectively meaningful professional life-world' (p.174). She emphasises the importance of being authentic as a professional, arguing that, *'Being authentic involves facing up to situations, through weighing up possibilities within an understanding of social responsibility'* (p.185). For executives to be able to take into account social as well as financial issues requires them to have the ability to see existing problems differently. They need to be able to re-frame them. Goffman defines the action of framing as, *'to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient ... in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment'* for the issue under study (cited in Houghton, 2015, n.p).

The new MBA programme has been running since autumn 2018. [None of the initial intake of 22 students was from investment banking or management consulting.](#) Instead they included an events manager, an entrepreneur and people from the public and voluntary sector. One course member explained her rationale for choosing the CSM/BBK MBA as follows: *'For me, what is attractive about this course is about challenging the status quo, looking at how things are done in the real world'* (Financial Times Business Education, 2018, p.10). Another participant reported that the blend of content on the programme was unique, driving out any tendency to compartmentalized thinking (student feedback, 2020). [So far the course](#) has produced one cohort of graduates and is recruiting its third, so it is early to gauge the impact of what Biggs would see as the product of the programme.

However, many critiques of MBA provision claim that the dominant model of professional education offers an inadequate response to current problems. The case is made here that the re-imagined MBA pedagogy which is student-centred drawing on an arts tradition which is practice- and experience-based supports students in re-framing existing problems and provides effective modelling for a new, more creative and responsive professional practice.

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