

**BEYOND PROFESSIONALISM: FROM BUSINESS
PROFESSIONAL TO PROFESSIONAL MANAGER - AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF
EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENTS**

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PROFESSIONAL TO PROFESSIONAL MANAGER - AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF
EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENTS**

By

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**Submitted in Fulfilment of Doctorate in Business
Administration**



Waterford Institute of Technology

**School of Business
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**Submitted to Waterford Institute of Technology
June 2019**

Ethical Declaration

I declare that this thesis is wholly my own work except where I have made explicit reference to the work of others. I have read the DBA guidelines and the institutional regulations and hereby declare that this thesis is in line with these requirements. I have discussed, agreed and complied with whatever confidentiality and anonymity terms were deemed appropriate by those participating in the research and dealt appropriately with any ethical matters.

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I have not submitted this thesis to any other university or degree-awarding institution.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Carla M. M. M.', written over a horizontal line.

Date: June 2019

Dedication

“Let us be leaders with dignity, who refuse to collude in our own defeat, who refuse to put our job security above our honour, who prize our character even more highly than our cash-flow statements ... people who are defined not by extracting value but by creating it; people who are known for their integrity, their ethics, and their visionary leadership” (Anderson and Escher, 2010, p. 236).

For Maggie, Ailbhe, Iarla and Olwen.

*“Ba é Fionn an chéad duine a bhlaís an Bradán Feasa agus is aige a bhí an t-eolas ar fad!”
(COGG, 2015, p.3)*

Acknowledgments

This thesis marks the completion of an extraordinary personal journey of learning for me, one that was sometimes arduous but ultimately very fruitful and enlightening. It is only fitting, therefore, that I should offer gratitude and give due acknowledgment to all those who provided me with advice, reassurance and inspiration over the duration of my studies.

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Abstract

Executive MBA programmes have long been synonymous with developing an eclectic mix of professionals into a professional cadre of executive managers. This exploratory study of professionalism in executive MBAs seeks to discover how their educators and learners perceive professionalism and identify the professional competencies, values and behaviours that they perceive learners develop, by which mechanisms and in what contexts. Semi-structured interviews with educators and learner focus groups provide a basis for thematic analysis.

Findings suggest that educators and learners perceive professionalism to comprise synthesis and design skills, ethical disposition and behavioural moderation. Executive MBA programmes appear to reinforce these elements inversely to the proto-professional education processes of the archetype professions by intellectually anchoring in the business disciplines, providing reflective space for, and sharing learner experiences. Education processes that appear to support professionalism include curricula integrated across a broad range of business disciplines, andragogy, relationship learning, intertwining professional relevance with academic rigour and career development. Yet, educators imply a more holistic approach, beyond professionalism, to supporting managerial development.

A synthesis of these findings with the literature yields a conceptual framework that contributes to our comprehension of the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBA programmes by linking their processes and outcomes to relevant developmental factors of managerial professionalism. This study also enhances our understanding of executive MBA programmes. At the frontline between liberal and professional education, these programmes appear to align with one of three models that exhibit increasing levels of embeddedness of professionalism: a traditional model that siloes management knowledge; an intermediate model that bolts on professional development; and an integrated model that promotes synthesis and design. Whilst this study is limited to executive MBAs on the island of Ireland, contributions to management education arise from the international context in which MBAs are built on similar notions.

Key Words - Professionalism, Management Education, Executive MBA, Educator and Learner Perceptions, Synthesis and Design, Ethical Disposition, Behavioural Moderation.

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List of Abbreviations

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
ABIM	American Board of Internal Medicine
AMBA	Association of MBAs
BR	Brochure
CC	Content Category
CPS	Cumulative Paper Series
DB	Discussion Board
DBA	Doctorate in Business Administration
EBM	Evidence Based Management
EFMD	European Foundation for Management Development
GMAC	Graduate Management Admissions Council
GMAT	Graduate Management Admissions Test
IoT	Institute of Technology
IRE	(Republic of) Ireland
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MBAAI	MBA Association of Ireland
MFT	Major Field Test
NA	News Article
PD	Programme Director
PR	Programmatic Review
PRME	UN Principles for Responsible Management Education
RK	Ranking
RQ	Research Question
TH	Theme
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VR	Validation Report
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology

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Language

This thesis is underpinned by a qualitative study with a constructivist-interpretive inclination. The underlying assumption is that individuals create reality, which requires interpretation. The agency of the researcher is integral to this interpretation and much of the data generated relies on the researcher's interaction with the study's participants. Hence, parts of Sections 1 and 4 as well as the prefaces to the CPS papers are written in the first person. Personal narratives demonstrate how the research questions arise from the experiences of the researcher and how those experiences influence the research.

The grammar and spelling checks used in this submission are MS Word English (Ireland). For consistency purposes, grammar and spellings have been standardised to this format. Words, such as 'organization' or 'color', will appear as 'organisation' or 'colour' respectively in the text of this submission except where citations, titles of works or bibliographies are provided.

Section 1: Introduction and DBA Research Overview

“There are those who ... assert that MBA programs are unable to supply employers with the skilled and knowledgeable recruits they need” (Schlegelmilch, 2018, p. 1).

1. INTRODUCTION

“Certainly, management matters and certainly education matters. But for us as educators, they must matter together” (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2006, p. 427).

1.1 Introductory Remarks

This section provides an introduction to, and an overview of the research undertaken in an exploratory study of professionalism in executive MBA programmes. It outlines the background to, and rationale of the study followed by an introduction to the research questions. Subsequently, it presents the conceptual framework underpinning the study and summarises the methodological basis for enquiry. Finally, the structure of the thesis, its contributions to management theory and practice and the limitations of the research are outlined.

1.2 Criticisms of MBA Education

Since its establishment at Harvard Business School, the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme has been among the most resilient and globalised initiatives to develop skilled management professionals (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007). Yet, criticisms of MBA programmes have intensified since Mintzberg (2004, p. 854) lambasted them for “teaching the wrong things in the wrong ways to the wrong people at the wrong time”. Ammunition in the form of MBA graduates linked to corporate and financial scandals have fed convenient arguments scapegoating MBAs for a perceived failure to prepare their students adequately for managerial practice (Swanson and Frederick, 2016). Such arguments extend to questioning the MBA’s future viability (Brocklehurst et al., 2007) as an educational product. In this context, one might expect student demand to weaken and employer interest to dissipate. Paradoxically, MBA programmes and their graduates remain highly sought-after by both prospective students and employers respectively (GMAC, 2017). Whilst there are tentative signs that demand has saturated in the United States, MBA programmes continue to grow in popularity elsewhere.

This apparent contradiction is reflected in an emergence of polarising views in an accumulating body of scholarship of MBA education aimed at critiquing and improving its provision. Whereas emphasis appears to be placed on incremental improvements, some scholars (e.g. Trank and Rynes, 2003; Navarro, 2008, Thomas et al., 2013) advocate for more systemic change. They contend that MBAs must up their game considerably to develop their students into professional managers who would rely on a common body of knowledge, values and practices. In fact, many scholars (e.g. Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Bennis and O’Toole, 2005; Khurana, 2007) claim that management is struggling to live up to its unfulfilled early promise

as a profession, as it wrestles with articulating its jurisdictional claims (Abbott, 1988) to the type of challenges that management professionals would be best positioned to address. Implied in this claim is that management's early ideals have been long since overshadowed by an emphasis on enhancing managers' economic and social status (Simpson, 2000).

1.3 Professionalism as a Metaphor for Improving Managerial Practice

It is against this backdrop that this thesis deliberates on Rubin and Dierdorff's (2013) proposed professionalisation of MBA programmes as a topic for enquiry. How could criticisms of MBAs be addressed by adopting aspects of professional education? What education processes are needed to develop students into professional managers? How might we assess the professional development of MBA students? These are among the many questions that arise in exploring this topic. In recognising the controversial debate on whether management should be considered as a profession (e.g. Donaldson, 2000), Paper 1 narrows the focus of the study to the more elusive concept of professionalism as a normative set of competencies, behaviours and values, often found in professionals, that acts as a metaphor for occupational improvement (Ong, 1979). If professionalism has proven to be an apt metaphor for the improvement of medical or legal practice, could this metaphor translate to the advancement of managerial practice? Likewise, if the development of professionalism serves as an important underpinning in the education of many professionals, then could it apply to the education of managers? Of course, translation of concepts from one context to another, even those as widely studied as professionalism, is neither automatic nor trivial. Given the doubts as to whether management should be considered a profession at all (Pfeffer, 2011), exploring the very relevance of professionalism to management becomes all the more intriguing. What follows is a study of professionalism in executive MBA programmes, the part-time version of the MBA in which classroom learning and professional practice are interwoven and, hence, in which professionalism is most likely to be found. In recognising the nebulous nature of professionalism, the study seeks to garner educator and learner perceptions of it and how it is developed in executive MBA programmes. In doing so, it extends our understanding of professionalism to the education of managers and unearths the practicalities of its development.

1.4 Concluding Remarks

The next section begins with outlining the primary audience at which the thesis is targeted. In articulating the background to the study, it then synthesises criticisms of MBA education. Finally, it provides an academic, professional and personal rationale for the study.

2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

“We face a world in which management education, particularly MBA education, is by many assessments in crisis” (Waddock and Lozano, 2013, p.265).

2.1 Introduction

The background to, and rationale for this study is best explained along historical lines. Khurana’s (2007) historical narrative of business schools depicts them as having yet to succeed in achieving their founding aims, i.e. to educate a professional guild of managers. Management as a profession still appears to be in its infancy with a knowledge base that is neither integrated nor systematic (Barends, 2015). Hence, business schools could benefit from clarity on their role to professionalise management (Schlegelmilch, 2018). Whilst professionalisation is associated with progress towards becoming a profession with a regulated body of knowledge, guidelines for ethical practice and so on, this study rests on the more nebulous notion of professionalism as a driver for any intrinsic transformation of managerial practice.

2.2 Primary Audience

Simon (1967) highlighted some key design features of business schools required to develop a professional cadre of managers. Yet, contemporary criticisms of business schools suggest that professionalism is not top of their priorities (Rousseau, 2012). This study aims to address the more fundamental issue of what management educators and learners perceive professionalism to be and how it is developed in executive MBA programmes. The primary audience for this research includes management scholars, educators and executives that are interested in professionalism as an avenue for improving management’s education provision to better prepare students for managerial practice. In addressing management scholars, it is envisaged that the findings would appeal to their interest in forging an empirical basis for managerial professionalism. For management educators, the study aims to identify practical guidelines for embedding professionalism in executive MBA programmes and, thereby, to assist its students with developing patterns of professional behaviour. Finally, this study is relevant to reflective executives (Roglio and Light, 2009), perhaps prospective, current or past MBA students, who wish to explore ways to further professionalise their managerial practice. Whilst the ideas generated in this study may apply to specialist fields of business or to the stratified layers of management, the focus is on professionalism within executive MBAs. As executive managers yield significant influence over the decision-making apparatus of organisations (Scase and Goffee, 2017), their education is core to management as an emerging profession.

2.3 Background to the Study

The opening chapter of George Romme’s (2016, p.2) monograph provides a striking contrast between the high levels of professionalism required of surgeons or airline pilots and the more ambiguous expectations of professionalism required by managers. His thesis is that the “quest for professionalism in management” must be reinvigorated in light of the damage that managerial amateurism has inflicted on society over the past few decades. Romme (2016) focuses on management scholarship as a driving force for professionalising management and his work provides inspiration for this study. The context for this study is management education, in particular executive MBA programmes. MBAs are the flagship management education programmes of business schools (Mintzberg, 2004). After the most recent global financial crisis, “resentment against the MBA” was “visible everywhere” (Podolny, 2009, p.63). The literature review in Paper 1 examines whether criticisms of MBA education could be addressed by adapting a modified model of professional education. Paper 1, thus, provides the background evidence supporting a rationale for the study, synopsising prior literature that critiques MBA education by reference to values, pedagogy and relevance (Table 1).

Table 1: A Synopsis of Criticisms of MBA Education

Values <i>Examples ...</i>	Pedagogy <i>Examples ...</i>	Relevance <i>Examples ...</i>
Ghoshal (2005), Antonacopoulou (2010), Hühn (2014), Koljatic and Silva (2015), Arieli (2016).	Currie and Knights (2003), Mintzberg (2004), Navarro (2008), Varela et al. (2013), Bedwell et al. (2013).	Eberhardt et al. (1997), Pfeffer and Fong (2002), Rubin and Dierdorff (2009), Costigan and Brink (2015).

The values critiques suggest that MBAs fail to foster ethical values worthy of professional conduct. The pedagogy critiques imply that MBAs overemphasise analytical skills over other skills, such as synthesis, interpersonal skills and critical thinking. The relevance critiques imply that knowledge created by management scholars and disseminated through MBAs is of little relevance to managerial practice. The education of other professions harbours potential solutions, such as practices that address ethics, practice-based pedagogy, design and research-practice integration (Rousseau, 2012; Barends, 2015). Yet, their application in management education is not a simple matter. For one, some believe that management is not a profession at all (e.g. Gosling and Mintzberg, 2004) or that MBA education should not be narrowed to professional training (Barker, 2010). Conversely, there are those who believe that the pedagogies of professional education are inadequate for bridging the theory-practice gap necessary to prepare students for managerial practice (e.g. Chia and Holt, 2008). Others, such

as Podolny (2009), see merit in adapting some practices used in educating other professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, to MBA programmes. For example, professional education accentuates ethical values, which are very valuable to the human aspects of managing and to negotiating the competing and conflicting demands of multiple stakeholders (Batool, 2016).

So, regardless of whether or not management is a profession in the strictest sense, Paper 1 explores the potential for professionalism, an umbrella concept for knowledge, values and practices of professionals (Friedson, 1994), to act as a blueprint for improving management education. From the literature, two challenges to this possibility become evident. Firstly, in almost all professions, definitions of professionalism are problematic. The American Board of Internal Medicine’s definition for medical professionalism (ABIM, 2002) differs from professionalism in law (Noone and Dickson, 2001) or in engineering (Herkert and Vincent Viscomi, 1991). Hammer (2000, p. 1) defines professionalism as “sets of attitudes and behaviours specific to professions”. Even within professions, professionalism is subjective and is constructed at multiple levels (Hodges et al., 2011). The origins of professionalism can be traced back to sociology literature (e.g. Parsons, 1951) in which the professionalism was based on a list of characteristics of the archetype professions, such as medicine and law (Table 2).

Table 2: Typical Characteristics of Professions

Knowledge	Values	Behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specialised Body of Knowledge ▪ Licensing and Certification ▪ Socialisation of Student Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Autonomy ▪ Self-Regulation ▪ Altruism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guiding Code of Ethics ▪ Service to Society ▪ Linked to Professional Body

Source: Adapted from Greenwood (1957)

Secondly, the literature review suggests that scholarship on professionalism in the education of the archetype professions is much more advanced than scholarship on professionalism in management education. Whilst prototype statements (e.g. Emiliani, 2000) on managerial professionalism and suggested codes of conduct (e.g. Anderson and Escher, 2010) exist, their empirical foundations are limited in comparison to the those for the medical or engineering professions (Romme, 2016). Yet, these challenges should not warrant neglect of academic and professional interest in the matter. As far back as the 1970s, a review of graduate business education termed MBAs as “professional management degrees” (Duncan, 1971, p. 516), implying comparability with degrees in law or medicine. In their stipulations for accreditation, the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) outline framework conditions for balancing academic rigour with

professional engagement. Hence, MBAs are, to some extent, legitimised by what their educators espouse about professionalism. With the focus of MBAs on leadership and managerial success, developing professionalism would appear to be an imperative to their very legitimacy. Whilst there is substantial debate within the management education literature about the pedagogy and curriculum of MBAs, the extent to which professionalism is embedded in these programmes remains largely underexplored. Executive MBA programmes adopt their curricula and pedagogies to address the occupational challenges facing their working students, whose learning can be interwoven with professional practice. Therefore, if there is such a thing as managerial professionalism, then it is most likely to be found in the executive version of the MBA. Following a synthesis of the literature, a clear gap is identified in Paper 1 with respect to the embeddedness of professionalism in these programmes.

2.4 Rationale for the Study

Given the background to the study outlined in the previous section, a strong justification for the study can be articulated academically, professionally and personally.

2.4.1 Academic Rationale

A study of professionalism in executive MBA programmes is justified academically given that our current understanding of managerial professionalism relies on a very small number of prototype statements, oaths and codes of behaviour that are based on limited empirical evidence (Romme, 2016) and on a highly contested historical narrative of management as a profession (Khurana, 2007). Unravelling executive educator and learner perceptions of managerial professionalism should enhance our understanding of the construct of professionalism and provide insight into its metaphorical function for occupational improvement in management learning and practice. Building on the work of Somers et al.'s (2014), this study elaborates on the theoretical travel of professionalism concepts to management, an occupation that appears quasi-professional. Given the growing appeal of professionalism as a metaphor for improvement in many occupations and the accelerating professionalisation of many occupations (Evetts, 2003), the education of managers serves as a useful contextual test-case for exploring the constraints of these trends.

2.4.2 Professional Rationale

The study is justified professionally in light of criticism of the MBA's problematic relationship with management practice (e.g. Ackoff, 2002; Rubin and Dierdorff, 2011; Khurana and Spender, 2012). Through the lens of professionalism, the study seeks to identify a pedagogical

and an epistemological basis for educating aspiring managers that is better aligned with managerial practice. If anything, the growing criticism of MBA education makes this study more relevant. Whilst some MBA educators have pioneered innovations that emphasise professionalism (e.g. Hagen et al., 2003; Randolph, 2011; Charlier et al., 2011), the literature suggests that most MBA students are not exposed to these innovations. Likewise, efforts to rejuvenate Simon's (1967) notions about managerial professionalism have produced significant ideas supported by robust empirical studies (e.g. Rousseau, 2012; Khurana and Spender, 2012; Huppertz, 2015; Barends, 2015) but their impact on MBA education is largely unknown. Whilst Barker (2010) argues that imbuing MBAs with professionalism does not necessarily equate to better preparing their students for managerial practice, this study sheds light on at least one aspect of Rubin and Dierdorff's (2013) proposed professionalisation of the MBA, as an avenue for enquiry, by articulating the applicability and relevance of professionalism to management educators and learners.

2.4.3 Personal Rationale

This study is justified personally in light of my own interest in the subject matter. I will always consider my profession to be engineering. I have worked for many years as an engineer and educated students for entry into the engineering profession for many more years. Engineering education is characterised by its emphasis on design, which aims to devise "courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (Simon, 1996, p. 130). Its problem-solving routines are rooted in the natural sciences but rely on abductive logic, which recognises the power of human agency to alter situations. Whilst not without its own issues (e.g. Crawley et al., 2007), I see blueprints within engineering education that could help management education to better claim relevance to professional practice.

For my Masters in Industrial Engineering, I studied the pioneers of management (e.g. Taylor, 1911; Fayol, 1949, Drucker, 1974), linking analytical engineering methods to the human aspects of managing. A career milestone came in the form of enrolling in an executive MBA. The diversity of students presented me with new ways of looking at the world. The breadth of knowledge acquired in business fundamentals helped me to have conversations with non-engineers and its international curricula broadened my horizons. Yet, I also formed concerns. Whilst business administration was presented as a science, connections between my experiences of management and the MBA's academic models felt tenuous. I recall sensing some degree of cynicism from students concerning the academic value of the MBA as they expended more energy on networking and pursuing career opportunities.

On graduation, I pursued an academic career whilst trying my hand in a start-up. I found that I was ill-prepared for the complexities of entrepreneurship. Whilst I could apply my engineering creativity to designing new products, my skills were inadequate for creating business value. I became a 'student' of entrepreneurship education and assumed a role to develop it (HEA, 2009). A criticism of this education was that the classroom metaphor for entrepreneurship relied on a corporate management model of entrepreneurship education that limited its relevance to non-business students (Gibb and Hannon, 2006). I was tasked with reorienting the metaphor towards imagination, creativity, opportunity recognition, judgment and rhetorical savvy, in essence exploring how entrepreneurship's creative elements (Foss and Klein, 2012) could replace the predominant rationalism metaphor (Ghoshal, 2005) in management education. This was the thrust of Herbert Simon's (1967) paper on helping students to develop synthesis skills for their application in contextualised entrepreneurial practice.

When I assumed the role of Dean of a new business school, I became acutely aware of the criticisms of business schools and became concerned at commentary that some management educators and scholars had aborted the quest for professionalism along the lines of other professional disciplines. Some believed that management education was at an impasse (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Stewart, 2009). Others believed that business schools had made progress in advancing management as a profession but challenged them to improve further (Cheit, 1985; Cornuel, 2007; Durand and Dameron, 2008). There were also those who expressed diametrically opposing views of business schools, some through rose-tinted glasses (e.g. Fernandes, 2005) and others who feared for their existence (e.g. Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). Yet, I sensed that many of these views were characterised by strong opinions and philosophical positioning. So, I developed a personal interest in searching for underlying evidence.

In the early stages of my DBA, I studied the works of management education historians (e.g. Daniel, 1998; Engwall and Zamagni, 1998; Augier and March, 2011; Locke and Spender, 2011). I was particularly drawn to Khurana's (2007) historical analysis of business schools in which they were to become agents of a grand initiative to remodel management into a profession akin to law or medicine. Whilst substantial literature had accumulated on this ideal (e.g. Metcalf, 1927; Bowen, 1955; Andrews, 1969), it struck me that claims about management as a profession remain both tenuous (e.g. Squires, 2001) and controversial (e.g. Podolny, 2009). It was also evident how little had changed in management education since Herbert Simon's (1967) paper outlining entropic tendencies in professional schools for theory and practice to diverge and calling for an emphasis on synthesis skills to address the issue in management.

In summary, the academic rationale rests on extending our understanding of professionalism to management education. The professional rationale rests on the potential for professionalism to address pressing issues in management education, e.g. its problematic relationship with practice. As a former MBA graduate and Dean of a business school, I must acknowledge a strong personal motivation for this study, shaped by the varied experiences over my career.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

Given the harsh criticisms of the Business School's flagship management education provision, the MBA, I therefore pose the rhetorical question in Paper 1: could professionalism assist with addressing these criticisms? Professionalism after all emphasises ethical guidelines, the role of professionals in society and so on, which could inform the ethics provision in MBAs (Frederick, 2008). Yet, it emerges during the literature review that this rhetorical question cannot be answered without first understanding what professionalism is and its embeddedness in MBA programmes. Hence, the initial objective of the study, which emerged from the literature review, was to explore the embeddedness of professionalism in MBA programmes.

I consider this research objective to be both intellectually appealing and professionally relevant. I find it to be intellectually appealing for two reasons. First, it is difficult to define what professionalism is, particularly in a management context, and, second, the challenges of management education seem to have evolved so little since Herbert Simon's (1967) seminal article advocating for greater professionalism in business schools. Likewise, I find it to be professionally relevant given the pressing concerns about MBA programmes, if not to their educators who must consider the why, what and how of their education provisions, then to their learners, who could benefit from better preparing for managerial practice. In acknowledging that my own personal experiences have shaped the scoping of this research, I am particularly conscious of making sure that these experiences and associated biases do not unduly influence how I interpret what participants in the study have to say on the matter whilst becoming immersed in the topic (Powdermaker, 1966). I suspect that many things have changed since my days as an MBA student and, yet, some criticisms of MBAs appear to have festered.

Having articulated the background to, and rationale for the study, the next section first provides an overview of the research process and introduces the two research questions underpinning the study. It then outlines some of the key conceptual underpinnings for professionalism, for how professionalism develops and for professional education. Finally, it articulates a methodological basis for enquiry that supports the exploratory essence of the study.

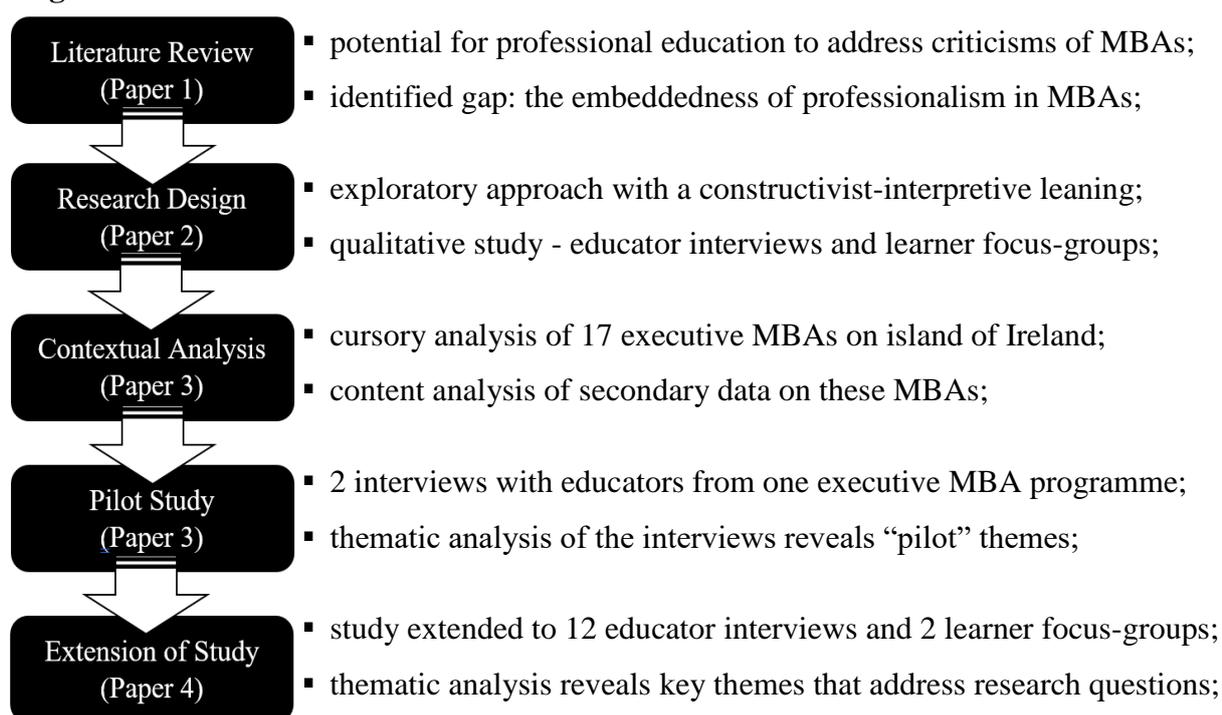
3. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

“In contrast to most methods in which researchers’ hypotheses and procedures are determined a priori, the research design in qualitative research remains flexible before and throughout the actual research” (Taylor et al., 2015, p.29).

3.1 Introduction

Figure 1 provides a simplified overview of the research process, from the literature review documented in Paper 1, to the initial research design documented in Paper 2, to the data collection and analysis documented in Papers 3 and 4 and to the final write-up documented in this thesis. Although Figure 1 suggests otherwise, the research process was not entirely linear. There were many dead-ends and unfruitful avenues of enquiry. There were also many instances where I found myself reverting back to earlier stages in the research process in order to reinterpret data and to make the necessary linkages in my logic.

Figure 1: The Research Process



The first and, perhaps, the most significant stage in the process was the literature review, which explored the potential for professional education to address criticisms of MBAs. A synthesis of four strands of literature, [1] the sociology of professions, [2] debate on management as a profession, [3] critique of MBA education and [4] exemplar processes in education models used by archetype professions, provides a basis for articulating the objective of the study and

constructing the research questions. It also provides a foundation for the conceptual framework underpinning the study, although, as is evident later in this thesis, the framework is developed and refined iteratively over the duration of the study.

3.2 Research Questions

The literature review highlights that the subjective nature of professionalism problematises its definition and measurement. There is an inherent challenge in interpreting differing perceptions of it. Deconstructing professionalism through the perceptions of MBA educators and learners, would be an important step in seeking to explore how, or if, executive MBA programmes develop it in learners. Taking account of this subjectivity, the study explores the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBA programmes, posing two research questions.

RQ1: What are executive MBA learners' and educators' perceptions of professionalism?

RQ2: What professional competencies, values and behaviours do educators and learners perceive to be developed in an executive MBA programme?

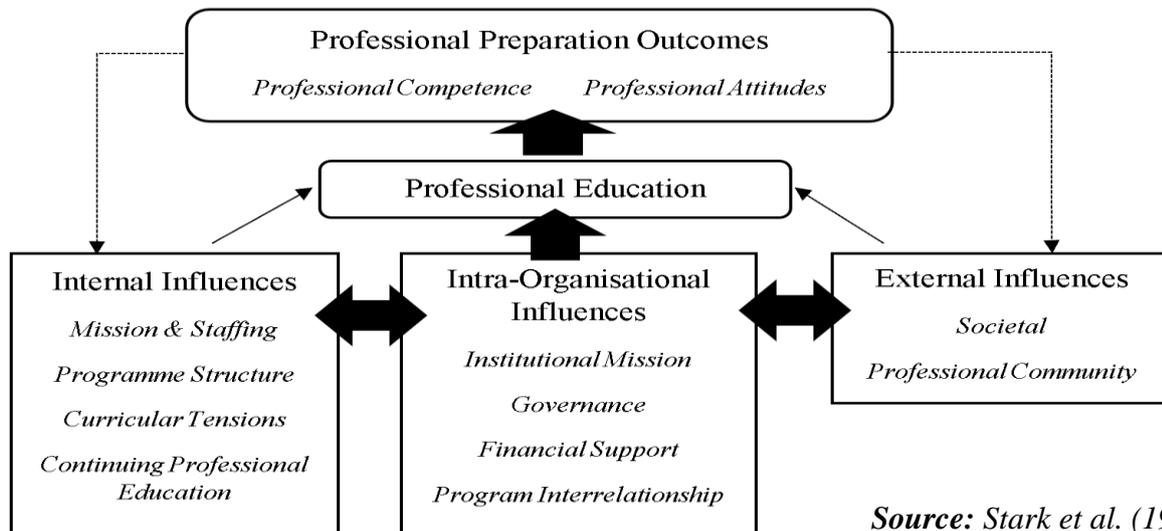
Descriptions of professionalism are typically built around lists of desirable competencies, values and behaviours (Wynia et al., 2014). Competencies are attributes, including knowledge and skills, that enable professionals to perform in their roles (Shippmann et al., 2000). Values represent beliefs that remain reasonably stable across contexts and over time (Rokeach, 1973). They help to define what is accepted as morally right and wrong and are expressed through inner attitudes or observable behaviours (Schwartz, 1992). The accepted values of professions are often enshrined in a belief system in the form of an oath or code of conduct (e.g. Anderson and Escher, 2010). This study seeks to diagnose what constitutes professionalism for executive MBA educators and learners as a synthesis of identifiable competencies, values and behaviours and to capture the education interventions and contexts by which these competencies, values and behaviours are developed in executive MBA programmes.

3.3 Prior Research Informing Conceptual Framework Development

Although most of the initial conceptualisation work for the study is documented in Paper 1, the final conceptual framework is refined iteratively over the cumulative paper series (CPS). In Paper 1, using Stark et al.'s (1986) framework, MBA programmes are conceptualised as professional education programmes that prepare students for entry into a profession. Stark et al.'s (1986) framework is based on a grounded theory study of education programmes for 11

different professions. This study focuses primarily on two core aspects of Stark et al.'s (1986) framework (1) professional education and (2) professional preparation outcomes (Figure 2).

Figure 2: A Conceptual Framework for Professional Education Programmes



Source: Stark et al. (1986)

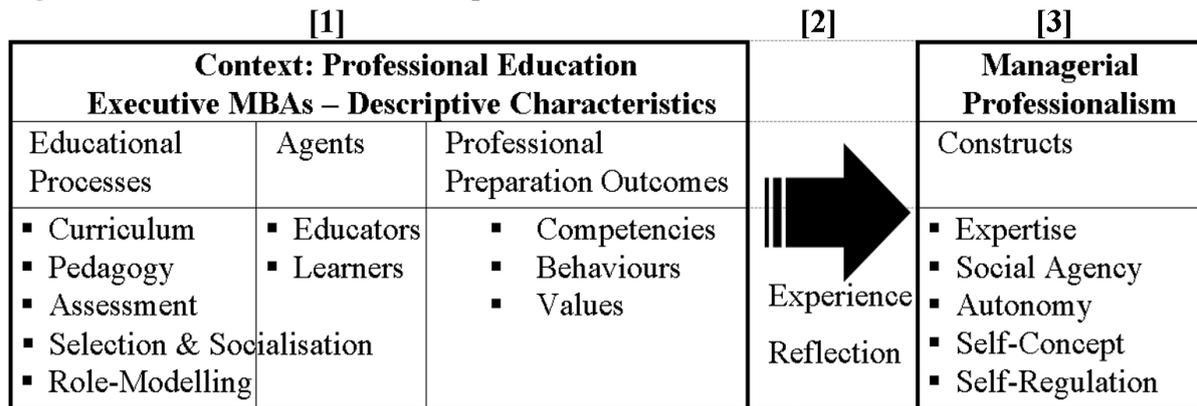
Stark et al. (1986) posit that the processes underpinning professional education, e.g. curriculum and pedagogy, are influenced by internal, intra-organizational and external forces. These processes influence the environment in which education takes place. Professional education efficacy is measured by professional preparation outcomes. Given their relatively short post-experience duration, MBAs do not align perfectly with Stark et al.'s (1986) framework. Nevertheless, Stark et al.'s (1986) framework, along with the agency of educators and learners, help us to think of MBAs as professional education programmes.

Aside from studies that focus on professionals in their field (e.g. Haga, 1976), the literature review identifies studies on student professionalism (e.g. Wresch and Pondell, 2015) or on links between educational experiences and future professional behaviours (e.g. McCabe et al., 2006). In this context, managerial professionalism is discussed in Paper 1 as a latent attribute of developmental factors, such as autonomy of judgment, self-regulation, social agency, expertise and self-concept (Nino, 2014). Autonomy of judgment refers to an ability to make decisions independently. Self-regulation represents a form of ethical control over a profession's practice devolved to its practitioners. Social agency represents individuals' perceptions of societal issues and their contribution to those issues. Expertise refers to a systematic body of knowledge that a professional is expected to possess. Self-concept refers to an individual's perceptions about oneself. Whilst there are arguably other factors for consideration, such as common sense of purpose (Romme, 2016) and attributes related to employability (Clark et al., 2012), these factors were initially deemed to be the most relevant to the education context.

In seeking to understand how MBAs contribute to the development of professionalism, Hilton and Slotnick’s (2005) investigation of how professionalism is developed in medical students is discussed in Paper 2. Using theories of psychosocial and moral development, their investigation illustrates how professionalism unfolds over a prolonged period of active learning from experience and reflection. Referring to this period as one of ‘proto-professionalism’, they suggest that students are influenced by opposing processes of attainment and attrition.

Hence, Figure 3 presents the pre-fieldwork conceptual framework for the study as a synthesis of three prior contributions: [1] an adapted version of Stark et al.’s (1986) framework focused on MBA education processes, agents of those processes, i.e. educators and learners, and professional preparation outcomes, [2] Hilton and Slotnick’s (2005) proto-professionalism concept, a period over which professionalism is developed from experience and reflection, and [3] managerial professionalism as a latent attribute of five developmental factors, including expertise, social agency, autonomy of judgment, self-concept and self-regulation (Nino, 2014).

Figure 3: The Pre-Fieldwork Conceptual Framework



The pre-fieldwork conceptual framework represents an abstraction of the key parameters used to guide enquiry during both the pilot study (Paper 3) and the extended study (Paper 4).

3.4 Overview of Research Methodology

An exploratory approach is used for this study. The rationale for this approach, outlined in Paper 2, is predicated on the nebulous and subjective nature of professionalism, which obscures our understanding of it and how it is developed. In essence, an exploratory approach is chosen to acquire an overview understanding first, before more targeted quantitative research can be considered. Hence, the study leans towards a constructivist-interpretive methodology in which the data collected and analysed is primarily qualitative in nature. As with many research journeys, the research design evolved, ultimately settling on one that gathers and analyses data from semi-structured interviews with MBA educators and from graduate focus-groups.

Considerable effort was invested in analysing the context for the study, which is documented in Paper 3. A map of the executive MBA landscape on the island of Ireland was constructed, identifying seventeen executive MBA programmes (see Section 2.4 in Paper 3). These MBAs were compared and contrasted with each other using data available in the public domain. Additionally, a content analysis of secondary data from sources, such as provider websites, news articles and programme brochures, was undertaken and the identified content categories were mapped to the pre-fieldwork conceptual framework. The purpose of analysing the secondary data was to acquire some insight into how professionalism within these programmes is conveyed to prospective students. A pilot study of professionalism in one of the executive MBA programmes was then undertaken, the findings of which are reported in Paper 3. The pilot study generated data from two educator interviews, from which a thematic analysis identified important pilot themes that capture educator perceptions of professionalism and of how it is developed. A comparison of the pilot themes and content categories was undertaken to test the likely transferability of the findings to other executive MBA programmes.

Paper 4 highlights the key findings from the extended study. In the extended study, educator perspectives were provided by six programme directors and six lecturers responsible for courses linked to professional development. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field-notes were taken during each interview, on which reflections were made post-interview. These reflections were used to form first impression themes from each interview. First impression themes and the interviews in which they surfaced were tracked. The study was extended until repeating occurrences of first impression themes implied saturation. Two learner focus-groups, comprising eleven participants who graduated from executive MBAs between 2011 and 2017, provided a mix of near real-time reflection and retrospective reflection on the role of professionalism in their MBA experiences. A thematic analysis of the entire data set was then carried out. Two processes contributed to thematic identification, balancing part and whole: [1] periods of immersion and reflection between interviews, facilitating formation of “first impression” themes, and [2] the generation of 200+ initial codes from the entire data and their subsequent organisation and aggregation into themes. These themes were discussed in the form of a thick description (Ryle, 2009) of the interview and focus-group narratives and then mapped to the pre-fieldwork conceptual framework. Finally, the findings were discussed in the context of the literature on both managerial professionalism and executive MBAs, allowing the creation of a post-fieldwork conceptual framework (See Figure 5 in Section 3) and for contributions to theory and practice to be elaborated.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

“As the conversation evolves, the epistemological and pedagogical underpinnings of management education might be subject to significant rethink” (Somers et al., 2014, p. 55).

4.1 Introduction

DBA research is expected to provide an original and valid contribution to the advancement of knowledge and management practice. The study underpinning this research offers three notable contributions: [1] to our understanding of managerial professionalism [2] to the educational practices within executive MBA programmes that develop or reinforce this professionalism and [3] to our understanding of executive MBAs as ultima-professional programmes. All three contributions are rooted in the literature, the research design and the data generated from the interviews and focus-groups. Consequently, they are embedded in the cumulative paper series covered in Section 2. This section summarises the contributions and limitations of the study. It begins by highlighting how the study contributes to our understanding of managerial professionalism by soliciting educators and learner perceptions of it and linking those perceptions to known developmental factors of professionalism. It then summarises the study’s contribution to management education practice by identifying the processes and contexts within executive MBA programmes in which this professionalism is perceived to be either developed, reinforced or maintained. It then summarises the study’s contribution to our understanding of executive MBA programmes by demonstrating that the professionalism embedded, whilst provides a basis for improving managerial practice, represents only one aspect to management development in such programmes. This section concludes by outlining the limitations of the study, which derive primarily from the exploratory nature of the research, the boundary constraints of the conceptual framework and the temporal limitations of enquiry.

4.2 Contribution to our Understanding of Managerial Professionalism

Whilst professionalism has become a cornerstone of modern society, it is difficult to define (Buch and Jensen, 2018). For some, it is an umbrella concept (e.g. Abbott, 1998) that describes the general nature of professions. For others, professionalism is a metaphor for occupational improvement (e.g. Evetts, 2003). Hammer (2000) outlines aspects of professionalism that are specific to individual professions. Many professional bodies have published clear statements on professionalism for their respective fields (e.g. Schaub and Pavlovic, 1983; ABIM; 2002; West, 2003). Whilst these statements guide professional practice, they have strong empirical and theoretical foundations. In contrast, prototype statements on managerial professionalism

have yet to gain widespread traction and there is limited evidence to underpin their validity within the fields of practice that they aim to serve. Whilst the suggestion that professionalism serves to enhance managerial practice is contested, Somers et al. (2014) articulates its potential relevance to management learning and practice. If we accept that it is subjectively constructed (Hodges et al., 2011), then this study contributes to our understanding of managerial professionalism by linking participants' perceptions of it to known developmental factors.

The findings suggest that executive MBA educators' and learners' perceptions of managerial professionalism, whilst broadly align with some of the common notions of professionalism, contain important nuances that are specific to management. In contrast to expertise typically attributed to professionalism, characterised by a systematic and regulated body of knowledge, the expertise underpinning managerial professionalism is characterised by strong synthesis and design skills, anchored in a breadth of knowledge of the business disciplines. Hence, the expertise of managers lies not in the breadth of knowledge itself but rather in the ability to synthesise that knowledge and creatively use it to design solutions to complex business problems. A further nuance specific to managerial professionalism lies in its ethical nature, derived not from an idealistic sense of altruism but from a pragmatism needed to accommodate a heightened moral hazard driven by a much broader range of clients (stakeholders), in exercising professional judgment creatively and in fulfilling social responsibilities. A final nuance relates moderation of individual managerial behaviour in the absence of collective self-regulation. Figure 15 in Paper 4 captures these perceptions of professionalism as three thematic elements, i.e. synthesis and design, ethical disposition and behavioural moderation.

This study explores the concept travel (Ozigweh, 1989) of developmental factors of professionalism and identifies factors specific to the management context (see Table 5 in Paper 4). Whilst some factors, such as social agency, have been studied in isolation (Koljatic and Silva, 2015), there has been no prior holistic investigation of the developmental factors of professionalism in MBA programmes. Hence, the study also contributes to our understanding of managerial professionalism by identifying how executive MBA educators' and learners' perceptions of it align with or diverge from these factors. Such an understanding informs the relevance of emerging prototype statements and codes of conduct that seek to explicate managerial professionalism. Whilst we know that management exhibits some attributes of the archetype professions, it is yet to be professionalised in a classic sense, lacking a systemic body of knowledge, accepted credentialing and regulation (Schein, 2003). The quasi-professional nature of management adds to the intrigue as to whether professionalism maintains relevance

in contexts where a question mark remains over an occupation's professional status. Participant responses would suggest that professionalism is vital to effective managerial practice.

4.3 Contribution to Management Education Practice

The prospect of professionalising MBA education has been controversial (Trank and Rynes, 2003; Barker 2010). Yet, Rubin and Dierdorff (2013) identifies professionalism as a future research agenda for advancing our understanding of MBA education. Stark et al.'s (1986) framework is typically applied to pre-experience programmes in preparation for entry into established professions (e.g. Morse et al., 1992). Whilst, graduates of such programmes are typically in the early stages of proto-professionalism, executive MBA learners typically have amassed significant professional experience on entry. This study contributes to management education practice by providing an evidence-base (Ambrose et al., 2010) of processes, which educators and learners perceive develop, reinforce or maintain professionalism. More specifically, it informs educators on exemplar practices for the development of professionalism at the more mature end of the proto-professionalism spectrum. With many possible influences on, and processes for developing professionalism in executive MBAs, disentangling these offers a contribution to practice. Whilst MBA professional preparation outcomes have also been studied in isolation, e.g. technical competencies (Costigan and Brink, 2015), integrative competencies, (Glen *et al.*, 2015), interpersonal competencies (e.g. Bedwell et al., 2014) and professional ethics (Jarvis, 2009), no prior studies take a holistic view of management development in executive MBA programmes as a synthesis of these outcomes.

Key findings imply that executive MBAs do not necessarily develop professionalism from scratch but, rather, reinforce or, at least, maintain it. They appear to achieve this in reverse-order to the proto-professional processes used in educating young undergraduates or graduates for entry into the archetype professions. Given that learners typically have significant professional experience on entry into executive MBA programmes, their professionalism appears to be reinforced by grounding their experience in a broad range of business disciplines, by providing space for reflecting on their experience and by providing opportunities to share their experiences with their classmates. In this context, executive MBAs can be considered as ultima-professional, as opposed to proto-professional, programmes, in which a variety of processes support the development of learners with high pre-existing levels of professionalism. Ultima-professionalism refers to a period beyond which mature levels of professionalism have been reached. Inherent in these are processes include curricula integrated across a broad range of business disciplines, andragogy, relationship learning, intertwining professional relevance

with academic rigour and career development. Hence, this study informs management educators of focus areas during the design, validation, accreditation, review and enhancement of executive MBA programmes for optimising the professional development of their learners.

Section 3 of this thesis takes up the challenge of providing a practical guide for management educators who want to know more about embedding managerial professionalism in their programmes. This guide is considered to be the most important contribution of this thesis. Not only does it address the issue of whether or not principles for developing professionalism are applicable to management, it answers the question as to how educators can best assist with reinforcing or maintaining professionalism in their mature student cohorts.

4.4 Contribution to our Understanding of Executive MBA Programmes

Executive MBA programmes differentiate themselves from their full-time equivalents in many ways. On the surface, they attract more mature student cohorts, which facilitates intertwined classroom learning and managerial practice, a more integrated approach to curricular design and even addresses the management challenges of students' sponsoring employers. Executive MBAs may well be tarnished, unfairly by criticisms addressed at full-time MBAs (e.g. Navarro, 2008). However, a key finding from this study is that Stark et al.'s (1986) framework, whilst may apply to full-time MBAs, does not apply appropriately to executive MBA programmes. Whilst this is not a theoretical contribution in itself (Whetten, 1989), the post-fieldwork conceptual framework (see Figure 2 in Section 3) offers a more plausible representation of executive MBAs as ultima-professional programmes in which professionalism is reinforced, rather than developed from scratch, in mature business professionals transitioning to executive management roles. This depiction of executive MBAs is consistent with developing managers who can operate outside their fields of expertise (Donofrio et al., 2010) and in which additional professional competencies more associated with liberal arts education, such as critical thinking and leadership capability (Stark and Lowther, 1989), are developed in parallel with the reinforcement of competencies traditionally associated with proto-professional programmes. At the frontline between liberal and professional education (Curtis, 1985), executive MBAs appear to align with one of three models that exhibit increasing levels of embeddedness of professionalism: a traditional model that siloes management knowledge; an intermediate model that bolts on professional development; and an integrated model that promotes synthesis and design (see Figure 3 in Section 3). Indeed, the latest generation of executive MBAs display remarkably high levels of professionalism, better handling of tension between scholarly contribution and practical value creation, better preparation of learners for the ethical reasoning

needed to respond to the complexities of managerial practice and better training of learner behaviours appropriate to the leadership roles of professional executive managers.

4.5 Limitations of the Study

As exploratory research that provides an insight into the perceptions of managerial professionalism of a small number of educators and learners, the study is not generalisable per se. Additionally, the study is limited geographically to executive MBA programmes on the island of Ireland. Although the literature suggests a great deal of homogeneity in the global MBA landscape, it is not established if the study's findings are transferrable to other geographical jurisdictions or to a wider population of executive MBA educators and learners. The boundary constraints of the conceptual framework also limit the study by the omission of factors that could potentially impact on MBA education and the professionalism construct. Although educators and learners are the primary agents in the education processes, there are others, such as employers, accrediting bodies, quality assurance committees, MBA associations, parent institutions and programme administrators, who could offer valuable insight. By limiting the study to educators and learners, there is an inherent bias in their perceptions, which is less critical of MBA education than voices evident in the literature. Even within the educator group, participants are either programme directors or lecturers responsible for professional development within their MBA programmes. The study does not convey a broad spectrum of views within academic programme teams. The conceptual framework also limits the study to developmental factors known to influence professionalism.

There are also temporal limitations. As snapshot in time, the study merely reflects participants' current perceptions and experiences. The learner participant group is limited to relatively recent graduates of a certain generation. Yet, generational perceptions of professionalism are continually evolving (Smith, 2005; Bryan, 2011). A more dynamic study of professionalism could be facilitated by a longitudinal analysis using ethnographic methods that would support observation of how professionalism unfolds in executive MBA learners before, during and after their studies. Notwithstanding these issues, the research unearths some important factors that collectively convey what professionalism means to the participants. Given the international context in which MBAs are built on similar notions (Spender, 2014), with some further definitional work, the study could be adapted to quantitative methods and scaled significantly to a wider participant base. Using a survey, participants could be asked to rate the significance of the factors of professionalism identified in this study to their managerial development. Such a study would be complimentary to the qualitative research conducted here.

5. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

“The writing of this thesis was a process I could not explore with the positivistic detachment of the classic sociologist” (Starfield and Ravelli, 2006, p. 222).”

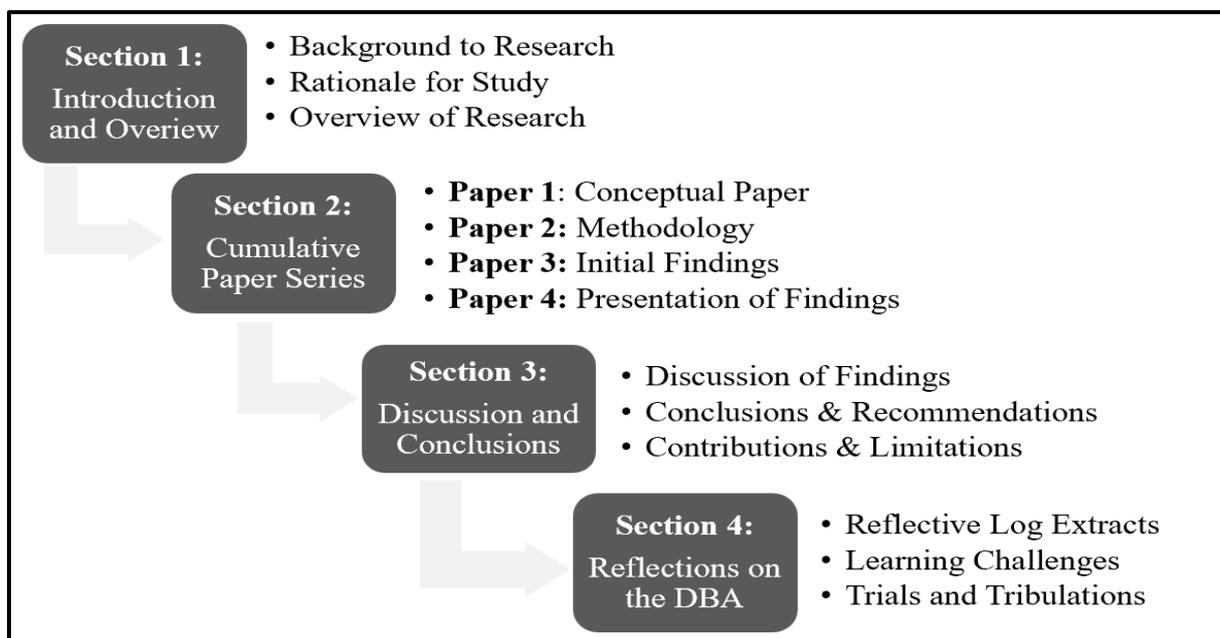
5.1 Introduction

Having presented the background and rationale, outlined the research questions and provided a brief summary of the research contributions, this section documents the thesis structure. As each of the papers in the cumulative paper series have been written as independent submissions, there is inevitably some minor discontinuity from paper to paper. Consequently, each section of the thesis is outlined briefly with appropriate linkages from one section to the next.

5.2 Structure

Figure 4 depicts an anatomy of the thesis based on four discrete but related sections. Section 1 (this section) provides an introduction to, and overview of the research. Section 2 encompasses the cumulative paper series. In Section 3, the study’s findings are discussed. Finally, Section 4 offers a personal reflection on the learning process over the duration of my DBA studies.

Figure 4: Outline of Thesis Structure



Section 1 presents the background to the research topic, the rationale for the study and an overview of the research. The background outlines an apparent paradox within management education, exemplified by the longevity, globalisation and popularity of MBAs, on one hand, and vocal criticism of MBAs, on the other. Exploring these criticisms through the lens of professionalism reveals potential solutions harboured in the education of the archetype

professions. Whilst the notion of management as a profession and the prospect of considering MBA education along professional lines are contentious, the rationale is articulated in the embryonic nature of prototype statements on managerial professionalism and the dearth of empirical research on professionalism in MBAs. Given the focus of executive MBA programmes on managerial success, professionalism seems integral to their legitimacy. Hence, Section 1 sets out an academically interesting and professionally worthwhile objective to explore the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs. As professionalism is a nebulous concept, subjectively constructed, the research questions seek to discover what educators and learners perceive professionalism to be and how executive MBAs develop it.

Section 2 forms the backbone of this thesis, detailing the literature review and conceptual framework, the research methodology, the findings and a discussion of those findings. Table 3 presents a summary of the cumulative paper series. All papers are presented as submitted for examination and approved by the examiners. The approval process required revisions to each paper to reflect examiner feedback. Each paper is prefaced by a short narrative, which outlines the evolution of the research journey from one paper to the next as well as how examiner feedback was considered either in amendments to papers or in steering downstream research.

Table 3: Summary of Cumulative Paper Series

<p>Preface to Paper 1</p>	<p>This preface outlines the process of scoping the research topic from a wide pool of scholarship on management education to researching the idea of developing MBA programmes along professional lines, notably proposed by Rubin and Dierdorff (2013, p.134) as part of a future research agenda to “elevate our collective understanding of the MBA”. In addition, the preface highlights the challenges of narrowing the research topic further to a set of research questions, based on a gap in the literature.</p>
<p>Paper 1 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework</p>	<p>Synthesising four strands of literature, Paper 1 examines how criticism of MBAs could be addressed by adapting aspects of professional education. A literature review reveals little research into how to develop professionalism in MBA students. Using Stark et al.’s (1986) framework for evaluating professional preparation degrees and Nino’s (2014) notion of professionalism as a latent attribute of developmental factors, Paper 1 offers a conceptual framework for professionalism in MBA programmes.</p>

<p>Preface to Paper 2</p>	<p>An important consideration discussed with the examiners was whether professionalism was actively developed rather than passively acquired. This spurred a further review of the literature focusing on the emergence of professionalism in students. The preface to Paper 2 highlights Hilton and Slotnick's (2005) theoretical work in exploring how professionalism emerges in medical students. The preface to Paper 2 documents a notable evolution in the research design from an ambitious multi-case analysis in the initial draft of Paper 2 to a more pragmatic qualitative analysis of MBA learner and educator perceptions in the final version of the paper.</p>
<p>Paper 2 Research Philosophy, Design and Methodology</p>	<p>In acknowledging that the nebulous nature of professionalism obscures our understanding of it, Paper 2 proposes an exploratory approach. Based on interpreting the reflections of the key agents in the education processes (i.e. educators and learners) on professionalism in MBAs, Paper 2 proposes a constructivist-interpretive leaning methodology, in which the data sought is qualitative in nature. The paper outlines an ambitious research design in which educator interviews inform a series of focus-groups with students and graduates who can link their MBA studies to their professional roles.</p>
<p>Preface to Paper 3</p>	<p>The preface to Paper 3 notes some developments in the research journey. The context for the study is narrowed to executive MBA programmes, which, whilst similar in nomenclature to full-time MBAs, tend to attract more mature students. Based on feedback from the WIT research ethics committee, the preface describes how the methodology is refined to focus on graduates (not students) to solicit learner perceptions. Whilst the shift in focus from students to graduates is an ethical consideration, the preface highlights how this shift simplifies the research design from one intended to be quasi-longitudinal to one that better links learners' experiences of professionalism during their MBA studies with their managerial practice.</p>
<p>Paper 3 Preliminary Findings</p>	<p>Paper 3 documents the preliminary findings that steer the direction of subsequent research activities. It begins by mapping the executive MBA landscape on the island of Ireland. A content analysis of secondary data identifies eleven content categories that summarise how educators convey MBAs to prospective learners. A pilot study of professionalism in one MBA, based on data from two educator interviews, is conducted. A</p>

	thematic analysis of the data identifies ‘pilot’ themes, which capture participant perceptions of professionalism and how it is developed. Whilst no claims are made about transferability of the ‘pilot’ themes, the secondary data hints at their potential relevance in other executive MBAs, thereby providing a reasonable basis for extending the study.
Preface to Paper 4	The preface to Paper 4 provides a concise summary of the research journey from the literature review to the final data collection and analysis methods used in this study. Although the four papers are interlinked, the preface seeks to explain minor differences in language between each paper.
Paper 4 Findings and Discussion	Paper 4 outlines the findings from the full set of educator interviews and learner focus-groups. A series of themes emerging from the data highlights educator and learner perceptions of professionalism (RQ1) as well as the perceived competencies, values and behaviours developed in executive MBAs (RQ2). The themes are mapped to the conceptual framework and are discussed in the context of three diverging models of MBA education that suggest different degrees to which professionalism is embedded.

Section 3 discusses the findings in the context of the literature. It provides a discussion of the research limitations, noting that the study is exploratory in nature and limited to a small number of participants. Section 3 also elaborates on the contributions of the study, summarised in Section 1 of this thesis. It demonstrates how the emergent themes contribute an important perspective on managerial professionalism, consistent with prototype statements, and highlights practical steps, beyond developing technical competence and knowledge of business fundamentals, that executive MBA educators must take if their programmes are to play a more effective role in professionalising management. Section 3 also sets out a future research agenda that would further our understanding of professionalism in executive MBA education.

Section 4 of this thesis offers a personal reflection on the DBA process. The DBA requires students to maintain a reflection-in-action (Schön, 2017) over their studies. This reflection not only generated useful data but became an integral mechanism for monitoring my own progress, helping me to highlight my achievements and take stock of my own learning (Gray, 2007). I elaborate on a range of techniques and tools used to aid my reflections, including storytelling, mind-mapping, reflecting on critical incidents and the relatively informal process of journaling. These tools and techniques have helped me to make sense of my own thinking and, in some cases, provided a basis for decisions during the study (Boud et al., 2013).

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

“Developing new knowledge or new practice is more like a marathon than a sprint. It is not necessarily the brightest students who are successful ... but those with unwavering patience and perseverance who cope well with uncertainty” (Burton and Steane, 2004, p. 11).

By many accounts, management education is in a state of intellectual and moral stagnation. Blame is placed on a misappropriation of Simon’s (1967) ideals of an intellectually robust and professionally relevant management education agenda since the reforms of Ford and Carnegie. Some management scholars (e.g. Khurana and Spender, 2012) believe that truth resonates in this message. Scholarship on the issue has evolved to a point of questioning how business schools should possibly respond to this blame. One avenue has been to advocate for a rejuvenation in the founding mission of business schools, i.e. to develop a professional cadre of managers socialised into a “profession rooted in a socially productive contract between work organizations and society” (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2013, p. 133). This thesis synthesises various streams of scholarship that explores ways to advance this agenda. MBA programmes are central to the management education provision of business schools (Wilson and Thomas, 2012). Yet, the idea of professionalising them is highly contentious. Some argue (e.g. Barker, 2010) against reducing MBAs to professional training. Others, such as Podolny (2009), claim that some facets of professional education could be used to improve managerial practice. Then, there are scholars (e.g. Mintzberg, 2004; Khurana, 2007; Nohria, 2012) who are evangelical-like in their enthusiasm to professionalise management by transforming the very fabric of its education. Yet, as the literature review will show, the debate on whether management is or should be considered a profession lacks criticality.

Hence, this thesis turns to the less defined but more useful concept of professionalism. Whilst prototype statements on managerial professionalism have surfaced periodically, they lack the empirical and theoretical underpinnings of statements on professionalism used in educating the archetype professions, such as medicine or law. Professionalism is central to discourse in medical education processes, such as student selection, curriculum, pedagogy, role-modelling and assessment. MBA educators can take advantage of learnings from the professionalisation of other fields, however appropriate analogies may be. Hence, by exploring professionalism in executive MBA programmes, what follows in this thesis is a contribution to our understanding of managerial professionalism, particularly from the perspectives of MBA educators and learners, and to management education practices used to develop it.

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Section 2: Cumulative Paper Series

“There are signs of stagnation in business schools in the West. Perhaps now is the time for the management education industry to re-evaluate its goals” (Khurana and Spender, 2013, p. 1)

PREFACE TO PAPER 1

“Business education may need an overhaul when it comes to training students to become socially responsible managers and professionals ...” (Nino, 2014, p. 1).

Introduction

Of the four papers in this section, Paper 1 was the most challenging for me as a DBA student. This challenge centred around developing a proposal for a viable study that could contribute to both theory and practice with a tangible set of research questions underpinned by an identified gap in the literature. This short narrative outlines the learning curve in progressing from an initial set of ideas to a research topic and, ultimately, to a set of refined research questions.

Evolution of Research Journey

My initial set of ideas drew on my very first assignment in the DBA programme. As part of my professional development, I set out personalised goals that I wanted to achieve in my DBA, including: [1] to complete a study in a relevant subject matter, [2] to learn to conduct original research, [3] to develop a reflective thinking capacity and [4] to learn to communicate my research. My research ideas were rooted in my role at the time and are synthesised in Table 1.

Table 1: Initial Research Ideas

Topic 1	Entrepreneurship Education: What Next?
Topic 2	Emerging Maritime Business Models
Topic 3	National Qualification Quality Authorities: A Strategic Review
Topic 4	Arab Business Leadership Styles
Topic 5	“Curricularisation” in Higher Education
Topic 6	The Role of Business Schools

Using the following evaluation criteria: intrinsic interest; potential impact; achievability; and alignment with my professional career, I scored each of the ideas, ultimately settling on the *Role of Business Schools* as my topic of choice. Having, in my professional capacity, undertaken a strategic review of a business school, I became acutely aware of many burning issues concerning business schools, including: -

- the legitimacy of business schools (e.g. Wilson and Thomas, 2012);
- alignment of graduate skills to employer needs (e.g. Ivory et al., 2006);
- value propositions based on career enhancement (e.g. Starkey et al., 2004);
- the low impact of business school research (e.g. Davenport et al., 2003);
- apathy to complex social issues (e.g. Grey, 2002);

- criticisms of their theoretical orientation (e.g. Hambrick, 1994);
- obsolescence of their neoclassical economic underpinnings (Ghoshal, 2005).

I found scholarship on these issues to be vast and wide. My first attempt at Paper 1 sought to take a critical stance on business schools. It traced the origin of these issues from the Ford (Pierson, 1959) and Carnegie (Gordon and Howell, 1959) reforms to contemporary criticisms of business schools that question their fitness for purpose (e.g. Humphries, 2014).

Consideration of Examiner Feedback on Finalising Paper 1

However, my first draft of Paper 1 did not narrow the scope of a future study sufficiently and I was still in search of research questions that would guide enquiry. This was reflected in the examiner feedback on the initial Paper 1 submission, which stated that: -

“Whilst the paper outlines rationale for the research and provides a review of the literature on business schools, the actual objectives and research questions are less than clear...”

“No clear conceptual framework is presented (although some figures do threaten to do this) and what contribution it will make to theory/practice?”

Yet, I was encouraged from feedback that there was “good coverage of a range of literature” and “glimpses of strong academic writing”. In particular, my historical analysis of business schools noted periods of discontinuity (e.g. Locke and Spender, 2011) that led to changes to the *raison-d’être* of management education. A summary of this analysis is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Evolution of Management Education Since 1960s

Era	Orthodoxy	Resulting Criticism	Proposed Remedy
1960’s Scientification	Management education lacked a scientific basis.	Theories irrelevant to practice (Thomas & Wilson, 2011). Drift towards rational model (Gavetti et al., 2007).	Re-orientate teaching and research towards managerial practice (Mintzberg, 2004).
1970’s Politicisation	The Business School needed to support economic liberisation.	The rise of ideological theories (Ghoshal, 2005) and neoliberalism (Locke & Spender, 2011).	Emphasise citizenship and social service in teaching (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992).
1990’s Corporatisation	Higher Education needed to be more “efficient”.	Erosion of academic autonomy. Ranking and Accreditation (Wedlin, 2007).	Move epistemology beyond market driven logic (Ivory et al., 2006).

Era	Orthodoxy	Resulting Criticism	Proposed Remedy
2000's Entrepreneurship	A world of greater complexity and uncertainty.	The 'market' model needs to cede to an interdisciplinary one (Maynard, 2015).	Theory of the Managed Firm (Spender, 2015).

This analysis cemented my own thinking on the evolution of management education to its current epistemological, ethical and pedagogical imprints. So, my second draft of Paper 1 zoned in on Herbert Simon's (1967) analysis of business schools as central to their primary purpose, i.e. to develop professional managers. I sought to explore the reduction-to-practice of Simon's (1967) ideals as a signature value proposition of the MBA, the flagship management education programme of business schools. In particular, I traced these ideals to the emerging practices of evidence-based management (Briner et al., 2009), design science (vanAken, 2005) and management rhetoric (Martin and Golsby-Smith, 2017) as a means for developing more synthesis and design-oriented MBA curricula (Beckman and Barry, 2007).

Initially, I proposed to implement an action-research intervention in the classroom that would pilot these emerging practices. However, apart from the practicality of such an intervention, two issues emerged, which caused me to further consider my research. First, there was an assumption underlying this line of enquiry that synthesis and design were at the heart of managerial professionalism and, second, several interventions along this line had already been piloted (e.g. Rousseau and McCarthy, 2007) or mainstreamed within individual MBA programmes (e.g. Boni et al., 2009). However, the pervasive message from the literature was that these interventions had yet to gain widespread traction (Khurana and Spender, 2013).

So, in returning to the more fundamental question of what we understand managerial professionalism to be, I examined four strands of strands of literature: [1] the sociology of professions, which provides a theoretical basis for professionalism, [2] the historical evolution of managerial practice and learning and contemporary discussions arguing for or against management as a profession, [3] critiques of MBAs and [4] exemplar education processes in the archetype professions used to foster professionalism. In addressing the examiners' comments on the first draft, the revised and accepted version of Paper 1, which follows, investigates a key criticism directed at MBAs, namely their failure to develop adequate skills for managerial practice, through the lens of professionalism. The subsequent literature review in Paper 1 explores possibilities for professionalising MBA programmes as a means for improving managerial practice. The notable lack of empirical evidence for managerial

professionalism, specifically within management education, was identified as a gap in the literature, providing the basis for a valid research objective to explore the embeddedness of professionalism in MBAs. I then crafted two research questions to support this objective.

RQ1: What are MBA students', graduates' and educators' perceptions of professionalism?

RQ2: What professional values, competencies and behaviours do students, graduates and educators perceive are developed in an MBA programme?

These research questions provide the study with a specific focus for addressing an identifiable gap emerging from the four strands of literature, namely a lack of empirical evidence and theorising on the embeddedness of professionalism in MBA education. To assist with addressing these two research questions, a conceptual framework is presented in Paper 1 using: [1] a modified version of Stark et al.'s (1984) framework for analysing pre-service professional degree programmes and [2] managerial professionalism as a latent attribute of several developmental factors. These developmental factors are highlighted in studies of individuals either working as managers in their field or studying to become a manager (e.g. Hall, 1968; Haywood-Farmer and Stuart, 1990; Nino, 2014; Despotidou and Prastacos, 2012; Romme, 2016). The conceptual framework is refined iteratively over the duration of the study.

Concluding Remarks

Paper 1, therefore, represents the culmination of a vast amount of reading, synthesising of different strands of literature, teasing-out of different ideas and considerable editing based on feedback from the DBA examiners and my supervisors. Although the initial motivation for the literature review, detailed in Paper 1, is stated as seeking to address how MBA education could be improved by the adaptation of models of professional education, it is the dearth of research on professionalism in MBA programmes that emerges as the primary gap in the literature. It became evident from comparisons with research on professionalism in the education of the archetype professions, such as medicine or law, that research on professionalism in management education was underdeveloped. Paper 1, therefore, evolves the research journey to a point whereby a strong rationale for exploring the embeddedness of professionalism in MBA programmes is evidenced in the literature review. Before we seek to address criticisms of MBA programmes using professionalism, we must seek first to gain an understanding of what professionalism is, in a managerial context. Given its nebulous and subjective nature, it is proposed in Paper 1 to explore what MBA educators and learners perceive professionalism to be and how they perceive professionalism is developed in an MBA programme.

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Paper 1: Conceptual Paper

“In fact, business is a profession, akin to medicine and the law, and business schools are professional schools – or should be” (Bennis and O’Toole, 2005, p. 1).

DEVELOPING MANAGERIAL PROFESSIONALISM IN MBA STUDENTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

ABSTRACT

Although its flagship graduate management qualification, the MBA, is considered a passport to a managerial role, the business school is commonly criticised for failing to adequately develop skills required for managerial effectiveness. This issue has been investigated through various lenses but there has been scant discussion on applying a model of professional education to address the MBA's perceived problems. How to assist students with developing patterns of professional behaviour has received extensive research attention in the archetype professions, such as medicine and law, but it is insufficiently addressed in management.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how criticisms of MBA education could be addressed by assimilating a modified model of professional education. Four strands of literature inform this review: sociology of the professions; debate on management as a profession; critique of MBA education; and exemplar processes in education models used by archetype professions.

The literature harbours many examples of MBA interventions that steer business schools towards their professional mission, offering insight into bridging theory to practice, strengthening practice-based pedagogy and setting ethical standards for graduates. However, in the absence of a framework for initiatives to support students' professional development, MBA educators operate largely unguided in their efforts to optimise their education processes.

Leveraging concepts from professional work and learning as well as frameworks for evaluating professional degree programmes, this paper provides a conceptualisation of professionalism in MBA programmes, so that not only can professionalism-related-performance of students be assessed and tracked but the extent to which professionalism is embedded can be evaluated.

Key Words - *Business School, MBA, Management Education, Professionalism, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Role-Modelling, Assessment*

Paper Type – *Conceptual Paper, Literature Review*

1. INTRODUCTION

“There is a striking difference between the ... professionalism expected of an aircraft pilot and the more ambiguous and less defined expectations we have of a manager” (Romme, 2016, p.2).

1.1 Business Schools Under Fire

The Ford (Pierson, 1959) and Carnegie (Gordon and Howell, 1959) reforms of management education sought to emulate medicine’s earlier transformation (Flexner, 1910) from a practice-based craft to a science-based profession. Their intellectual architect, Herbert Simon, proposed that business schools pursue a dual orientation: professional practice and fundamental research. Simon’s (1967) concerns of divergence between the two proved prophetic as rationalism misappropriated the idea of intellectually robust and professionally relevant education (Khurana and Spender, 2012). Paradoxically, management education has become a regulated profession without having professionalised management practice itself (Spender, 2007).

Hence, business schools have come under pressure, risking their very legitimacy (Starkey and Tempest, 2009). Management education is considered to be removed from the human aspects of managing (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2013). Dominated by economic logic, it is criticised for prioritising shareholder value over requirements of other stakeholders (Pierson, 2010). Hence, some claim that business school graduates are unprepared for the intricacies of managerial work (Mintzberg, 2004; Khurana, 2007). These issues are mirrored in tangible critiques of MBA pedagogy and curriculum (Navarro, 2008). Its economic and rational-analytic methods are blamed for generating a pedagogy-practice gap (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Bennis and O’Toole, 2005). Recurring themes include curricular irrelevance (Moldoveanu and Martin, 2008), dubious ethics (Skapinker, 2010) and theory-oriented pedagogy (Muff, 2012).

1.2 The MBA as a Potential Platform for Developing Managerial Professionalism

Since its genesis at Tuck Business School in 1900, the MBA has been among the most durable and globalised efforts to develop skilled management professionals. Although the idea of putting management on a parity of esteem with medicine or law was slow to be accepted within academia, MBAs emerged as a response by universities to provide more effective management techniques. Today, over 100,000 MBA degrees are awarded each year in the US alone (Boyde, 2014). Hence, a question arises as to whether professionalising the MBA could improve managerial practice (Knowles and Hensher, 2005). Rubin and Dierdorff (2013), in particular, identified the MBA’s professional orientation as a focus for future research. An infographic summary of salient MBA statistical information is provided in Appendix I.

To plan, lead, organise and control professionally, suggest that managers should have [1] expertise [2] an ethical disposition and [3] a sense of purpose. Romme (2016) outlines four dimensions of managerial professionalism, namely: -

Professionalism = P x K x B x E	
P = Shared Sense of Purpose	K = Body of Knowledge
B = Actual Behaviour and Actions	E = Expectations from Stakeholders

1.3 Rationale for Literature Review

Yet, significant gaps exist between prototype statements on professionalism in management, (e.g. Romme et al., 2015), and the rich empirical data on professionalism in medicine, (e.g. Jakovljević and Ostojić, 2013). Some scholars (e.g. Nohria, 2012) suggest that the MBA's relevance and values would benefit from practices in professional education, such as field immersion. The objective guiding this review is to investigate how criticisms of MBAs could be addressed by embedding professionalism, thus, better promoting it in managerial practice. The review seeks to identify methods to develop professionalism in MBA students. What would constitute a set of ideals? Against what criteria could students be evaluated? How might curriculum and pedagogy be adapted? These are merely some of the questions in considering how MBAs could adapt practices in models of professional education. MBA educators may learn from archetype professions, however imperfect comparisons may be. These professions suggest that the essence of professionalisation is not only in its outcome but its journey.

1.4 Overview of Paper

The paper first leverages concepts from the sociological studies of professions, the nature of professional work and models of professional education. It continues with an examination of how management practice and learning has evolved. This provides a basis for analysing the current debate by management scholars on management as a profession. However, distinct from a sense of occupational identification exemplified by professions, the focus of the paper shifts to the more useful, although less defined, concept of professionalism. The literature identifies innovations in curriculum, pedagogy, student selection and role-modelling as a basis for more professionally oriented MBA programmes. However, absence of accepted guidelines for embedding managerial professionalism is problematic. The paper culminates in a conceptual framework for embedding professionalism in MBAs so that future research can generate empirical evidence that can inform how best to train students as professional managers. In this context, Khurana and Nohria's (2008) idea of a Certified Business Professional as a requirement for MBA graduates to practice, becomes more meaningful.

2. SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF PROFESSIONALISM

“I hold every man a debtor to his profession; from which as men of course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavour themselves, by way of amends, to be a help thereunto” (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933, p.284).

2.1 Etymology of the Professions

For a model of managerial professionalism to be credible, it must be informed historically by the work of professionals. Priests were the first to receive a professional education, albeit with little room for critical thinking. Punishment for opposing church dogmas provided the medieval context for a second profession, that of law, which emerged from the universities of Bologna in 1088 and Sorbonne in 1257. The early medical profession modelled itself on the guilds: it was conservative, evolving theory and practice slowly. In the age of enlightenment, medical students of the University of Göttingen, founded in 1737, were among the first to bypass theology. They focused on science, e.g. reading Hippocrates. The medical profession advanced considerably under scientific thinking (e.g. Pasteur et al., 1878). Social innovations followed the Napoleonic wars, including the creation of new professions. Björjman (2014) cites the examples of Von Humboldt (1793) and Von Clausewitz (1832) from this era who are still studied by their respective professions today. US business schools emerged in the 19th century as descendants of German schools. Harvard Business School was founded by Edwin Gay after completing his PhD. in Berlin (Heaton, 1968) and Wharton was influenced by Edmund James, a University of Hälle graduate (Sass, 1982). With the rise of corporations, scholars promoted a management profession to curb pursuit of self-interest (Tawney, 1957). Using attribution theory, Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) showed that attempts to distinguish professions from other occupations were arbitrary, hence, flawed (Table 1). With the expansion of knowledge, the list of professions has grown, requiring ever more specialised education and intensifying the debate on who has the right to call themselves a professional.

Table 1: Typical Attributes of Professions

Attribute	Description
<i>Expertise</i>	Expertise based on a body of knowledge, usually at an advanced level.
<i>Jurisdiction</i>	Regulated entry and outlawing of non-professional competitors.
<i>Meritocracy</i>	Career progression based on fair and open evaluations.
<i>Cohesion</i>	A corps-d’esprit that reflects ethical standards of conduct and practice.
<i>Legitimacy</i>	Sanctioning as a legitimate profession by state or international body.
<i>Calling</i>	Sense of service (beyond self-interest) to the profession and society.
<i>Autonomy</i>	Disdain for hierarchical micro-management or interference in judgment.

Source: Adapted from Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933)

2.2 From Profession to Professionalism

Scholars disagree on the attributes that define professions. Hughes (1958) argues that the extent to which professions and other occupations differ is a matter of interpretation. His ethnographic studies show how professional identity is formed and reproduced by shared educational backgrounds, experiences and engagement with professional bodies. Many scholars now consider professions as middle-class, knowledge-based service occupations, requiring high levels of education. Hence, research emphasis has shifted from attempting to define what is meant by a profession, to professionalism (Larson, 1977).

Less concerned with drawing hard demarcations between professions and other occupations (Abbott, 2001), professionalism encompasses the general nature of professions and is considered a socially stabilising value system worth promoting at work (Parsons, 1939). Friedson (2001) argues for professionalism as a principle of service occupations in which control should rest with practitioners. It implies a high level of mutual trust in societies with advanced division of labour (Marshall, 1939). Professional occupations are rewarded with autonomy and privileged status in exchange for ethical use of their expertise.

Friedson's functionalist view of professionalism as a form of decentralised occupational control is rose-tinted, promoting collegiality, altruism and practitioner pride. Structuralist interpretations dismiss it as an ideology in pursuit of self-interest. So, on one hand, professionals are praised for social conscience and ethical disposition (Dingwall, 2016), on the other, critics view professionalism as a rhetorical strategy to legitimise power (Larkin, 1983). A more balanced narrative depicts it as a metaphor for occupational improvement (Figure 1). Exuding appeal as something to which to aspire (Fournier, 1999), becoming a professional is seen as a way to improve occupational status.

Figure 1: Professionalism as a Metaphor for Occupational Improvement



It is also appealing at the micro-level as a form of inner-directed control, alleviating a need for close managerial supervision. Professionalism, as outlined in the early Dialogues of Plato, implies that professionals acquire expertise for their trade, *technein*, through education and training, and are well versed in their moral, *arête*, judgement (Jowett, 1937).

Source: Adapted from Evetts (2003)

2.3 Abbott's Systems Perspective of Professionalism

The sociology of the professions is well theorised and supported by extensive empirical research. Abbott (1988) distilled this work into a theory that captures the general nature of professionalism rather than characteristics of specific professions.

Jurisdiction and Professional Identity:

Professions acquire exclusive practice domains (Friedson, 1994) through specialised knowledge in which they lay claim to relevant societal problems. A profession's identity relates to its ability to carve-out a jurisdiction. Abbott (1988) considers jurisdiction to be in flux as professions jostle for specific tasks to augment their prestige and influence.

The Nature of Professional Work:

Abbott (1988) defines professional work using diagnosis, treatment and inference. Diagnosis affords professionals a right to categorise important problems. Treatment requires specialised knowledge to solve problems. Inference applies abstract reasoning to complex problems that do not fit into the more prescriptive diagnostic or treatment categories.

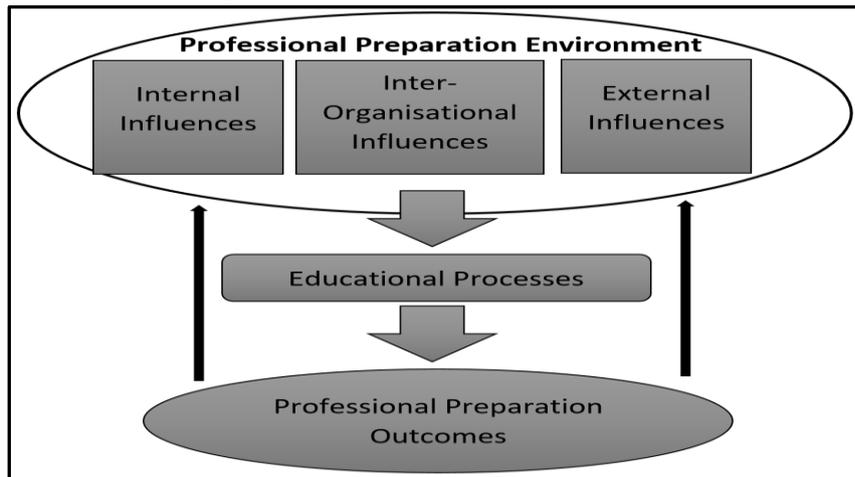
Body of Knowledge and Academic Component of a Profession:

The academic component plays a role in jurisdictional claims. Research generates new knowledge that enables inference. Abbott (1988) suggests that research should relate to professional practice. If too concrete, then knowledge commoditises, eroding professional status. If too abstract, then research problems are considered irrelevant to practice. Abbott's (1988) conceptualisations of diagnosis, treatment and inference are leveraged in the design of practice-based pedagogy (Bisman, 2001) and for optimising curricula in occupations chasing professional status (Purinton, 2010). Models of professional education help to foster identity, define the boundaries of professional work and establish standards of conduct, the very areas for which business schools are criticised (Khurana and Spender, 2012).

2.4 Models of Professional Education

Stark et al.'s (1986) framework suggests that education used to prepare students for professional entry is influenced by internal, intra-organisational and external forces, which, together, shape a professional preparation environment. This environment affects the educational processes used to achieve professional preparation outcomes. Aimed at enhancing higher education for entry into professions, such as accounting (Thomas, 2012) and nursing (Ralph, 2008), the value of Stark et al.'s (1986) framework is in the factors it captures in transitioning to a model of professional education (Figure. 2).

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for Professional Education



Source: Adapted from Stark et al. (1986)

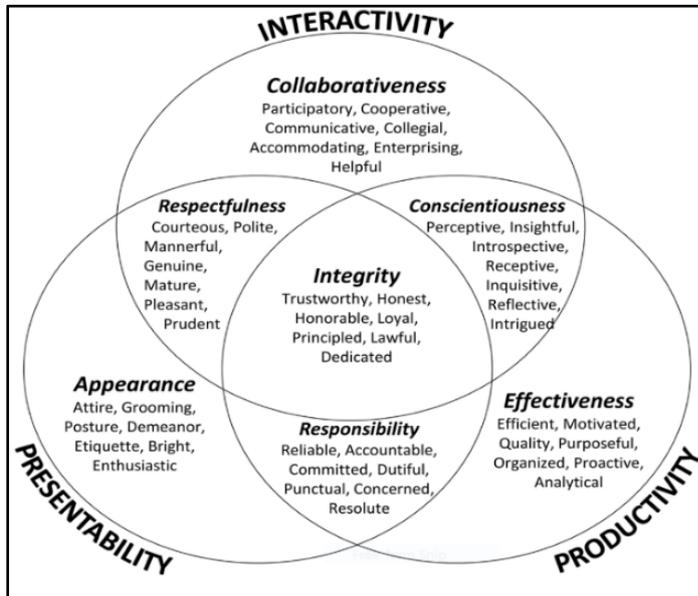
Internal influences lie within academic programme and are categorised into staffing, structure, curricular tensions and professional development. Intra-organisational influences are derived from organisational contexts. External influences are categorised into societal and professional community influences. Educational processes refer to strategies used to achieve professional preparation outcomes. With many influences, processes and outcomes for MBA education (Appendix II), disentangling these would constitute an important research contribution (Ball, 2006). Some factors have been studied in isolation. For example, Rubin and Dierdorff (2009) address technical competence. Evidence based (Charlier et al., 2011) and design thinking approaches (Glen et al., 2015) deal with integrative competencies. Jarvis (2009). Pouryousefi (2013) focuses on ethical dimensions whereas Bedwell et al. (2014) explore interpersonal competencies. Yet, there has been little holistic investigation of what constitutes professional competencies, values or behaviours for management, as a synthesis of these factors, both in terms of professional preparation outcomes or education processes used to achieve them. In contrast, this issue receives considerable research attention in the medical (Swick, 2000; Cruess and Cruess, 2006; O'Sullivan et al., 2012) and legal (Hamilton, 2008) fields.

2.5 Professionalism from the Perspective of Employers

Although professionalism is difficult to define, that does not justify a neglect of pedagogical interest in the matter. With business school missions focusing on leadership and potential for managerial success, developing professionalism seems integral to their *raison-d'être*. Career success depends on how “a new member learns and adapts to the value system, the norms and the required behaviour patterns” (Schein, 1968, p.220). In this context, Clark et al. (2014) suggest that professionalism qualities are just as important as technical training. Through an

iterative ranking process of words drawn from literatures on leadership, teamwork, recruiting and human resource management, Clark et al. (2012) constructed a concept of professionalism from the perspective of employers and HR professionals (Figure. 3).

Figure 3: Employer Perspectives of Professionalism



Source: Adapted from Clark et al. (2012)

Figure 3 represents how professionalism manifests itself in three primary behavioural modes: interactivity, presentability and productivity. It suggests that behavioural issues cannot be ignored and that, while professional bodies may be the standard bearer for a deeper set of issues, institutions within the profession, such as employers, may determine behavioural norms.

2.6 Discussion of Professionalism Concepts

Romme's (2016) equation, i.e. Professionalism = P x K x B x E is focused on management scholarship, not management education. It is similar to Despotidou and Prastacos' (2012) conceptualisation except that it deconstructs sense of purpose into actual behaviour and stakeholder expectations. Underpinned by ancient philosophy, Despotidou and Prastacos (2012) explore professionalism from the perspective of organisations. However, both models have their origins in sociological conceptions. Believing that a "a firm definition of professions is both unnecessary and dangerous" (Abbott, 1988, p.318), research shifted to their general essence, i.e. professionalism. Functionalist and structuralist perspectives highlight the dichotomy between self-interest and altruism. Evetts (2003) more balanced conceptualisation replicates previous articulations of a profession's characteristics. Yet, the context in which it is used, i.e. as a narrative for occupational improvement, serves as a useful rhetorical device for improving managerial practice. Abbott's (1988) systems perspective outlines three interrelated

components: jurisdiction and professional identity; the nature of professional work; and professional learning, which Somers et al. (2014) link to managerial learning. Stark et al.'s (1986) framework for professional education provides a useful metaphor for how to transition the MBA to a professional qualification. However, caution is warranted. There are differences between the MBA and programmes to which the framework has been applied (Stark et al., 1989). The MBA's short duration affords little time for developmental progression. Furthermore, many MBA students already have an established professional identity. The MBA is also a post-experience qualification whereas as many professional qualifications tend to be pre-experience. Clark et al.'s (2014) work on developing professionalism in undergraduate business students provides insight into employer perspectives of professionalism. They articulate behavioural qualities synonymous with career progression. A comprehensive construct of managerial professionalism must, therefore, take account of these qualities.

2.7 Relating the Theory of Professions to Management Practice and Learning

Professional schools tend to coalesce around mutually supporting theoretical and practical challenges. MBAs are criticised for not articulating a clear identity or proper conduct for their graduates (Khurana and Spender, 2013). Fragile jurisdictional claims cause confusion about the type of societal issues that managers are trained to resolve (Datar et al., 2010). Somers et al. (2014) use Abbott's (1988) concepts of diagnosis, treatment and inference, to identify competencies, which business schools should develop to uphold jurisdictional claims. In calling for an emphasis on practice-based pedagogy to "build skills in colligation and classification so that graduates can build the necessary diagnosis–treatment linkages", they present a jurisdiction based on managing the different forms of capital. Their work provides a basis for professional identity, in terms of what managers are exclusively qualified to do, and for standards of ethical practice required to balance competing stakeholder needs.

2.8 Professionalism as a Managerial Tool

Professionalism is described as an amalgam of knowledge, skills, integrity and altruism in those who trustfully provide services to others (Beaton, 2010). A metaphor of a lawyer or doctor as gentlemen who can be trusted on the ethical use of their specialist competencies, fact or fiction, conveys a powerful incentive that contributes to the appeal of professionalism (Evetts, 2014). Managers may be more successful if they exhibit professional behaviours themselves. The next section outlines a narrative of how management itself started out as a professionalisation project (Khurana, 2007) but dwindled to a point where it seems largely abandoned by its scholars (Trank and Rynes, 2003) and educators (Welsh and Dehler, 2007).

3. THE EVOLUTION OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICE AND LEARNING

“But surely if management had not emerged as a systematic discipline, we could not have organized what is now a social reality in every developed country” (Drucker, 1985, p. 18).

3.1 Introduction

Drucker (1985) links economic growth in the last century to a “management profession”. This raises an important question: how best to develop management in this century? This section dedicates analysis to understanding management’s evolution. Historical analysis assumes that particulars, rather than generalisations, are significant. It seeks to explain our behaviour without forgoing complexities in human experience. It, thus, helps to explain management’s journey from Oxford in the 1300’s (Richardson, 1940) to its currently perceived intellectual and moral cul-de-sac (Khurana and Spender, 2012) and to identify those factors that influence management education’s current policies, curricula and pedagogies.

3.2 Historical Phases of Management Development

The embedding of rational thought in administration began with the first purpose-built business school in Portugal in 1759 (Rodrigues et al., 2004). It surfaced in the 18th century German Cameralist schools. Cameralism, as a science of administration, pursued a less Machiavellian approach to state affairs (VonJusti, 1755). It focused on the wealth of nations and educated managers for the emerging private sector. New business schools forged strong ties with Cameralist traditions (Wilson, 1887). Yet, Cameralism hid the vagaries of revenue-collection in a guise of rationality (Wakefield, 2009). It highlighted the politics of methodological choice between praxis and the Wissenschaft tradition (Locke, 1996) and rooted a rigour-relevance gap into management’s very foundation. Understanding contemporary management requires, therefore, that we appreciate its Cameralist parentage (Lindenfeld, 2008).

Khurana’s (2007) emic analysis of contemporary management identifies three phases, each with their own paradigm. The first refers to the 19th century when education sought to train managers for ‘social duty’. Harvard and Wharton became instruments to transform management into a profession with self-regulated modes of selection, education, certification, and appointment. From the onset, professionalism was promoted. Lowell (1923, p.131) implored business schools to make students part of “a powerful and honourable profession”. Management texts evoked social responsibility and moral rectitude (Jones, 1914). Linking management with university education stemmed from a belief that training could reinforce altruism, helping to ensure that monopolistic corporations were managed in society’s interests.

By the twentieth century, a second era of managerial capitalism had emerged with France's Écoles de Commerce, Germany's handelshochschulen, the UK's commerce schools and US' business schools adopting curricula for book-keeping and operations management (Thomas et al., 2013). Engineering methods provided new quantitative measures and trained managers to view firms as efficiency-seeking systems requiring scientific management (Nelson, 1980).

World War II profiled behavioural analysis and quantitative methods in decision-making. Its aftermath led to a period of investor capitalism. A belief that the social sciences, not professional practice, could improve management, gained traction. Economists espoused rational behaviour for corporate performance (Chandler, 1977). As firms grew, so did demand for MBA graduates who could model more diversified firms with measures such as market share and return on investment (Harris, 1984). To maximise returns for free-floating investors, asset-stripping became accepted so long as it made "financial" sense. Whilst, on one hand, this period became associated with short-termism (Porter, 1992), on the other, it widened firm ownership to a middle-class and spawned a new financial services industry (Spender, 2012).

Growth in financial services led to a further period of casino capitalism, which relied on mathematical models to create synthetic financial products (Patterson, 2010). With investors no longer constrained to trading real assets (Sorkin, 2009), these products became detached from wealth-creation activities and the financial sector, a major employer of MBA graduates, divorced itself from social duty. Although business faculty did not have the mathematical skills to develop these products, their ideological theories helped to legitimise them (Cooper, 2008).

3.3 The Impact of Historical Influences on Management Education

The Ford and Carnegie reforms are considered the genesis of many problems responsible for business schools' current woes. Since then, three interrelated periods of discontinuity have led to significant changes to the *raison-d'être* of the Business School (Alajoutsijärvi et al., 2014).

The first reform emphasised discipline-based scholarship. Scientific publications drove career progression. Insisting on PhD. qualified educators, practitioners were replaced by a classroom-bound generation. However, scientific approaches offered poor insight into complex social factors that might have unearthed the problems that managers face (Shoemaker, 2008). A second reform emphasised quantitative methods. A shift towards a belief that phenomena can be explained through theorising, rigorously constructed and empirically validated, coincided with market deregulation and erosion of state intervention. Embedded was an unchallenged assumption that managers must be aligned to shareholder interest. Engwall and Zamagni (1998)

identify a further crisis driven by corporatisation of business schools. This led to rankings and a value proposition of career enhancement without due regard for learning, which Podolny (2009) believes, prevents business schools from returning to their professional mission.

3.4 Synthesis and Design as the Basis of Simon's Science-Based Professionalism

Today, qualitative skills remain subservient in management scholarship, creating a chasm between its educational products and professional skill (Austen, 2010). Simon (1967) articulates what "balance" means, stipulating design as the key feature that differentiates the professions from the sciences. Yet, his assumption of rationality is problematic (Crowther-Heyck, 2006). In analysing qualitative capabilities of professionals and finding that managers rely on reflection-in-action, Schön (1987) extends Simon's (1967) work by connecting rational-analytic and self-reflective approaches. Rousseau (2012) identified design science (Van Aken, 2005), evidence-based management (Barends, 2015) as mode 2 (Starkey and Madan, 2001) interventions that steer business schools towards their professional mission. There is an emerging view of professions as knowledge-based occupations built on scientific principles (Siegrist, 2002; Brante, 2011). A question remains as to whether management can evolve as a science-based profession, informed by its scholarship.

3.5 The Need for Practice Based Pedagogy

Criticism of management pedagogy has led to the emergence of practice-based studies, driven by field immersion (Raelin, 2007). Although similar, professional education is better grounded in scientific theory. It emphasises formal socialisation, professional identity and ethical guidelines for practice. By contrast, practice-based studies have a postmodern epistemology with emphasis on self-reflection, field immersion and context-dependent knowledge (Gheradi, 2000). Practice-based pedagogy is more experiential in nature. Given the complex nature of managerial work, Somers et al. (2014) points to the complementary nature of both approaches.

3.6 Summary

Bennis and O'Toole (2005) suggest that business schools have lost their way. They may, in fact, have never found one other than to respond to market needs. Without an anchoring theory of management, or even robust heuristics that could substitute for one, its education may be rudderless. Khurana (2007) provides a historical narrative for the evolution of management. Whether there really was a professionalisation project, as Khurana suggested, is questionable but it serves as a rhetorical device for its birth, misappropriation and decline. The next section analyses contemporary arguments by management scholars on management as a profession.

4. CONTEMPORARY DEBATE ON MANAGEMENT AS A PROFESSION

“The physician as such studies only the patient's interest, not his own.” Plato, The Republic.

4.1 Introduction

Management scholars have debated management using the theoretical trappings of professions. Brandeis (1914) argued that management's professionalisation was a work-in-progress. Lowell (1923) attributed Harvard Business School's establishment to management's emergence as a profession. The debate on whether or not discourse on professionalism was appropriate continued (Bowen, 1955; Donham, 1927; Andrews, 1969) with management still being considered only an emerging profession up to the 1970's (Barber, 1963; Kanawaty, 1977).

4.2 Assessing the Level of Professionalism in Management

An assumption on both sides of the debate is that management has or lacks traits of a profession. In calling for 'higher aims', Khurana (2007) draws on specific attributes of professions without explaining why he chooses some over others. Using either Romme's (2016) or Despotidou and Prastacos' (2012) frameworks, it is possible to articulate that management scholars consider the level of professionalism in management practice to be highly contested.

4.2.1 Body of Knowledge

As Pfeffer (2011, p. 38) implies, “it took more than higher aims to move medicine beyond quackery”. Barker (2010) argues that no broad consensus exists on management's knowledge base. The MBA is not a prerequisite to management (Khurana and Nohria, 2008) and it is impossible to regulate entry (Iñiguez, 2010). A related issue is the gap between theory and practice. With few attempts to anchor management in a theory of the firm, its neoclassical assumptions fail to unearth complex managerial issues (Ferraro et al., 2005). Management is assumed to be data informed direction and control to optimise firm performance, i.e. a “generic rational activity... without reference to contexts” (Spender, 2013, p.4). Criticism extends to MBA programmes, which, Mintzberg (2004) argues, reduce management to decision-making and decision-making to analysis, sequestering knowledge into functional silos.

4.2.2 Professional Ethics

Khurana's (2007) calls for MBAs to be accountable to oaths or to ethical codes of conduct. Two decades previously, management's ethical-moral dimensions climbed high on academic agendas (Porter and McKibben, 1988). Three strands of scholarship on business ethics now exist. There are those interested in the teaching of ethics, (e.g. Clegg and Rhodes, 2006). There

are those who cite managerialism as an ideology (e.g. Ghoshal, 2005). Finally, there are those with a general interest in improving management (e.g. Ivory et al., 2006).

Citing codes for law and medicine, Durkheim (2013) questions why not one for industry? Along the lines of the Hippocratic oath (Miles, 2004), Emiliani (2000) and Khurana and Nohria (2008) offer prototype statements for serving public interest by enhancing value created by firms. To deal with moral ambiguity, oaths and codes of conduct typically have three roles: aspirational, educational and regulatory (Frankel, 1989). With current prototype statements largely aspirational, enforcement is highly challenging. Professional bodies investigate complaints and administer sanctions. Without one for management, society may suspect that managers enjoy professional privileges whilst evading professional responsibilities (Khurana et al., 2004). One challenge in writing a code, suggest Khurana and Nohria (2008), is reaching consensus on a common sense of purpose and responsibility.

4.2.3 Shared Sense of Purpose and Responsibility

Professions tend to have a shared sense of commitment to a broader good (Pelegriano, 2002). For management, there are two challenges: its highly fragmented scholarship and its diversity of practice. Addressing the fragmented nature of its scholarship, a few scholars, (e.g. Aguinis et al., 2014) suggest a multi-paradigmatic approach. However, Rolin (2011) suggests such an approach requires scholars to forge some common ground. Diversity of practice also erodes a common sense of purpose (Pritchard, 1997). Stakeholder theories, (e.g. Donaldson and Preston, 1995), imply society and business are interwoven. Hooker (1996) summarises managers' responsibilities as: to generate wealth; to create employment; and to add to social stability. So, when managers serve shareholders by generating profit, not maximising it, they contribute to business sustainability, creating wealth and employment, thereby, providing a public good.

Definitional uncertainty (Cogan, 1955) obscures the debate on management as a profession. In citing functionalist perspectives, proponents of management as a profession assume rose-tinted views. The problematic aspects of professions, such as monopolistic tendencies, tend to be overlooked. Khurana (2007, p.69), for example, cites Larson, Friedson and Parsons in a relatively uncritical analysis of professionals. Given the highly lucrative nature of management education, attempts by management scholars and educators to promote professionalism may well be considered with caution. Flexner, (1930, p.166), for example, claimed that Harvard Business School had failed miserably in its professionalisation of management as it "raised neither ethical nor social questions" in the education of its students.

4.3 Alternative Conceptions of Management as a Profession

Pouryousefi (2013) implies that managers, as professionals, rely on an ethical disposition so they can use trust-creating mechanisms to respond efficiently to principal-agent market information asymmetries. The merits of this logic lie in its balance between altruism and self-interest. Managers can claim to act in society's interests when guided by professional norms, not as altruistic saints. Spender (2007) questions whether professionalism is the right discourse for improving management. Whilst rationality captures one dimension, art captures another. Today's entrepreneurial culture implies that we combine analytic reasoning with more creative skillsets (Martin, 2009). This begs the question if art is a profession. Spender (2007, p.40) answers rhetorically "yes", implying that a profession is a "community's self-consciousness of constraints in which its imagination operates". Barends (2015) outlines similarities between medicine and management. He demonstrates that medical practice is also far from uniform and that, due to demand for well-trained managers, recruitment emphasises education credentials. Differences between the two, he suggests, lies in the rigour-relevance gap, which he blames on lack of an evidence-based culture. Managers use only a small proportion of behavioural science pertinent to organisational practice (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006). Finally, leveraging Aristotle's concepts of praxis, technein and phronesis, both Squires (2001) and Despotidou and Prastacos (2012) outline a philosophical basis for a management profession. Squires (2001) posits that, while management is not a particularly cohesive profession, it displays characteristics of one.

4.4 Summary

The literature on management as a profession reveals that scholars tend to ignore previous problematising on the definition of professions. There is also a tendency to dichotomise self-interest and altruistic orientations. Using a normative model of professionalism, Pouryousefi (2013) provides a more nuanced analysis, suggesting that managers are professionals given that an underlying ethic is required to improve efficiency in market transactions. Crises linked to management failures occur occasionally as a distortion of professionalism. Yet, it may also be argued that managers have been responsible for remarkable achievements. Perhaps, managers are trusted to occupy their positions despite information asymmetry that renders them difficult to evaluate. However, it remains inconclusive as to whether management should properly be understood as a professional role. Ferlie et al. (2010) argue for a 'public interest' model of business schools, rebranding them as management schools with a focus on identity, socialisation, self-regulation and ethics. The next section explores how professionalism could address criticisms of MBAs using Despotidou and Prastacos' (2012) framework.

5. DEVELOPING MANAGERIAL PROFESSIONALISM ON THE MBA

“The MBA degree is not a magic wand that transforms inexperienced and immature undergraduates into licensed managers” (Mintzberg, 2004, p.20).

5.1 Background to MBA Programmes

In 1900, Tuck Business School developed the first graduate studies in management. Harvard Business School, founded in 1908, offered the first MBA, aimed at developing graduates skilled in general management in response to demand from corporates for a more scientific approach. Most students enrolled straight after their undergraduate studies. It was not until the 1940's that Chicago Booth launched the first Executive MBA, which focused on providing working professionals, often with non-business qualifications, with skills for management.

By the 1950's, MBAs emerged as an accepted form of management education in countries outside the US, e.g. at the University of Western Ontario, the University of Karachi and INSEAD. Manchester and London Business Schools launched MBAs in the 1960's (Franks, 1963), prior to which British firms were sceptical of management education and universities refused to recognise it as an academic discipline. The first MBA in Ireland was launched in 1964 at University College Dublin, with over 200 applicants for 15 places (McGuire, 2009). The Ford and Carnegie reforms suggested that MBAs resembled vocational training and sought to make them more analytical and research based. The response was to increase admissions standards and place greater emphasis on theory, resulting in a shift from corporate-driven to faculty-driven perspectives. This became the genesis of the classic two-year MBA in US with curriculum organised around disciplinary lines, such as Accounting, Finance, Economics, Operations Management and Corporate Strategy as the capstone course.

The 1970's Carnegie reforms sought to rebalance the emphasis away from quantitative courses (Wheeler, 1988). Offerings in entrepreneurship, teamwork, leadership and organisational behaviour were introduced. Bok's (1978) analysis of Harvard's MBA precipitated the inclusion of business ethics, now mandated by the main accrediting bodies. Porter and McKibben (1988) highlighted concerns related to collaboration between businesses and faculty, to the relevance of research and to soft-skills and teamwork. It advocated for interdisciplinary research and more integrated curricula. Since then, two-year MBAs have gradually given way to more intensive 12-month programmes with emphasis on integration (Kimbell, 2011; Kolko, 2015). The number of graduates and their salaries have both risen steadily with the advent of rankings (Wedlin, 2006) as has employer demand, particularly in the financial and consulting sectors.

MBA's tend to follow a standardised curriculum (Navarro, 2008), a pedagogical approach based on case studies (Jain, 2005) and an underlying economic ideology (Ferraro et al., 2005). Accreditation and rankings have become important to attracting students. There are less than 100 schools worldwide triply accredited by the UK-based Association of MBAs (AMBA), the US-based Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the European Foundation for Management Development (EQUIS). There remains a strong emphasis on quantitative courses (Navarro, 2008) and specialist MBAs have emerged as alternatives to traditional MSc programmes. Advances in technology have facilitated online delivery, such as the MBA offered by the Open University, and have, more recently, led to the emergence of new courses in big-data and analytics. Spender (2012) cites Fisher and Kiang (2007), Montgomery and Ramus (2011) and Hsu et al., (2009) as examples of the benefits of MBA qualifications to students. Most students report their MBA experience as a positive force in their professional development (Lundstrom, 2011). Baruch and Peiperl (2000) corroborated the MBA's value proposition of career and salary enhancement.

Two types of MBAs now dominate the market. Full-time MBAs tend to attract a younger cohort with less experience than the intakes into part-time executive MBAs. Very few business schools have deviated from this template. Cambridge developed a 4-year MBA, during which teaching often took place at the workplace, but eventually succumbed to market forces, amending it a 20-month Executive MBA. Henry Mintzberg developed the IMPM (www.impm.org) to address the pedagogical and curricular criticisms levelled at MBAs but restricted intake to very experienced executives. Today, the MBA is among the few truly globalised graduate management education programmes. It has become the de facto credential for many executive roles with students coming from very diverse backgrounds. Implicit in the recruitment of graduates is a belief in their potential to develop into successful managers.

5.2 Critique of MBA Programmes

However, critics suggest that not enough has changed in MBA education since Leavitt's (1989) indictment. Periodicals query the MBA's value against its own mantra of career progression (e.g. Dundon, 2014) as mid-ranked MBAs struggle to recover from the financial crisis (Economist, 2011). Its fit with an entrepreneurial society is questioned (Maynard, 2015). Such criticism identifies multiple contentions – curriculum irrelevance (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2009), apathy to social issues (Antonacopoulou, 2010), dubious ethics (Knights, 2008), its quantitative orientation (Spender, 2012) and its market ideology (Navarro, 2008). A cluster of MBA related

scholarship exists in the Academy of Management Education and Learning (AMLE). This section synopsis critique of MBA education through the lens of professionalism.

5.2.1 Criticism of the MBA's Expertise and Jurisdiction

A recurring theme is misalignment of graduate skills with employer requirements (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2009; Rynes and Bartunek, 2013). MBAR (2012) and Costigan and Brink (2015) indicate that this problem may be abating. Courses facilitating managerial practice through corporate (Inamdar and Roldan, 2013) or entrepreneurial (Erickson and Laing, 2016) experience are emerging with renewed interests in soft skills (Bedwell et al., 2014). MBAs also suffer from a theory-practice gap (Kieser and Leiner, 2009). Whilst AMLE focuses on the teaching-practice gap, evidence-based management (Charlier et al., 2011), research synthesis (Rousseau et al., 2008) and systematic reviews (Geyskens et al., 2009) focus on the research-teaching gap. Burke and Rau (2010) explore ways to reduce this gap through research integration and for grounding management texts in research.

Addressing integrative competence, prominent MBAs have followed Rotman's lead in embedding design thinking (Dunne, 2008), which uses abductive logic to solve wicked problems (Buchanan, 1992). Stanford revamped its MBA along interdisciplinary lines (Datar et al., 2010). Haas School of Business focuses on innovation with students integrating diverse ways of thinking (Beckman and Barry, 2007). Yale School of Management swapped traditional curricula for organisational stakeholder perspectives (Wallace, 2010). This direction reflects a fundamental belief that managers rely less on a systematic body of knowledge and more on integrative thinking (Leavett, 1989). Such expert knowledge would require a theory that explains why firms exist (Coase, 1937). From a 'management' perspective, Spender (2015) assumes that firm value derives from managerial imagination in response to uncertainty (Knight, 1921) and bounded rationality (Foss, 2002) and posits that professional judgment and rhetorical skills complement rational decision-making.

5.2.2 Criticism of the Ethical and Moral Dimensions of the MBA

Mirtoff (2004) claimed that ethics was a subversive force in MBA education. Despite accreditation criteria (AACSB, 2004; EFMD, 2014), questions remain as to whether MBAs educate students to behave responsibly. With AMBA (2009) reporting that students rated ethics as unimportant, there is concern that MBA epistemology remains ethically flawed (Hühn, 2014). The MBA's economic logic leaves little space for alternative perspectives and espouses causal modes of explanation that ignore ethical implications (Henisz, 2011). Crane (2004)

claims that MBAs reduce students' ethicality and Giacalone (2004) implies that MBA curricula fail to inculcate values worthy of professional conduct. A particularly virulent critique suggests that the MBA's emphasis on neoclassical micro-economics and quantitative analysis de-socialises students, turning them into greedy and power-seeking egotists (Ghoshal and Moran, 1996; Ferraro et al., 2005; Iida and Oda, 2011). However, this critique does not seem to be very helpful in considering the challenges of management education in our increasingly quantified society. Yet, academics are rebelling: "the stereotype business school teaching people how to be bastards and make money" is no longer apt (Parker, 2015, p.42). Some MBAs are rebranding, claiming to be "critical" (University of Leicester, 2017). Aspen's (2011) MBA ranking on ethical education found that the proportion of those schools surveyed, which oblige their students to pass an ethics course, increased from 34% in 2001 to 79% in 2011. With more curricular revisions including ethics (Weber et al., 2013), research focus has shifted to their effectiveness (Doh and Tashman, 2014).

5.2.3 Criticism of the MBA in instilling a Sense of Purpose and Responsibility

Anderson and Escher (2010) outline professional norms for Harvard MBA graduates based on Rawls (1971) commutative, distributive and contributive justice. Parkan (2008) highlights how oaths form a rite-de-passage in which initiation focuses on purpose and responsibility. deBruin (2016) argues that they foster professionalism under conditions of publicity, ceremony and function. The risk is that cosmetic promises generate a false sense of moral inoculation. Selection and socialisation also play a role (Schein, 1968). Values and identities may be formed long before an oath is taken. Values and careers are connected (Okenado and Samuelson, 2015). With more MBA graduates choosing finance than not-for-profit sectors, it is unclear how MBAs affect value change (Arieli et al., 2016). Romme et al.'s (2015) statement of purpose is consistent with the MBA Oath. They advocate that management should be a profession in which: practicing and knowing co-constitute each other; there is shared interest in outcomes; and pluralism is articulated through dialogical encounter. Datar et al. (2010) invoke a discourse of knowing, doing and being, the 'being' representing values that form managers' professional identities.

Hence, solutions to address MBA criticisms fit with professionalism concepts. As the MBA's knowledge domain moves towards integration, its core syllabi, i.e. the nature of firms and how they are managed, may have a theory (Spender, 2015) that could anchor its knowledge base.

Rasche’s (2013) analysis of *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* data, conveys a mixed message. More ethics courses exist but ethics appears not to be well embedded across the curriculum.

5.3 Can professionalism address criticisms made against MBAs?

Although liberal arts degrees face criticism in favour of professional qualifications, backing for a model of professional MBA education is far from pervasive. Despite interest in aspects of professional education, some question if it is suitable for educating managers (Raelin, 2007; Chia and Holt, 2008). Whilst the professional model partially addresses the pedagogy-practice gap, Chia and Holt (2008) claim that it does not go far enough. Somers et al. (2014) suggest that this could be overcome by adapting practice-based pedagogy to managerial work.

Solving practice-based problems requires students to behave ethically. Professional education emphasises codes of conduct, which communicate expected professional norms. Jarvis (2009), for example, calls for students to be morally accountable for designing solutions to field problems. Design, as a key activity of professional schools, devises “courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones” (Simon, 1996, p. 130). Romme’s (2016) model deals with management’s fragmented knowledge base. Although not a panacea, professional education can, therefore, address criticisms of MBAs by bridging theory and practice, setting ethical standards and conveying expected norms (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Using Professional Education to Address Criticisms of the MBA

MBA Critique	Skills Misalignment to Managerial Practice	Questionable Moral and Ethical Orientation	Lack of Integration
Potential Solutions in Professional Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge Foundation ▪ Integrating Theory and Practice ▪ Practice Based Pedagogy ▪ Diagnosis, Treatment & Inference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ethical Guidelines ▪ Jurisdiction: Balancing Stakeholder Needs ▪ Reflection-in-Action ▪ Role in Society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Synthesis and Design ▪ Code of Conduct: Norms, Values and Behaviours ▪ Socialisation ▪ Research-Teaching Integration

5.4 Approaches to Developing Student Professionalism

In medical education, five processes for developing student professionalism have been identified: student selection and socialisation, curriculum design, pedagogy, role modelling and assessment (Passi et al., 2010). Although examples of good practice exist in MBA education, an integrated approach along similar lines has not yet been emulated.

Socialisation is synonymous with formation of professional identity (Weidman et al., 2001). Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) find that business schools are adapting to a broader mandate to teach professional skills and to provide a holding environment for the professional identity of managers. MBA student selection focuses on the GMAT. However, the GMAT's validity is changing. Design requires students disposed towards divergent thinking (Dunne and Martin, 2006). Shepherd et al. (2008) finds that the GMAT prejudices entrepreneurial applicants. In contrast, the risk of medical graduates behaving unprofessionally is reduced by screening applicants (Knights and Kennedy, 2007). Rubin and Dierdorff (2011) argue that curriculum relevance produces well-rounded professionals. Hence, curriculum design, including that of informal and hidden curriculum, seems key to professionalising the MBA. Entrepreneurship (Edelman et al., 2008), cultural awareness (Bell et al., 2009), ethics (Wright and Bennett, 2011) and sustainability (Rusinko, 2010) exemplify curricular innovations that help to prepare students for professional practice. Design oriented curricula (Moldoveanu and Martin, 2008) align with Simon's (1996) conception of professionalism. However, no accepted theoretical model or practical guidelines exist for embedding professionalism into MBA curriculum.

A core focus of the Academy of Management Learning and Education (AMLE) is on teaching and learning. It suggests that most MBA educators subscribe to a Deweyian philosophy of education, encouraging students to think creatively. Some scholars encourage experiential (e.g. Nohria, 2012) and reflective (e.g. Johnson and Brown, 2015) practices. Examples of problem-based learning (Sharp, 2003), service learning (Coffey and Wang, 2006), critical pedagogy (Currie, 2003) and case-studies for teaching professional judgment (Musson and Cohen, 1999) underscore the importance of pedagogy that creates space for MBA students to voice how their experiences shape their professional lives. Business schools place significance on their alumni with their most successful lauded as role models. Alumni networks play a role in career progression (Hall, 2011) and professional identity formation (Dobrow and Higgins, 2005). Yet, Roth (2014) suggests that role-modelling is creating arrogant MBA graduates who are trained to exercise strong opinions and emulate reductionist behaviour. One opportunity for role-modelling is through teaching teams (Helms et al., 2005). The challenge is in agreeing a set of desirable role-model characteristics. Three characteristics in medicine seem transferrable: technical competence, teaching skills and personal qualities (Crues et al., 2008).

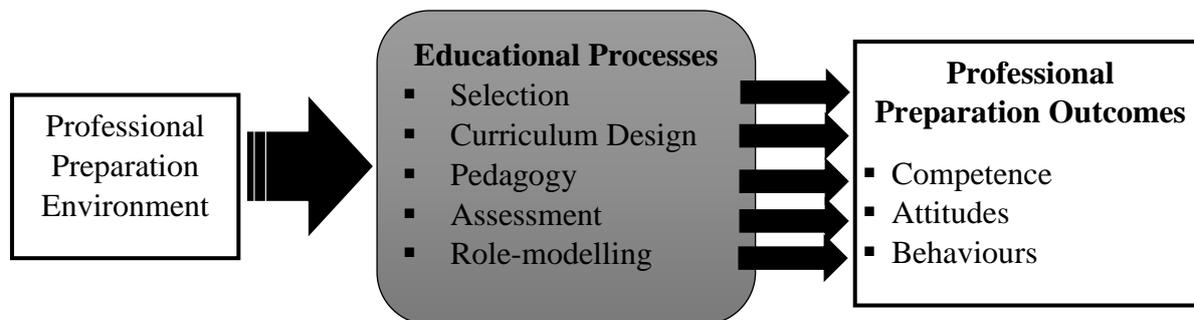
Professionalism should be assessed for students to consider it an important (Stern, 2006) part of their learning. For MBA programmes, the difficulty is that there are no agreed standards for the assessment of professionalism. In contrast, assessing medical professionalism is more

evolved (Lynch et al., 2004). Clinical training provides an environment to grade students' professionalism, either as a single construct or as a multi-dimensional profile (Hamilton, 2005). Arnold (2002) suggested that qualitative assessment methods should complement quantitative approaches and that different assessment environments should be researched.

5.5 Operationalising Professionalism on the MBA

Professionalism remains pivotal to MBA accreditation. Yet, as Romme (2016) noted, there is a substantial difference between what is said to accreditation panels and what actually happens once these panel members depart campus. Section 5.4 suggests that it is possible to develop professionalism using a variety of appropriate educational processes, such as selection and socialisation, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and role-modelling (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Typical Processes in Professional Education



However, if MBA programmes are to be professionalised, then valid and reliable means of measuring professionalism are needed. The challenge with this is that professionalism is a nebulous concept, subjectively constructed with varying interpretations. Even within the education of the more established professions, such as medicine and law, definition and measurement remain problematic. Oaths offer a possible basis from which to discern useful metrics (Appendix III). Oaths usually include statements on compliance with professional standards, beneficiaries to whom signatories serve and commitment to fulfil certain obligations and responsibilities. Yet, a difficulty with relying on oaths is that their normative definitions tend to over-emphasise professional identity as a set of positive attributes. They ignore contextual concerns (Martiminakis et al., 2009). Assessment of professionalism that focuses exclusively on behaviour may ignore the underlying knowledge base, attitudinal elements and the ability to deploy behaviours in different practice contexts. Hence, future definitions and measurements of managerial professionalism cannot be based solely on oaths or codes of conduct alone. We must also consider other means of deciphering what professionalism means.

6. PROPOSED RESEARCH UNDERTAKING

“The entire MBA curriculum must be infused with multidisciplinary, practical and ethical questions and analyses reflecting the complex challenges business leaders face” (Bennis and O’Toole, p. 104).

6.1 Summary of the Literature

History depicts management education as an altruistic response to corporate monopolistic tendencies. MBAs have become synonymous with the creation of a professional identity for managers (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000). The literature on the concerns of management scholars with respect to MBAs has grown considerably over the past two decades (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2013). Critiques emphasise three broad issues.

First, the “relevance” critique suggests that management scholarship produces little actionable knowledge of relevance to managerial practice and that MBA programmes over-emphasise theoretical concepts. “Business schools are becoming decoupled from practice and from the institutions that hire their MBA students” (Tushman et al., 2007, p. 346). Second, the “values” critique suggests that MBA programmes do not foster appropriate ethical values. “By propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility (Ghoshal, 2005, p. 76). Trank and Rynes (2003) connect the erosion of ethics to de-professionalisation in management education. Third, the “pedagogy” critique suggests that MBA programmes deploy ineffective teaching and learning processes. MBAs have become “specialised training in the functions of business, not general education in the practice of managing” (Mintzberg, 2004, p.2).

Professionalising the MBA provides scope for some optimism. Professional education emphasises ethics in lieu of the asymmetrical knowledge that professionals hold over others. Expected to be ethical towards their clients, professionals take oaths that oblige benevolent application of their knowledge-based power. Professionals are expected to be responsible to society as a whole. This should even hold true of management professionals, whose *raison d’être* may be to generate profit, albeit in a sustainable fashion, that creates wealth and employment. Yet, not everyone is convinced (Raelin, 1990). With a fragmented body of knowledge (Rolin, 2011) and rigour-relevance gap (Pettigrew, 1997), diversity in managerial practice precludes a shared sense of purpose (Khurana and Nohria, 2008). The absence of a formal body of knowledge and of regulated entry might suggest that it is pointless to pursue professionalisation of management. However, debate on management as a profession draws on a rather naïve depiction of established professions (Barends, 2015; Romme, 2016).

The nature of the medical (Sullivan, 2000) and legal (Flood, 2011) professions continues to be contested. In emulating developments in these professions, some management scholars have shifted their research focus to the concept of professionalism, as a normative set of values and behaviours, (e.g. Jarvis, 2009; Despotidou and Prastacos, 2012; Pouryousefi, 2013; Romme, 2016). The literature suggests that linkages exist between adopting practices in professional education to help students develop professionalism and addressing the MBA's problems of irrelevance, undesirable value-driven behaviour and the pedagogy-practice gap. The literature also harbours examples of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, student selection and role-modelling used by MBAs for this purpose. However, there is a wide gulf between prototype statements on managerial professionalism and the more evolved studies of professionalism in the education of the archetype professions, such as medicine and law.

6.2 Research Objective Revisited

Prior studies used to test theories of managerial professionalism tend to examine professionals in their field (Imse, 1962; Haga, 1976). Some studies highlight professionalism as a latent attribute and the developmental factors that have contributed to it. These studies focus on student professionalism (Nino, 2014; Hilton, 2013; Wresch and Pondell, 2015) or link educational experiences to later professionalism behaviours (Hall, 1968; McCabe et al., 2006)

As one dimension of managerial professionalism, considerable scholarship exists on student ethics. Lowry's (2003) investigation of business students found that their moral awareness scores dropped with progression. Piper's (1993) study of moral reasoning in MBA students found that they had limited understanding of societal injustice and, hence, limited awareness of the potential consequences of their decisions. Carpenter et al. (2004) found a correlation between prior academic dishonesty and present dishonest behaviour in the workplace.

Yet, unlike medicine, there are currently no widely accepted guidelines nor underlying conceptual frameworks for embedding professionalism in MBA education. In the past, the concept has been defined either so broadly as to obscure its constituent components or so narrowly as to preclude a holistic picture. Even within the established professions, measurement and definition is problematic (vanMook, et al., 2009; Rutter and Dundan, 2010). The literature demonstrates that professionalism is a multi-dimensional and multi-perspective construct (Hodges et al., 2011). The challenge of interpreting diverse perceptions of professionalism in MBAs is accentuated further by limited prior research and the embryonic nature of statements on managerial professionalism (e.g. Romme et al., 2015).

Establishing the elements that constitute managerial professionalism in order to develop and assess them in MBA programmes would represent a significant research contribution. There is a need, therefore, to explore, through the reflections of the principle agents, namely students and educators, the extent to which professionalism is embedded in MBAs, in terms of the managerial competencies, values and behaviours that they perceive are developed. Hence, a refined research objective and set of research questions include: -

Research Objective: to explore the extent to which students and educators perceive professionalism is embedded in MBAs as a mechanism for managerial development.

RQ1: What are MBA students', graduates' and educators' perceptions of professionalism?

RQ2: What professional values, competencies and behaviours do students, graduates and educators perceive are developed in an MBA programme?

6.3 Conceptual Framework Development

Comparative studies have an innate tendency to highlight some features while ignoring others (McGlothlin, 1960). A conceptual framework can, therefore, facilitate systematic cross-programme comparison and minimise subjective analysis. A useful starting point is to articulate the key dimensions of professionalism used in prior studies.

6.3.1 Dimensions of Professionalism

Most scholars highlight expertise as a key dimension of professionalism. It represents the body of knowledge that justifies a profession's jurisdiction. Typical indicators include competency ratings and academic performance etc. The major field test for MBAs, for example, assesses mastery of essential knowledge and critical skills for graduating MBA students in the core areas of marketing, finance and accounting (ETS, 2018). Social agency represents the ethical values that professionals are expected to have. It is measured by individuals' perceptions of societal issues and their contribution to these issues. Instruments, such as the defining issues test (Rest, 1979), can measure ethical disposition. Moore and Rosenblum (1970) identified autonomy of judgment as a key component, measured by ability to make independent decisions based on expertise. Typical indicators include critical thinking, problem solving ability, confidence and expertise. Several scholars refer to this concept in professions such as law, medicine, and accounting (Hall, 1968). Haywood-Farmer and Stuart (1990) added 'self-concept' as a dimension to predict readiness to execute the duties and responsibilities of a professional role. It tends to be a latent attribute that students develop as they acquire expertise. Items used to test it include self-confidence, communication, leadership and ability to develop

relationships (Hensel, 2009). A comparison of concepts used to guide prior empirical studies of professionalism concepts in management suggests considerable overlap (Figure 6).

Figure 6: A Comparison of Managerial Professionalism Concepts

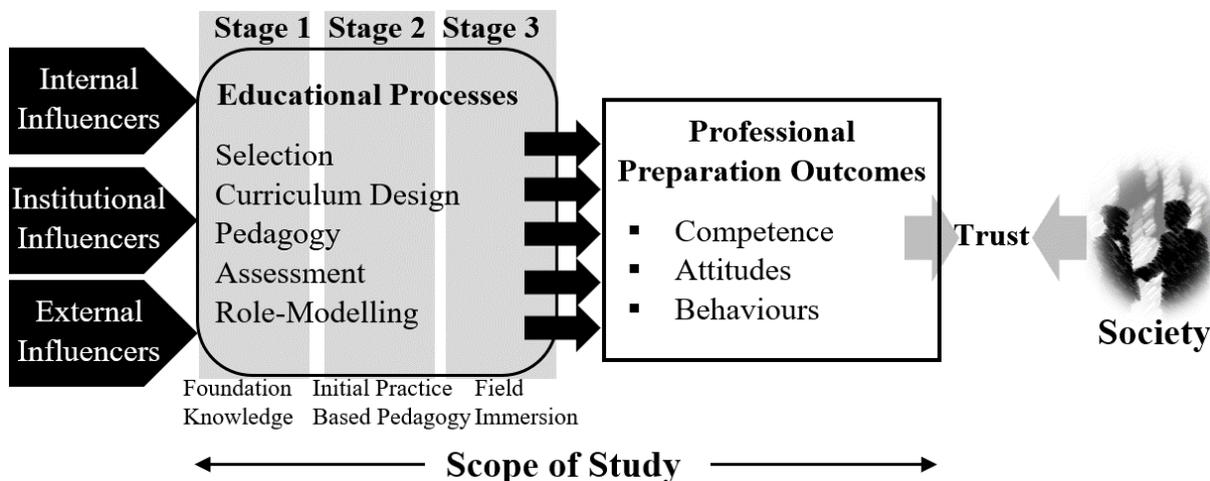
	Self-Regulation	Autonomy of Judgment	Social Agency	Body of Knowledge	Self-Concept	Sense of Purpose
Hall (1968)	✓	✓	✓			
Haywood-Farmer (1990)		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nino (2014)		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Romme (2016)			✓	✓		✓
Despotidou & Prastacos (2012)			✓	✓		

However, the proposed study is not merely a study of professionalism, per se. It is proposed to investigate the embeddedness of professionalism in an academic programme.

6.3.2 Proposed Conceptual Framework for this Study

Figure 7 presents a first pass of the conceptual framework for this study. MBAs use [1] educational processes that “maximize the potential for achieving the expected outcomes” (AACSB, 2013, p.28), including curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, selection and role-modelling. RQ1 seeks to interpret what students and educators perceive professionalism to be, based on their experiences of educational processes that, in certain contexts, lead to professional preparation outcomes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). RQ2 seeks to identify [2] professional preparation outcomes as categorised by Stark et al. (1986). Whilst stated learning outcomes can contribute cursory data, the subjectivity of the professionalism concept suggests that RQ2 is best considered from the professional perspectives of MBA educators and learners.

Figure 7: First-Pass Conceptual Framework



Given that MBAs do not have a defined professional preparation environment, a transition from foundational knowledge to managerial practice is required. Starting with foundational knowledge, student colligation abilities would be developed to define problems in managerial practice. Practice-based learning would provide experience of managerial work, developing diagnosis and treatment skills and a nascent professional identity as a manager. Finally, a field immersion would develop inference skills. Hence, the proposed conceptual framework is an amalgam of: [i] Stark et al.'s (1986) framework, [ii] Somers et al.'s (2014) linking of management education to professional learning and [iii] educational processes used to develop professionalism (e.g. Passi et al., 2010).

6.3.3 Limitations of the Framework

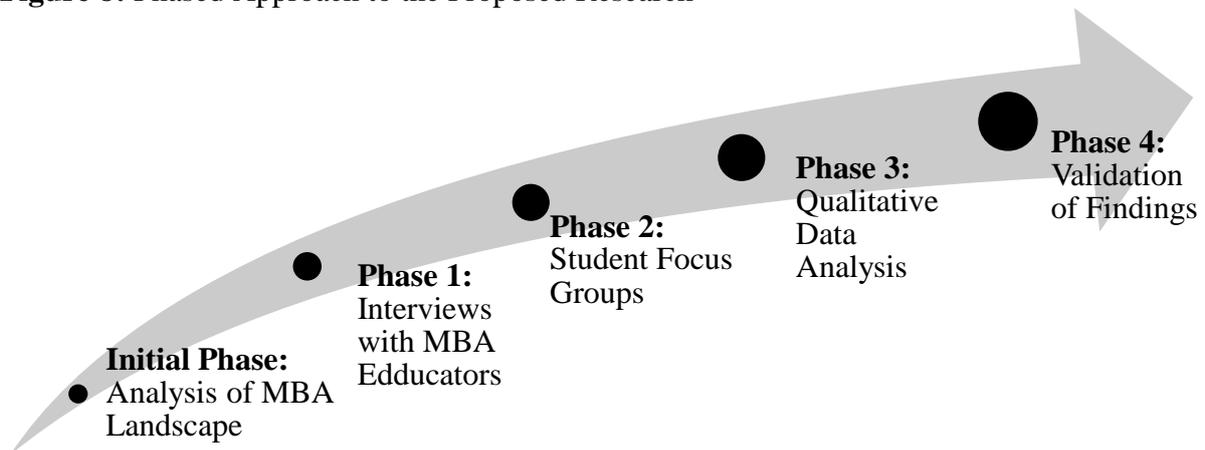
Sick patients trust their doctors to diagnose and treat their ailments. Pouryousefi (2013) shows that when trust is high, managers can lower transaction costs. It is often only when unethical behaviour or lack of expertise become apparent that trust is eroded. While trust could be captured under assessment scenarios whereby faculty make judgments on students' trustworthiness to perform as managers, trust represents only one side of a social contract, which, in return, society grants autonomy. Studying trust would, thus, require a longitudinal analysis to evaluate the impact of professional preparation outcomes on the societal contract. Oaths specify the beneficiaries of a profession. How they benefit is critical to the generation of trust, on which professions operate. deBruin's (2016) work on oaths provides a reference for what students could strive to achieve. Oaths document principles of professional practice, such as judgment, doentology and compliance. Yet, although public declarations seek to bind graduates to these principles, the research questions seek to explore how these principles are ingrained. Without clear incentives and protocols to translate intentions to behaviours, public declarations may be hollow rhetoric. Hence, trust will be excluded from direct questioning. Examination of oaths will focus on processes that prepare students for such public declarations.

The scope of the study will, therefore, be focused on [1] professional preparation outcomes and [2] the educational processes deployed to achieve them. The conceptual framework represents an appropriate abstraction of the key parameters that can be used to explore academic programmes, such as MBA programmes, with respect to the embeddedness of professionalism. Influencers on education processes, such as accreditation, are largely outside the control of educators tasked with programme delivery. However, they may emerge as key themes from engagement with the key agents, such as educators and learners, in the proposed study.

6.4 Steps Towards Implementation

There are challenges to answering the research questions. First, “the MBA” is a metaphor for MBAs in general. Whilst differences in curriculum and pedagogy exist across MBAs, these tend to be merely variations within a shared discourse focused on the firm (Spender, 2014). A representative sample of MBAs is still required to make robust findings. Secondly, the research questions seek to investigate the status-quo, leaving no room for intervention. Ruling out action research, observations must be removed enough not to influence the normal course of events and be sufficient in data acquisition to answer the research questions. Thirdly, given that professionalism is a multi-dimensional and multi-perspective construct, there is a challenge in articulating a shared understanding of what managerial professionalism means in an MBA context. It is, therefore, proposed to undertake a phased approach (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Phased Approach to the Proposed Research



An initial phase is aimed at identifying and characterising a representative sample of MBAs. There are circa. 15 MBAs delivered in Ireland and the MBA Association of Ireland is an important umbrella organisation, representing over 6000 MBA graduates. Considerable documentation on curriculum, learning outcomes, delivery and accreditation is available in the public domain. The Bologna Declaration places professional competencies at the centre of curricular design (Jurše and Tominc, 2008). A documentation analysis of four of these MBAs (Appendix IV) can be extrapolated to provide a broad overview of the wider MBA landscape. Phases 1 and 2 represent the data gathering phases. Although these phases are interchangeable, they are contingent on the initial analysis of the MBA landscape. Following purposive selection of educators and students from a smaller sample of MBAs, the purpose of the interviews and focus groups is to converge on a shared meaning for professionalism in an MBA context and, hence, to frame managerial professionalism in a common language, addressing RQ1.

With respect to RQ2, the MBA can be viewed as a coherent set of educational processes designed to produce desired outcomes. Hence, the proposed study seeks to capture exemplar processes used to aid students develop professionalism across the three stages of foundation knowledge, initial practice-based learning and field immersion. Establishing causality is also important, so a key focus will be to identify generative mechanisms that answer why interventions in particular contexts lead to certain outcomes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). A key question with respect to exemplar processes is: what is it about them that helps students to develop professionalism? Students usually exercise more energy on learning that is assessed. Clear standards can help to crystallise links to curriculum and pedagogy and, thus, strengthen assessment and feedback loops. Phases 1 and 2 will also seek to identify measurement instruments used to track students' professional development. Veloski et al. (2005) suggests that these instruments should have evidence of validity, reliability and practicality. It is also proposed to engage with the students directly to extract, from their perspective, what aspects of the MBA's educational processes are beneficial in developing professionalism.

Phase 3 will focus on a thematic analysis of the data, using inductive coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994) in NVivo. In reality, data gathering and analysis phases will not be completely decoupled from each other. Interpretation of qualitative data will require follow-up with participants, supporting documentary evidence and cross-validation between students and their lecturers. Hence, there will likely be overlap between the data collection and analysis. Given that qualitative data analysis is inherently subjective and is affected by the analyst's perspective, Phase 4 will focus on validating the findings by soliciting feedback on them from educators and students and triangulating with MBA graduates, who can link their education to their current managerial roles and reflect on how professionalism is acquired and maintained.

There have been renewed calls to reinvigorate the professional mission of business schools (Rousseau, 2012). The prospect of adapting aspects of professional education is worth exploring in the context of better preparing MBA graduates for managerial roles. Yet, there is no baseline data on the extent to which professionalism is already embedded in MBAs. As a practical contribution, the proposed study seeks to bridge this gap and to inform educators on the direction their MBAs must take if they are to develop along professional lines. The study will close with a workshop for MBA educators, offering practical guidelines on how to optimise the MBA for developing managerially professional graduates and to highlight the factual elements that contribute to students' professional development. An important output also relates to enhancing the theoretical understanding of professionalism in an MBA context.

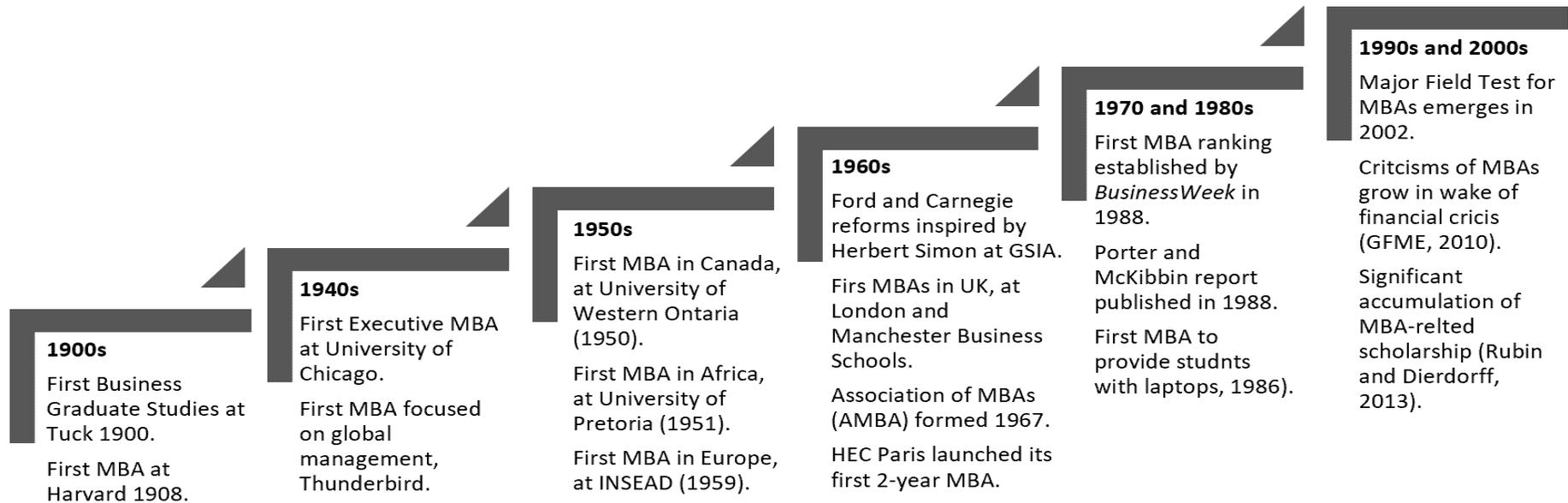
7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

“the essence of an MBA resides not in professional training but in the broader experience of the business school as a learning environment” (Barker, 2010, p. 55).

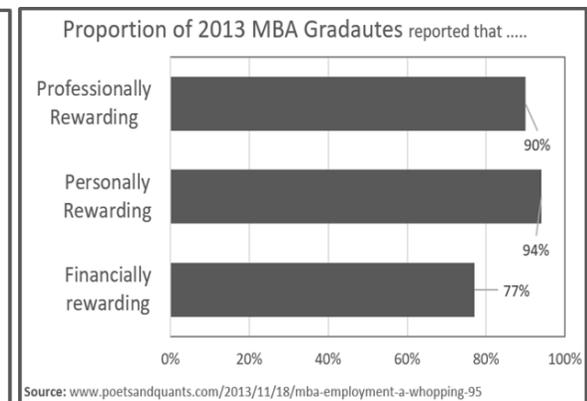
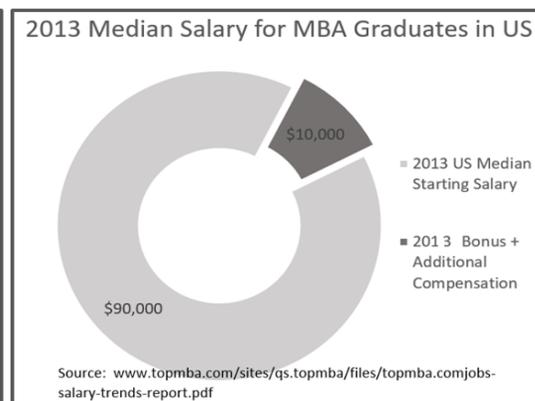
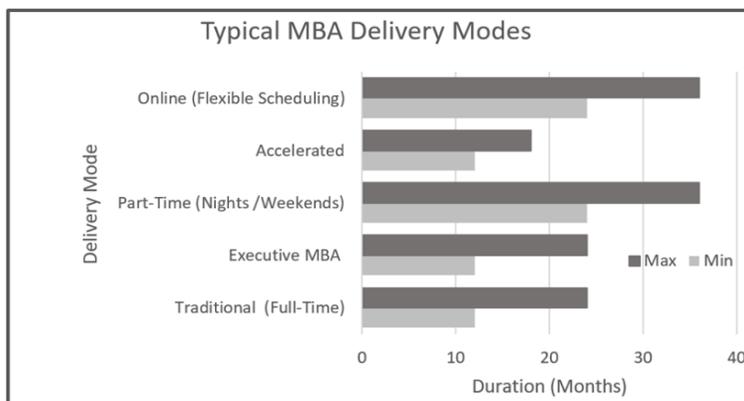
MBA education, is, by many assessments, in an intellectual and moral crisis or so the rhetoric suggests. Many scholars believe there is some truth in this message. The debate, therefore, has evolved to how business schools should best respond to the criticisms addressed at MBA programmes. Some experts, such as Barker (2010), argue that it is inappropriate to narrow MBA education to professional training. Others, such as Podolny (2009), strike a middle ground, suggesting that aspects of professional education should be pursued to improve managerial practice. Others, such as Khurana (2007), Nohria (2012) and Romme (2016) have embarked on campaigns to rejuvenate the professionalisation of management. There are merits to all arguments but the debate, itself, remains “academic” without first understanding the extent to which professionalism is already embedded in MBA programmes. Although emerging prototype statements and codes of ethics are laudable, they are a world away from the rich empirical data available on professionalism embedded in the educational programmes of medicine and law. MBA educators may learn from the professionalisation journeys of these archetype professions, amongst others, however imperfect comparisons may be.

Management literature highlights many examples of education processes, such as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that assist with the professional development of MBA learners. However, the challenge in emulating the development of professionalism in, say, medical education rests on a common understanding of what managerial professionalism means to MBA educators and learners in context. In an increasingly complex and uncertain world, professionalism, it would appear, remains ever critical to society’s wellbeing. Society should be able to trust implicitly that MBA graduates will set, and comply with, high professional standards in their managerial roles that are, in many respects, not enforceable, save for their own sense of professionalism, embodied in their knowledge, values and behaviours. Vaara and Faÿ’s (2011) bourdieusian perspective suggests that ‘habitus’ may explain how MBA learners’ values and behaviours form during their studies and that the reproduction of ‘doxa’ impedes change. Without initiatives to take stock of and, perhaps, upset the status quo, MBA education may genuinely risk obsolescence (Schlegelmilch and Thomas, 2011). For this reason alone, the proposed study of professionalism in MBA programmes is worth pursuing.

APPENDIX I: INFOGRAPHIC SUMMARY OF SALIENT MBA STATISTICS



Source: Adapted from MBA Central (2016)



APPENDIX I (CONTINUED)
INFOGRAPHIC SUMMARY OF SALIENT MBA STATISTICS

MBA Graduates reported recouping

Source: www.poetsandquants.com/2014/03/17/the-mba-degree-is-it-really-worth-it

200% of their investment ten years after graduation.	1X of their investment four years after graduation.	1/3 of their investment within one year of graduation.
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Financial Times Global MBA Rankings 2017

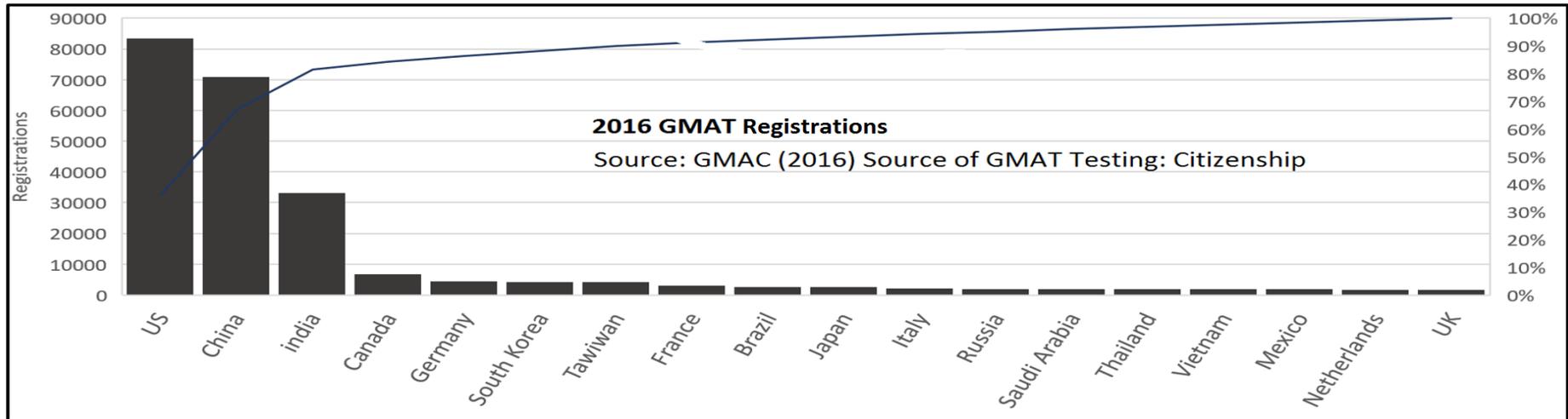
Rank	MBA	Country
1	INSEAD	France
2	Stanford	US
3	Harvard Business School	US
4	Judge Business School, Cambridge	UK
5	London Business School	UK

Source: <http://rankings.ft.com/exportranking/global-mba-ranking-2017/pdf>

Top Employers of MBA Graduates in US, 2016

1	Google
2	McKinsey
3	Boston Consulting Group
4	Bain & Company
5	Deloitte
5	Amazon

Source: <http://universumglobal.com/rankings/united-states-of-america/student/2016/mba/>



APPENDIX II:

ADAPTATION OF STARK ET AL.'S (1986) FRAMEWORK TO THE MBA

Possible Internal, Institutional and External Influencers in MBA Education

Internal	Institutional	External
<p>Programme Organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty Background • Faculty Mix • Evaluation of Faculty • Research Focus <p>Structure of Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance Requirements • Student Mix • Duration of Study <p>Curricular Tension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogical Approaches • Theory-Practice Orientation • Course Content & Sequence • Assessment Methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission of University • Programme Centrality • Financial Resources • Academic Governance • Quality Assurance Process 	<p>Societal Influences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government Funding • Government Regulation • Media Rankings • Graduate Employers • Graduate Salaries <p>Professional Community Influencers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation & Standards • MBA Associations • Alumni Involvement • Ethical Codes • Management Scholarship • Field Experience Facilities

Possible Professional Preparation Outcomes for MBA Education

Professional Competence	Professional Attitudes and Behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual Competence: understanding the theoretical foundations of management. • Technical Competence: ability to perform managerial tasks. • Integrative Competence: ability to integrate theory and practice. • Contextual Competence: understanding societal context for management practice. • Adaptive Competence: ability to anticipate and adapt to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Identity: extent to which graduate accepts professional norms. • Professional Ethics: extent to which graduates internalise business ethics. • Marketability: extent to which graduates are marketable due to their training. • Scholarly Concern for Improvement: extent to which graduates recognise need to increase knowledge through research. • Professional Development: extent to which graduates maintain currency.

APPENDIX III:

PROTOTYPE OATHS AND CODES ON MANAGERIAL PROFESSIONALISM

'May I suffer a painful and ignominious death if I fail to carry out my solemn oath to defend the honour of the king' (Sulmasy, 1999, p.333).

Title	Authors	URL Link or Synopsis	Source
The MBA Oath (2010)	Anderson & Escher	http://mbaoath.org/	Harvard Business School
Thunderbird Oath of Honour	N/A	https://thunderbird.asu.edu/about/global-impact/thunderbird-oath-honor	Thunderbird School of Management
Canadian MBA Oath	N/A	https://telfer.uottawa.ca/assets/documents/2010/TelferMBAOath.pdf	Telfer School of Management
Columbia Honor Code	N/A	www8.gsb.columbia.edu/honor/	Columbia School of Business
Time to Make Management a True Profession	Khurana & Nohria (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Log-term value for society. ▪ Societal Interests > Self-Interest ▪ Transparency of Performance 	Harvard Business Review
The Question for Professionalisation (2016)	Romme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practising and knowing. ▪ Shared interests in outcomes. ▪ Pluralism and dialogical encounter. 	Oxford University Press
Dutch Bankers' Oath (2013)	deBruin and Dolfmsa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perform with integrity and care. ▪ Interests of all stakeholders. ▪ Compliance with regulation. 	Review of Social Economy
Economists' Oath (2013)	DeMartino	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Serve the public good. ▪ Accept the limits of economics. ▪ Care for the weakest in society. 	Oxford University Press
The Oath of Management	Emiliani (2000)	Adaptation of Hippocratic Oath	Management Decision
Ethics in MBA Programs (1991)	Ghorpade (p. 903)	"... codes of ethics as being the most effective measure for encouraging ethical behaviour in business".	Journal of Business Ethics
Towards Professional Ethics in Business	Hooker (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Generate wealth. ▪ Provide gainful employment. ▪ Contribute to social stability. 	Tepper School of Business
Principles of Responsible Management Education	N/A	http://www.unprme.org/	United Nations

APPENDIX IV: SUMMARY OF FOUR MBA PROGRAMMES

A WIDER SAMPLE OF MBA PROGRAMMES WILL BE ANALYSED IN AN INITIAL PHASE OF THE RESEARCH

Programme	Dublin City University	Henley Business School	Durham Business School	Smurfit Business School
Delivery	Executive	Flexible	Online	Full-Time
Accreditation	AACSB/AMBA	EQUIS/AACSB/AMBA	EQUIS/AACSB	EQUIS/AACSB/AMBA
Programme Outcomes or Core Programme Themes aligned to Synonyms of Professionalism	<p>Career Development: action-research projects; self-reflection.</p> <p>Enterprise: integration across business functions; evidence-based management; industry-oriented assessment.</p> <p>Ethics: building business in harmony with societal needs.</p>	<p>Managing the Organisation: personal development; managing people; financial resources; processes and systems</p> <p>Making Choices: context and stakeholders; reputation and responsibility.</p> <p>Making an Impact: leadership and change management.</p>	<p>Specialist Pathways: develop knowledge skills and capabilities in specific areas aligned to professional needs.</p> <p>Consultancy Capability: critically examine the complexities of managing business consulting projects.</p>	<p>Leadership Development: build awareness of self, team, context and leadership and acquire tools to continue professional development.</p> <p>Career Service: acquire tools to enable you to take advantage of career opportunities.</p>
Three Noted Aspects of Delivery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic Consultancy Project 2. Personal Leadership Skills 3. Enterprise Engagement 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management Research Challenge 2. Professional Development Module 3. Career & Employability Services 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic Case Analysis 2. Career Consultation 3. International Summer School 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Foundation Week 2. Knowledge into Action 3. Leadership Development
Course Learning Outcomes aligned to Synonyms of Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Apply strategies to assist with effective teamworking. ▪ Key presentation skills. ▪ Self-assess management competencies. ▪ Evaluate ethical considerations in work settings. ▪ Appreciate the significance of socially responsible and ethical marketing behaviour. ▪ Explore client-specific challenges and agree ToR for a consulting project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and awareness of the practices that support and hinder the development of people in organisations. ▪ Engage in debate on issues of corporate responsibility, sustainability and governance and learn about key concepts of how stakeholder relationships are built. ▪ Undertake a major research project investigating a significant management or business problem, which leads to actionable recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge of behavioural issues and challenges facing contemporary organisations. ▪ Critical appreciation of the key business areas that need to be managed with emphasis on integration rather than functional silos. ▪ Critical appreciation of the limitations and implications of decision analysis. ▪ Evaluate the wider context of corporate reporting, such as governance and responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work as part of a team to formulate competitive strategies. ▪ Integrate diverse theories of leadership and translate them to management practice. ▪ Develop alertness to the myriad of tensions inherent in management choices. ▪ Critical thinking about the responsibilities of business leaders to broader society.

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PREFACE TO PAPER 2

“There are numerous descriptions of ... professionalism, Yet, attempts to define the concept have not yet led to widespread success ... to teach such ideas efficiently and effectively, nor to definitive tools and methods to evaluate learner outcomes” (Wagner et al., 2007, p. 288).

Introduction

Paper 2 focuses on the research design and the underpinning research philosophy of the study. However, before doing so, it addresses the feedback received from the examiners on Paper 1, which had major bearing on the direction of downstream research activities. Paper 2 also documents, in detail, the data collection and analysis methods initially proposed but it is worth noting that these methods were refined later in the study. Paper 2 concludes with the proposed contributions, limitations and ethical considerations involved in the study.

Evolution of the Research Journey

Feedback received from the examiners on the initial version of Paper 1 suggested very minor amendments to the research questions to better reflect that professionalism is actively developed rather than passively acquired. The literature review in Paper 1 highlighted typical characteristics of the professions including: specialist knowledge and skills; self-regulation and autonomy; high standards of ethical reasoning; and control of entry, training and credentialing. However, these characteristics are not definitive. Contemporary scholars of professionalism tend to cite Aristotle’s concepts of episteme, techne, phronesis as human characteristics that provide the means for professional expertise, judgment and wisdom (e.g. Schein and Kommers, 1972). The development of such attributes requires protracted periods of maturation and is informed by models of moral development (Kohlberg, 1969), personality development (Erikson, 1950) and reflective practice (King and Kitchener, 1994).

Hence, prior to proposing a methodological basis for the study, further conceptualisation is provided in Paper 2 on the development of professionalism. Using Hilton and Slotnick’s (2005) model of proto-professionalism, it is argued that professionalism or one of its defining features, namely phronesis, emerges over a protracted period of metacognition. Implicit in this model is an assumption that both formal education and experience have their respective roles to play in developing professionalism. Further theoretical work on the concept of professionalism is also articulated by exploring links between education and future professionalism behaviours (Nino, 2012). As such, this conceptualisation work emphasises managerial professionalism as the primary subject of the study with MBA education as the context for its development.

The research design is dependent on the two research questions highlighted in Paper 1. The nebulous nature of professionalism (Daicoff, 1996) and the embryonic nature of research on professionalism in management education together justify an exploratory approach to the study. Consequently, a constructivist-interpretive approach to soliciting different perceptions of professionalism from the two key agents in MBA education, namely educators and learners, is outlined. In Paper 2, interviews with MBA educators as well as student and graduate focus-groups (representing learners) are proposed as the data collection instruments. The interviews were designed to be semi-structured and a guide was developed to ensure interviews remained focused on the research questions. As documented in Paper 2, the initial research design allowed for three focus-group sessions with students at the beginning, middle and towards the end of their studies and one focus-group session with graduates. The decision to pursue focus-groups was pragmatic. Focus-group research provides a convenient mechanism for conducting enquiry with cohorts of learners that have shared norms and experiences.

Three activities were proposed to support data analysis. First, an immersion-crystallisation process (Crabtree and Miller, 1999) was proposed to identify first-impression themes. Second, using a constant comparison analysis, the entire data would be inductively coded into themes in a three-step process, beginning with open coding and culminating in a small number of conceptual categories (Boyatzis, 1998). Third, a more-structured qualitative comparison process (Romme, 1995) would be used to identify patterns across the MBA sector. Given the importance of context in qualitative studies (Bryman et al., 1996), emphasis is placed on describing the MBA landscape in Paper 2. A first-pass analysis identified fifteen providers on the island of Ireland and an umbrella body, the MBA Association of Ireland, representing over 6000 MBA graduates. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that the landscape is constantly changing. At the time of editing this thesis, one year after the submission of Paper 2, Cork Institute of Technology announced a new executive MBA programme (CIT, 2018).

Consideration of Examiner Feedback in Revising Paper 2

The initial thinking behind the research design was to undertake a cross-case analysis, incorporating a number of MBAs in Ireland. However, the examiners correctly identified that this approach was high-risk in terms of securing participation in the study, especially given the relatively small and competitive market for MBA students in Ireland. In any event, the relative homogenous nature of MBA education (Lamb and Curie, 2007) negates the need for cross-case comparison. Consequently, I re-wrote Paper 2 to remove the cross-case analysis. Interviews

with MBA educators and student focus groups were still considered critical to data collection, but I shifted the analysis to avoid any direct comparison of case-study MBA programmes.

The examiners also noted that the paper should emphasise that the focus of the study is on professionalism, with MBAs providing the context. To reassert that the focus of the study is on professionalism, with MBA programmes providing the context, I explicitly state in the revised version of Paper 2 that the units of analysis comprise the key developmental factors of professionalism and that the MBA provides the context (see Section 2.3.1 in Paper 2). Based on the examiners' recommendations, I also provide, in the revised paper, further justification for the focus on MBAs as the context for the study. In acknowledging that MBAs are not the sole providers of management education or training, a brief discussion on why such programmes were chosen as the context for studying the development of management professionals, as well as on what alternatives exist, is provided. A further suggestion by the examiners was to give due consideration to a longitudinal approach to the study. Consequently, in the revised version of Paper 2, a multi-phase research design is proposed with three sets of participants: educators, students and graduates. The logic behind this design was to develop an initial understanding of managerial professionalism with educators before undertaking a quasi-longitudinal study of its development in students, which would, in turn, inform how graduates link their professional development over their MBA studies to their managerial roles. Whilst this does not reflect the final research design underpinning the study (see Paper 3), it underscores my approach to incorporating multiple data sources, different methods and to adding rigour, breadth and richness to the study. Whilst accepting the final version of Paper 2 (which follows), the examiners recommended that greater consideration be given to operational matters and to undertaking a more comprehensive analysis of the MBA landscape on the island of Ireland. In retrospect, the research would have benefitted from more concrete plans being in place at this stage. These matters are addressed in Paper 3.

Concluding Remarks

Paper 2 concludes by outlining steps to be taken to ensure the rigour and quality. It draws on Guba and Lincoln's (1989) criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in qualitative research and acknowledges the researcher as a key instrument in the research. The paper also notes the ethical issues to be managed in conducting interviews (Allmark et al., 2009) and focus groups (Smith, 1995). It acknowledges the sensitivities around maintaining participant confidentiality, even though risks to breaches in confidentiality are mitigated somewhat by steering the research design away from a cross-case analysis.

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Paper 2: Research Design and Methodology

“Perhaps this lack of definition is why some academics describe professionalism as a nebulous concept” (Shashikiran, 2013, p. 61).

A METHODOLOGICAL BASIS FOR EXPLORING PROFESSIONALISM IN MBA PROGRAMMES: STUDENT AND EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

ABSTRACT

Professionalism, namely competencies, values and behaviours developed by students during education and training for professional practice, is subject to extensive research in the education of traditional professions but it is only an emergent research area in management education. For a century, MBAs have been synonymous with developing a professional class of managers. This paper articulates a methodological basis for exploring the embeddedness of professionalism in MBAs as a discourse for preparing students for managerial practice.

Measurable constituents of professionalism, e.g. business ethics or management competencies, have been studied in isolation. Yet, there has been little holistic investigation of what constitutes professionalism, as a synthesis of these constituent factors, in terms of professional preparation outcomes or teaching and learning processes used to achieve them. Even within the traditional professions, e.g. medicine or law, the nebulous nature of this multi-dimensional and multi-paradigmatic construct obscures our understanding of how it develops in students. Studies suggest cognitive, psychosocial and epistemological aspects to its development.

Hence, an exploratory approach based on interpreting reflections of the principle actors in its development, i.e. students, graduates and educators, on their experiences of, and engagement with professionalism is proposed to diagnose a clearer conceptualisation of its embeddedness. Given the global homogeneity of MBA curriculum, a sample of programmes in the Irish market provides a context for this study. Qualitative data will be gathered using in-depth interviews with MBA programme directors and educators as well as student and graduate focus-groups. Sessions will be audio-recorded, transcribed and coded in NVivo for key themes through an immersion /crystallisation process. Concept maps will be developed to convey initial findings and aid understanding. It is anticipated that this approach can be used to contribute an insight into how, and to what extent professionalism is embedded in MBA education.

Key Words – *MBA, Professionalism, Explorative, Students, Graduates, Educators, Interviews, Focus Groups, Qualitative.*

Paper Type – *Methodology Paper.*

1. INTRODUCTION

“Foucauldian analysis suggests that the meaning of professionalism is not fixed but negotiated and highly contestable” (Fournier, 1999, p.304).

1.1 Motivations for Proposed Study

Substantial literature has emerged on the concerns of management scholars with respect to MBAs (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2013). Yet, only a few attempts have been made to investigate the possibility of developing MBAs along professional lines (e.g. Trank and Rynes, 2003; Barker, 2010). This study attempts to tackle fundamental questions surrounding this issue.

1.2 Summary of the Literature

MBAs were established to develop a professional class of managers. Contemporary critiques are three-fold. “Value” critiques imply that MBAs fail to foster ethical values (Hühn, 2014). “Pedagogy” critiques cite their overemphasis on rational-analytical methods (Mintzberg, 2004). “Relevance” critiques imply that knowledge disseminated by MBAs is of little relevance to practice (Datar et al., 2010). The education of traditional professions harbours solutions that are potentially transferrable to management education (e.g. Rousseau, 2012; Barends, 2015).

Scholarly positions on these solutions vary. Raelin (2007) believes that a professional model is insufficient to bridge the pedagogy-practice gap needed to prepare MBA students for the complexities of management. Khurana and Nohria (2008) seek to rejuvenate management’s professionalisation. Barker (2010) argues against narrowing MBA education to professional training whilst Podolny (2009) sees merit in adapting some aspects of professional education.

Professional education promotes ethical values to temper power from asymmetrical knowledge that professionals hold over others (Beaton, 2010). Its focus on practice-based pedagogy (Nohria, 2012) and research-practice integration bolsters jurisdictional claims (Somers et al., 2014) that position graduates for societal challenges they are expected to solve. Hence, there is merit in considering professionalism as a blueprint for improving management education.

However, how to assist students develop professionalism carries significant research attention in traditional professions but is underexplored in the management discipline. There is a significant gap between the rich data on professionalism in the education of doctors or lawyers and the emerging prototype statements on managerial professionalism. In pursuing a “balance of academic and professional engagement” (AACSB, 2016, p.38), MBA education is justified partially by what is espoused about professionalism to funding and accrediting bodies. Without a genuine quest for professionalism, the legitimacy of MBA education becomes questionable.

1.3 Research Objective

The challenge in this quest relates to the nebulous nature of professionalism itself. Whilst some professions seek to internalise it (e.g. ABIM, 2001), they struggle with definition (vanMook, et al., 2009) and measurement (Rutter and Duncan, 2010). The challenge of interpreting diverse perceptions of professionalism in MBAs is accentuated further by limited prior research and the embryonic nature of statements on managerial professionalism (e.g. Romme et al., 2015). There is a need to explore through the reflections of the principle agents, namely students, graduates and educators, the extent to which professionalism is embedded in MBAs vis-à-vis the managerial competencies, values and behaviours perceived to be required by employers. Competencies refer to knowledge, skills and attributes needed to perform in a professional role. Prior studies of MBAs map learning outcomes (Costigan and Brink, 2015) and curricula (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2009) to managerial competencies but assume assurance of learning. Values refer to underlying beliefs that guide professional behaviour, reflecting ethics and other norms. Competency is not only indexed in terms of expertise, but accepted behaviour (Osborne, 1993), often translated into codes of professional conduct (Okenado and Samuelson, 2015). Thus, the research objective is to explore the extent to which students, graduates and educators perceive professionalism is embedded in MBAs as a mechanism for managerial development.

RQ1: What are MBA students', graduates' and educators' perceptions of professionalism?

RQ2: What professional values, competencies and behaviours do students, graduates and educators perceive are developed in an MBA programme?

This study attempts to diagnose what constitutes professionalism in MBAs and how it emerges. With values and behaviours often prioritised differently by different stakeholders (Eraut, 1994), it will explore the enculturation of professional values and clarity on behavioural priorities.

1.3 Theoretical Background to the Study

Prior studies highlight managerial professionalism as a latent attribute, linking education with later professionalism (Imse, 1962). These studies identify key dimensions (Table 1).

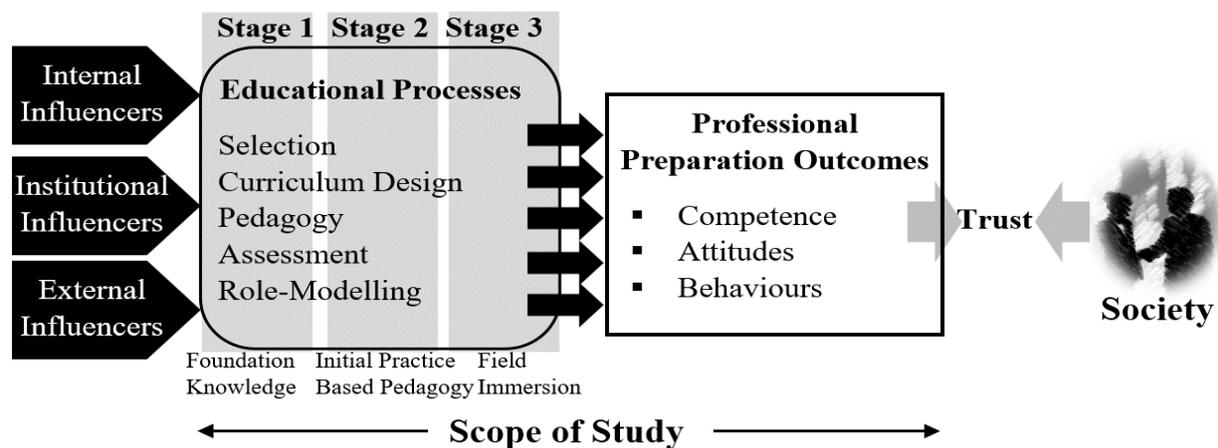
Table 1: Key Dimensions of Managerial Professionalism

#	Construct
1	Expert Body of Knowledge (Nino, 2014; Somers et al., 2014; Romme, 2016)
2	Social Agency (Jarvis, 2009; Pouryousefi, 2009; Romme, 2016)
3	Autonomy (Hall, 1968; Haywood-Farmer and Stuart, 1990)
4	Self-Regulation (Hall, 1968; Romme, 2016)
5	Self-Concept (Haywood-Farmer and Stuart, 1990; Nino, 2014)

1.3.1 Conceptual Framework

However, whilst the proposed study is about professionalism, it also about the extent to which it is embedded in an academic programme and, by extension, how it develops in students. Hence, Stark et al.'s (1986) framework for evaluating professional preparation degree programmes is adapted to accommodate the MBA's short cycle (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Overview of Conceptual Framework



MBA's use [1] educational processes that “maximize the potential for achieving the expected outcomes” (AACSB, 2016, p.28). RQ1 seeks to interpret what learners and educators perceive professionalism to be through the identification of educational processes that lead to professional preparation outcomes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Moreover, it seeks to place these processes across three development stages. RQ2 seeks to identify [2] professional preparation outcomes, which Stark et al. (1986) categorise in detail. While learning outcomes can contribute cursory data, the subjectivity of professionalism suggests that RQ2 is best considered from the professional perspectives of MBA educators, corroborated by students.

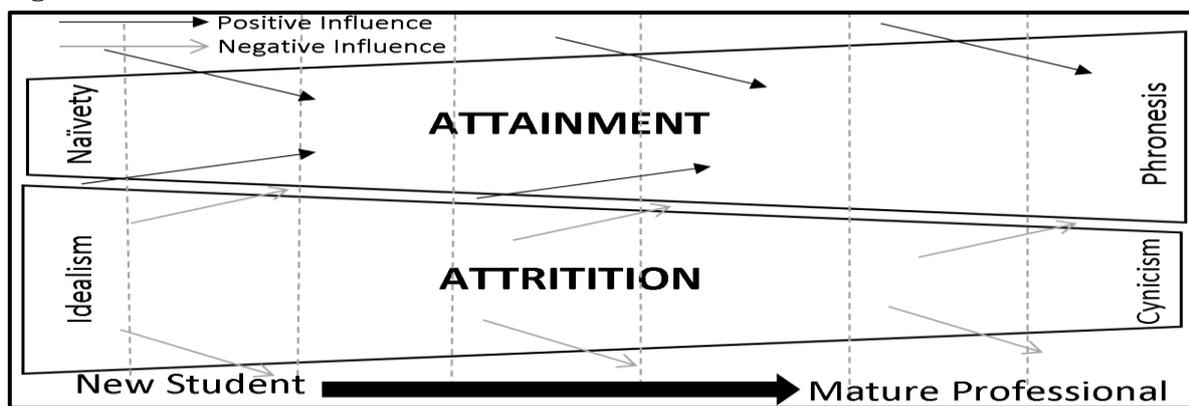
1.3.2 Scope of Study

Whilst trust between society and professionals is central to professionalism (Beaton, 2010), it is a two-way contract. The study will not cover the impact of professional preparation outcomes in this contract as it would require longitudinal analysis. Instead, it will examine proxy factors of trust by exploring educational processes and outcomes as antecedents to it. Student evaluations are often conducted on the basis of whether they would be trusted to do the job in practice. Similarly, whilst the study will not examine influencers directly, as they are outside the control of those tasked with delivery, MBA descriptive characteristics may take account of many influencers. A useful analysis, for example, would be to compare responses based on different types of accreditation. Hence, the scope is focused on [1] professional preparation outcomes and [2] educational processes used to achieve them.

1.3.3 Supporting Theories

Stark et al.'s (1986) framework is useful for evaluating degrees seeking to optimise curricula in occupations chasing professional status (Ralph, 2008). However, it tells us little about how professionalism is developed. Psychologists identify three assumptions underpinning development (Rees, 2005). The first relates to nature versus nurture. The second relates to learners: are they passive or active? The third relates to whether professionalism occurs in stages or continuously? Hilton and Slotnick (2005) coined proto-professionalism as a period before which professionalism is attained, implying that it is an acquired state of phronesis from learning from experience and reflection. They use theories, such as psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950) and moral development (Rest and Narvaez, 1994), to illustrate how opposing processes, attainment and attrition, influence how it unfolds (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Proto-Professionalism



Source: Adapted from Hilton and Slotnick (2005)

As an acquired state, rather than trait, a key assumption underpinning Hilton and Slotnick's (2005) model is that environmental factors contribute more to professionalism than biological factors. Arnold and Stern (2006) also emphasise environmental influences, advocating developmental models based on career stage whilst Miller (1990) offers a staged model for clinical skills acquisition. For MBAs, Varela et al. (2013) advocate for a staged approach to skills development, beginning with task-specific, often disconnected, knowledge (Logan, 1985), gradually integrated and used to guide application (Anderson, 1982), resulting in automated skills (Fitts, 1964). The idea that this requires a lengthy process poses challenges in terms of what can be achieved during an MBA. Whilst these theoretical works contribute to the prickly issues concerning professionalism and its development, they do not explain if there are, in fact, different developmental stages nor what their associated timeframes might be. A full theory on how professionalism is developed would likely require longitudinal studies

deploying ethnographic methods. Notwithstanding, Somers et al. (2014) link professionalism to managerial learning, using Abbott's (1988) concepts of diagnosis, treatment and inference. This study offers new contexts to which Hilton and Slotnick's (2005) framework and Stark et al.'s (1986) study of how professionalism unfolds can be extended.

1.4 Structure of Paper

Having identified the purpose of the study and its theoretical underpinning, the paper proceeds as follows. The research design chosen to answer the two research questions is justified in Section 2, outlining why a qualitative analysis of data from interviews with MBA educators and student / graduate focus groups is considered the best form of empirical research to produce the required data. The "MBA" is a metaphor for MBAs in general. Hence, Section 3 outlines a cursory analysis of the MBA landscape to support identification of a representative sample of MBAs and their characteristics as a suitable context for the study. The proposed data gathering processes are reviewed in Section 4, detailing the interview and focus group activities and steps to be taken to ensure that the data acquisition is conducted within the norms of these processes. First-pass interview and focus group guides offer loosely structured frameworks for initiating dialogue, probing for information and building trust. As the data is likely to be contextual (Silverman, 2013), there is a challenge in translating the richness and uniqueness of a subject's situation into themes. Section 5 details three approaches based on immersion/crystallisation (Borkan, 1999), constant comparison (Glaser, 2017) and qualitative comparison (Ragin, 1987) to be used to support a thematic analysis. Section 6 navigates important issues so that findings can be brought to a closure (Miles and Huberman, 1984). These include: the study's limitations and contributions, ethical issues in qualitative (Miller et al., 2012) and educational (Burgess, 2005) research and proposed strategies to ensure data quality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

1.5 Concluding Remarks

The nebulous nature of professionalism along with the embryonic stage of research on managerial professionalism requires the research questions to be setup so that meaning can be extracted from reflections of key actors, i.e. students, graduates and educators. These questions are best considered from a professional perspective, answers to which are most likely qualitative in nature. Yet, we cannot ignore prior attempts, however imperfect, to measure aspects of professionalism. Graduate focus group questions relating to autonomy, expertise, self-concept, social agency and behaviours valued by employers (Clark et al., 2012) can provide rudimentary signals as a basis for transitioning this study to future quantitative enquiry.

2. PROPOSED RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

“The idea of acquiring an ‘inside’ understanding –the actor’s definitions of the situation – is a powerful concept for understanding ... qualitative enquiry” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 102).

2.1 An Exploratory Approach

This section articulates the logic that links the research objective to data collection and analysis (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). Intended to be exploratory in nature, this study incorporates “broad-ranging, intentional, systematic data collection designed to maximize discovery of generalizations based on understanding of an area of social life” (Stebbins, 2008, p.327). An exploratory approach is chosen for two reasons. First, a chasm exists between empirical data on professionalism in education for the archetype professions and prototype statements on managerial professionalism, which is at a preliminary stage of investigation. Until a more thorough understanding of professionalism in management education is diagnosed, there is a limited basis on which to conduct valid, reliable and scalable quantitative research. An exploratory approach can provide a solid foundation for more systematic quantitative research later by acquiring an overview understanding first. Second, professionalism is a multi-dimensional and multi-perspective construct (Hodges et al., 2011). The study warrants a comparison of differing perceptions. Interpreting these perceptions is required to examine if existing professionalism concepts travel to management education, to identify new concepts and, even, to articulate tentative theories. Notwithstanding, exploratory research has limitations. A small sample size can, for example, limit generalisability. Arriving at definitive conclusions can be problematic in the absence of rigorous design.

2.2 Philosophical Positioning of the Study

The nebulous and idiosyncratic nature of professionalism precludes a widely accepted definition. Attempts to define it typically use different behavioural traits, for which there is no definitive list. Within management, professionalism has been described using various constructs (Despotidou and Prastacos, 2012; Nino, 2014; Romme et al., 2015), demonstrating that its meaning is interpreted widely. How to interpret and accommodate diverse perceptions of something as multifaceted and complex as professionalism is a key challenge in this study. Given the subjective nature of the information that the study seeks to uncover, the underlying epistemology leans towards a subjectivist epistemology and relativist ontology, i.e. a constructivist-interpretive approach (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), to reveal different perceptions of what constitutes professionalism. It assumes that it is on these perceptions that MBA

educators construct their views of how to embed it. The study accepts and analyses their constructions of reality (Searle, 1995). In other words, professionalism is assumed to be subjectively, interpersonally and socially constructed within individuals.

That is not to preclude more positivist-oriented approaches, such as those evident in the more mature literature on professionalism in the education of lawyers and doctors. To the contrary, discerning signals and patterns of embeddedness from qualitative comparison, however rudimentary, can provide a basis for later construct validity and help with definition and measurement problems. Consequently, it is proposed to complete the study by evaluating the perceived impact of MBAs on constituent factors of professionalism, as part of the graduate focus group, to facilitate extending the work to a more scalable quantitative study in the future. Notwithstanding, the embryonic nature of research on managerial professionalism is suited to an interpretive approach that can yield a rich understanding of complex issues. Hence, the value of this philosophical positioning is as much aligned with how understanding fits with the emic perspectives of its participants as it can be generalised to MBAs. Criteria used to evaluate the findings in this interpretive paradigm include dependability, credibility, confirmability and transferability. "The basis of qualitative research lies in the interpretive approach to social reality" (Holloway, 1997, p.2). As the research aims to understand how participants make sense of their experiences of professionalism in MBAs, the data sought will be qualitative and subject to analysis that is intuitive, context-dependent and existential (Miles, 1979).

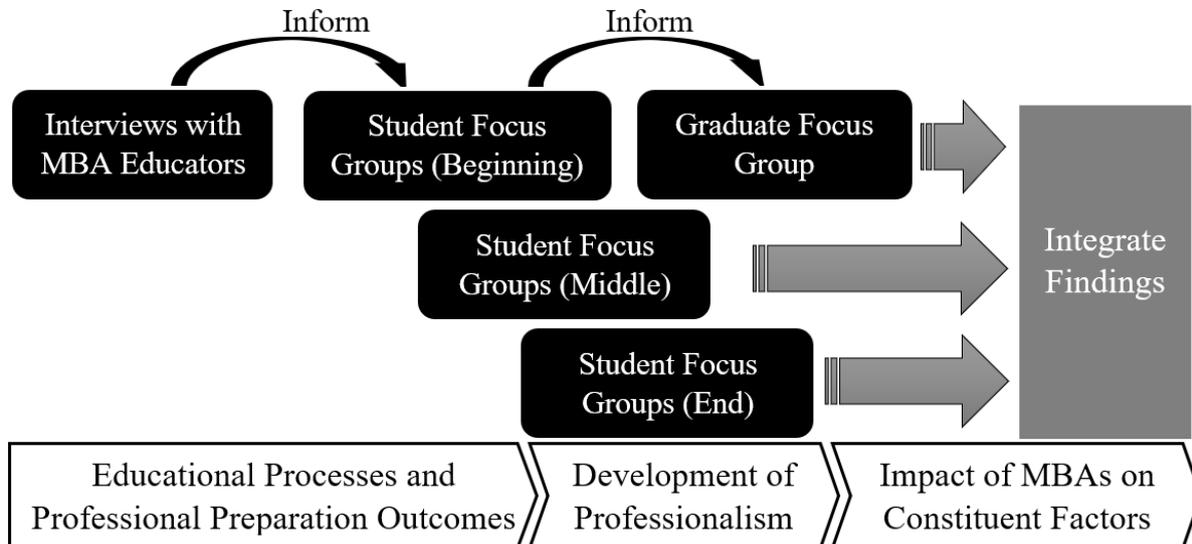
2.3 Multi-Phase Design

The research design is largely dictated by the research questions, which, in turn, are largely dependent on their context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). To facilitate triangulation, the research design is framed by three phases as the most plausible way to conduct the investigation. Qualitative findings from interviews with MBA educators will inform the approach to student focus groups, which will, in turn, inform the approach to the graduate focus group (Figure 3). Rather than relying on objective methods, such as surveys, both interviews and focus groups will facilitate an 'up-close and personal' analysis of the key actors' perspectives.

This design is inherently multi-method in focus, reflecting an attempt to capture an in-depth understanding of professionalism from multiple sources. There are three main reasons for pursuing such an approach. Firstly, whilst quantitative instruments have been used to measure professionalism in other contexts, it is unclear which constituent factors of professionalism are

most relevant to MBA studies or to MBA graduate employers. A qualitative study, based on interviews with MBA educators, can help to pinpoint and prioritise these factors.

Figure 3: Proposed Research Design



Secondly, given the nebulous nature of professionalism, there needs to be some basis on which to conduct meaningful focus group sessions with students. Some provisional findings based on interviews with MBA educators can provide such a basis for student focus groups, which can provide insight into the development of professionalism, from new student to near-graduate. Graduates, with hindsight, can link their education to their current roles and reflect on how professionalism is acquired, valued by employers and maintained. Thirdly, a multi-phase approach allows for all elements identified in the conceptual framework of to be studied. The deployment of this design allows for linking prior research on attempting to measure constituent factors of professionalism with interpreting what the nebulous concept of professionalism means in an MBA context, and, by extension, in a managerial context, as a synthesis of those factors. This, in turn, can provide an opportunity to generate the necessary data that might facilitate quantitative enquiry in a future scalable study (Creswell et al., 2003). Hence, the research design accommodates multiple data sources, different timings and methods, adding rigour, breadth and richness to the study. Whilst time consuming, interviews and focus groups will play a key role in gathering the data as they represent the most viable way to access knowledge from student, graduate and educator experiences (Silverman, 2013).

2.3.1 Units of Analysis

To ensure an appropriate balance between granularity and coherency, several units of analysis and associated sub-units have been identified (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Selected Units of Analysis

Professionalism	Context: MBA Programmes		
Constructs	Professional Preparation Outcomes	Educational Processes	Key Actors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expertise ▪ Social Agency ▪ Self-Concept ▪ Autonomy ▪ Employability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Competencies ▪ Values ▪ Behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Curriculum ▪ Pedagogy ▪ Assessment ▪ Selection ▪ Role-Modelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educators ▪ Students ▪ Graduates

Given that the primary unit of analysis is professionalism, prior constructs, which serve as accepted developmental factors of professionalism, are included as sub-units of analysis. These include: expertise (Romme, 2016), social agency (Nino, 2014), self-concept (Haywood-Farmer and Stuart, 1990), autonomy (Hall, 1968) and employability (Clark et al., 2012). Expertise or the expert body of knowledge is what distinguishes a profession’s jurisdiction for solving societal problems (Somers et al., 2012). Typical indicators for expertise might include a desire to become an authority figure in a specialist management field; academic grades on the MBA; a desire for recognition from colleagues as an expert in a management field and; a willingness to take on greater management responsibility.

Given the vital importance of sense of responsibility and ethical disposition to professionals, social agency is considered an important developmental factor of professionalism (Friedson, 2001). Nino (2014) focused on the extent to which students perceive social issues and their respective contributions as an important goal. Examples include leading community-based initiatives; promoting workplace diversity; leading initiatives to promote sustainability; maintaining currency on social and political affairs; and helping others less well off or in financial difficulty. Self-Concept is an important factor in professionalism as prior research suggests that expertise drives a sense of superiority (Haywood-Farmer and Stuart, 1990) over others. Self-confidence, leadership potential, public speaking ability and understanding of others can be considered important indicators of self-concept.

Professionals exercise judgement, often in the absence of close supervision. Autonomy of Judgment is, thus, considered an important factor in professionalism. Moore and Rosenblum (1970) defined it as independent judgment guided by specialist knowledge. Nino (2014) selected: analytical and problem-solving ability; critical thinking ability; general knowledge and knowledge of a particular business field as key indicators for autonomy of judgment.

Through an iterative ranking process of words drawn from literature on leadership, teamwork, recruiting and human resource management, Clark et al. (2012) developed a descriptive model of professionalism for business graduates as perceived by employers. Appearance, integrity, responsibility, effectiveness, conscientiousness, ability to collaborate and respectfulness were all identified as indicators of professionalism from the perspective of employers. Clark et al.'s (2012) work suggests considerable commonality between professionalism and employability.

It is also important to emphasise that in seeking to interpret managerial professionalism, the MBA provides the context for the study whereas constructs for exploring developmental aspects of professionalism, such as expertise, social agency, autonomy of judgement and self-concept, provide a basis for a thematic analysis of professionalism itself. Any attempt to evaluate the perceived impact of MBAs on their learners' professionalism will, therefore, take account of these constructs. While the constituent factors listed above serve as a guide for qualitative analysis, the analysis is not limited to these factors only. Educational processes and professional preparation outcomes relate to Stark et al.'s (1986) evaluation of academic programmes along professional lines. Learners and educators provide a lens through which their perceptions can contribute to understanding the cognitive, psychosocial and epistemological aspects to the development of professionalism.

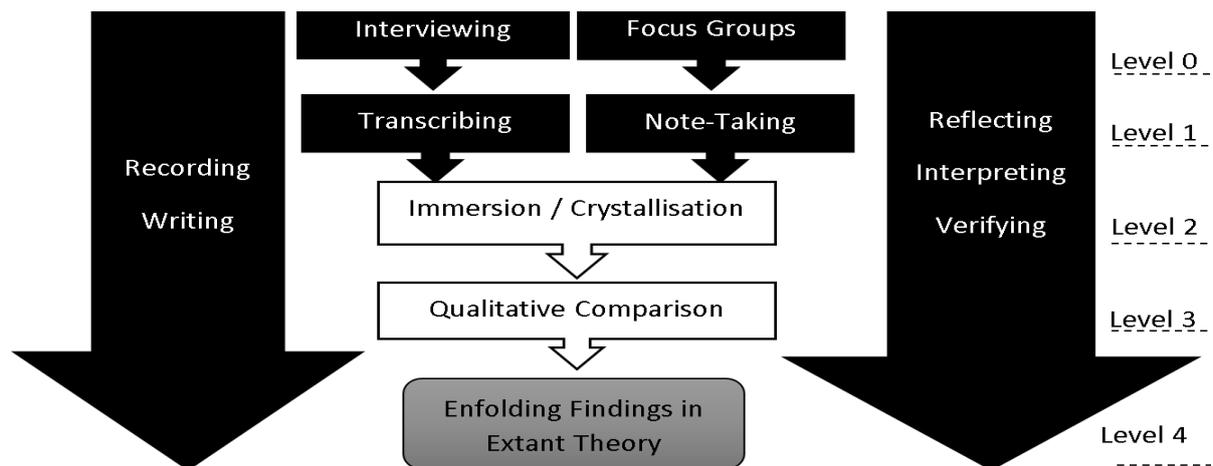
2.3.2 Sources of Data and Collection Techniques

To facilitate triangulation and to broaden insight, three data sources are to be used in the study: [1] the experiences of educators; [2] perceptions of professionalism from students and graduates, as well as; [3] supporting documentation, such as learning outcomes, student handbooks, validation reports, assessment guidelines. Educator interviews and focus groups with students and graduates will comprise the principle data qualitative collection methods.

2.3.3 Approach to Qualitative Data Analysis

Figure 5 presents the proposed framework for a thematic analysis of interview and focus group data. The framework is based on four analytical levels, with increasing levels of abstraction, guided by constant comparison, immersion-crystallisation and qualitative comparison. This approach will allow for a range of interpretive analytical styles (Crabtree and Miller, 1992) to be used, from highly intuitive immersion/crystallisation to quasi-statistical qualitative comparison. The approach aims to link professionalism and its recognised developmental factors, *suis generis*, as the primary focus of the study to the MBA as the context for the study.

Figure 5: Proposed Approach to Qualitative Data Analysis



Level 0, i.e. data collection, will be based mainly on audio-recordings of the interviews and focus groups but will also include fields notes, reflections and other remarks recorded. Level 1 involves writing each transcript and associated notes, sorting and shifting through them, and developing inductively an initial set of codes (Patton, 2002). It will assist with identifying potential patterns, common phrases, themes and data categories. Level 2 requires the researcher to step back from the analysis by re-reading transcripts in detail before suspending this immersion so that iterative and reflexive cycles of analyses can be conducted to crystallise further insights. Gradually, higher level themes and the relationships between themes will be established. Level 3 will shift to the more structured qualitative comparison (Ragin, 1989), which will be used to ascertain patterns and to map high-level codes to a priori literature themes, such as established factors of professionalism. Level 4 requires findings to be clustered without reference to prior theory. Findings will then be interpreted in the context of extant literature (Eisenhardt, 1989), opening possibilities for theorising.

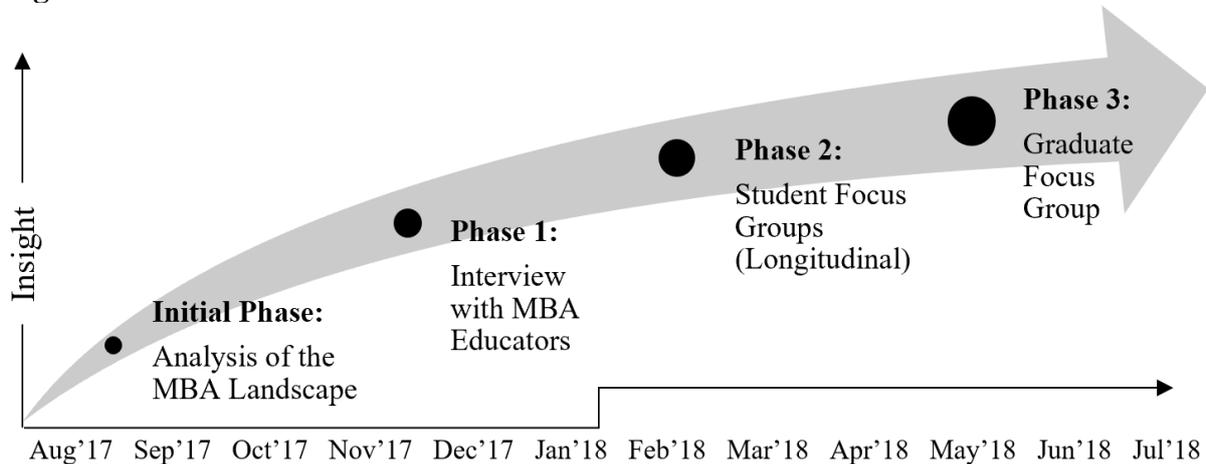
2.3.4 Linking the Study to Prior Empirical Work

Nino (2014) explored many of the accepted developmental factors of professionalism, such as autonomy, expertise, social agency and self-concept, in undergraduate business students. Similarly, Clark et al. (2012) constructed a model of professionalism based on employability. The underlying concepts of Nino (2014) and Clark et al. (2012) offer a basis for a thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups, in essence providing an opportunity to map inductively generated codes to pre-existing concepts. Given that much of the curriculum in undergraduate business studies is similar to that in the MBA (Spender, 2012), this approach will allow us to explore whether Clarke et al.'s (2012) concepts of professionalism, from the perspective of employers, translate to MBA students.

2.4 Implementation Plan

With circa. twelve months to conduct the investigation, a tentative implementation plan is outlined in Figure 6. Although the phases are indicative and not necessarily sequential, there are some contingencies that place constraints on when research activities can occur.

Figure 6: Indicative Research Phases and Timelines



An initial analysis of characteristic data in the public domain (Appendix I) will provide insight into what is being reported with respect to professionalism on MBAs. This analysis will be used to assist with purposive sampling of MBAs as a suitable context for the study. Subsequent phases are contingent on this analysis. Phase 1 requires a series of semi-structured interviews with MBA programme directors and lecturers, focused on identifying professional preparation outcomes and educational processes. Phase 2 represents an undertaking of student focus groups at the beginning, middle and end of the MBA. As a reflection-in-action, it represents a longitudinal analysis, attempting to capture the development of professionalism. Finally, Phase 3 requires a graduate focus group to reflect on how professionalism has been developed and then maintained in their managerial roles. Thematic analyses of interview and focus group data will be undertaken with the assistance of the NVivo 11 software platform.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

Refinement of theoretical underpinnings, such as those of Nino (2014) and Hilton and Slotnick (2005), is challenging in contexts where a priori constructs are nebulous, obscuring linkages between empirical data and theory. This is the scenario in which this study seeks to diagnose the complexities of embedding professionalism in MBAs. Hence, a multi-phase design with different data sources is proposed to explore these complexities and to articulate patterns across them. The next section details the initial phase of analysis (of the MBA landscape) and process for selecting a sample of MBA students and educators for the study.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE MBA LANDSCAPE AND SAMPLING

“The MBA curriculum is noticeably homogenous around the world – taught in English with similar texts ... built on similar notions” (Spender, 2014, p. 430).

3.1 Introduction

Since its beginnings at Tuck in 1900, the MBA has been among the most persistent initiatives to provide students with skills for managing organisations and people. Few would argue against its global significance (Lewington, 2016). In 2014, Business surpassed Education as the most popular post-graduate course in the US. Steady growth in graduates and GMAT applications depict its popularity (Byrne, 2014), which stems from a value-proposition of employer acceptance and career enhancement. Yet, the MBA landscape is neither static nor uniform. Mid-ranked MBA’s, no longer considered sound investments, have struggled in recent years while the elite MBAs strengthen (Bradshaw, 2015). GMAT enrolment figures, the de facto entry-test, covers 238 full-time, 117 part-time and 33 on-line MBAs (GMAC, 2016). AMBA accreditation encompassed 245 business schools in 54 countries (AMBA, 2017). These statistics convey a global imprint, which facilitates media rankings. Not all MBAs are captured by accreditation or meet ranking criteria. The MBA is an unlicensed entity and differences in curriculum and pedagogy exist. Spender (2014) argues, however, that these differences are mere variations within a shared conceptual framework. The level of homogeneity of MBA curriculum and pedagogy lends itself to a using a relatively small sample of MBAs as a context to the study. There is unlikely to be significant variation across programmes, which renders a cross-case analysis unnecessary. A sample of students, graduates and educators from MBAs in a given geographical area can suffice in representing the global MBA landscape. Even a single case-study MBA may be illustrative of findings from across a wider spectrum of programmes. MBA providers are not the sole providers of management education or training. Roche (2010) outlines a much wider landscape of management education and training activities (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Spectrum of Management Education and Training Activities



3.2 The Irish MBA Landscape

The first programme in Ireland was offered by University College Dublin as an Executive MBA in 1964 with over 200 applicants for 15 places (McGuire, 2009). Today, more than 400 students graduate annually from 10 plus MBAs offered in Ireland (McCarthy, 2017). Two types of MBAs dominate the market. Full-time MBAs tend to attract a younger cohort with less experience than intakes into part-time executive MBAs who are often funded by their employers (Faller, 2014). To remain consistent with the notion that the development of professionalism requires practice-based pedagogy, executive MBAs are chosen as a more focused context for the study. Most of these programmes specify their curricula using a lingua franca aligned to qualifications frameworks harmonised in the wake of Bologna (Jurše and Tominc, 2008). An analysis of this sample, as a microcosm of the wider MBA landscape, can contribute to a broad understanding of context. More significantly, it can inform purposive selection of specific MBAs that have specific characteristics of interest (Appendix I).

3.3 Sources of Data for MBA Landscape Analysis

A wide range of data sources can aid analysis (Table 2). Most, if not all, MBAs have brochures or web-site marketing outlining important consumer data to prospective students. They typically include abbreviated course descriptors, duration of studies, delivery mode, entry requirements, fees, profile of graduates and accreditation, among others.

Table 2: Publicly Available Data on MBA Programmes

▪ Programme Brochures	▪ Programmatic Review	▪ Media Articles
▪ Web-Site Marketing	▪ Ranking Scores	▪ Course Descriptors
▪ Validation Reports	▪ Accreditation Requirements	▪ Programme Aims or Outcomes

Most new programmes undergo a formal validation process, in which the curriculum, the delivery team and academic policies are assessed against international standards and stakeholder requirements. Links to two sample reports are provided in Appendix II.

Most programmes are also subject to periodic review and enhancement processes so that they remain relevant to key stakeholders. These reviews either focus on a single programme or on a cluster of programmes within a school. Links to sample reports are provided in Appendix III.

Ranking scores are based on published criteria, such as value for money, career enhancement, internationalisation and research metrics (Appendix IV). For those MBAs that pursue rankings, improving their score drives certain priorities for enhancing educational processes. Different accrediting bodies prioritise different requirements, such as curricular composition,

competencies, assessment rigour, faculty quality and delivery. Accrediting bodies, such as AMBA, EQUIS and AACSB, have specific requirements with respect to professionalism. The UN Principles for Responsible Management Education is also making inroads into MBAs, promoting altruism and ethics as key components of professionalism. Hence, an analysis of the accreditation context as an important influencer may yield useful insight. There are also numerous media articles on individual MBA programmes and the sector. Several articles question the value of MBAs against their own mantra of career progression (e.g. Dundon, 2014; Reddan, 2017) where others peddle potential career benefits (e.g. Faller, 2015). There are also many articles that merely report updates or happenings across the MBA community. Some MBAs also publish their course descriptors and programme outcomes (Appendix V).

3.4 Data Analysis

Given the volume of information available on MBAs in the public domain, a first-pass text-mining of data (Liddy, 2000) will be undertaken to capture semantic information. Various techniques such as key-words in context, content analysis, k-means clustering, inverse document frequency and event extraction will be deployed. The objective of this approach is to produce an exploratory analysis, which succinctly informs the description of the Irish executive MBA. A further manual analysis, using NVivo, will focus on references to professionalism or its pseudonyms (Table 3).

Table 3: Typical Synonyms of Professionalism Values and Behaviours

Integrity	Effectiveness	Responsibility	Collaboratives	Conscientiousness	Respectfulness	Appearance
Trustworthy	Efficient	Reliable	Participatory	Perceptive	Courteous	Attire/Dress
Honest	Motivate	Accountable	Cooperative	Insightful	Polite	Grooming
Honourable	Quality	Committed	Communicative	Introspective	Mannerly	Posture
Loyal	Purposeful	Dutiful	Collegial	Receptive	Genuine	Demeanour
Principled	Organised	Punctual	Accommodating	Inquisitive	Mature	Etiquette
Lawful	Proactive	Concerned	Enterprising	Reflective	Pleasant	Bright
Dedicated	Analytical	Resolute	Helpful	Intrigued	Prudent	Enthusiastic

Source: Clark et al. (2012)

To achieve this, a constant comparison analysis will be undertaken deductively whereby pre-identified codes, such as professionalism pseudonyms, are looked for in the data.

3.5 Sampling of Participants

Recruiting MBA educators for interview is more problematic. Participation consumes their time. It may also require ethical approval from their respective institutions. While information

provided can be anonymised and not attributed to any programme, the competitive nature of the Irish MBA landscape makes anonymity challenging. All participant MBA educators will be invited to a post-study workshop to highlight the study’s key findings. Should access to educators become problematic within the relatively small number of Executive MBAs in the Irish market, extension to MBA educators outside of Ireland will be considered.

A longitudinal analysis of the development of professionalism is even more problematic as this is likely to consume considerable time. There are three possible options for implementation. The first is to recruit students from across the sector. However, this is unlikely given the time commitment involved. The second is to interview those students individually on their terms. However, the logistics in lining up participants who are at the beginning, middle and end of their studies may be challenging. The final option is to choose students from a single MBA (or very small number of MBAs) as an illustrative case-study (Yin, 1994) and to argue its generalisability. For pragmatic reasons, this is the preferred option.

Recruitment of MBA graduates for a focus group to reflect on the findings towards the end of the study is relatively low risk. This can be organised through an event with the MBA Association of Ireland or an extension of the illustrative case-study of a single MBA. This will be a once-off event, designed to bring the study full-circle. Purposive selection of MBAs may also come into the equation, although this must be tempered with a willingness to participate. Selection is not merely a matter of whether or not MBAs meet a checklist of criteria. Such checklists can help to screen for MBAs that may be completely inappropriate but, more importantly, short-listing of MBAs of interest is best undertaken on the basis that they have specific characteristics of use to the study (Table 4).

Table 4: Examples of Descriptive Characteristics of MBA Programmes

Characteristic	Why might it be a factor in selection?
<i>Age</i>	It may be worth exploring the impact of MBA age on professionalism.
<i>Accreditation</i>	It may be worth exploring different emphases that accrediting bodies place on professionalism within programmes.
<i>Ranking</i>	Does ranking have an impact on emphasis placed on professionalism??
<i>Entry Criteria</i>	Do MBAs deploy entry-criteria that screen for professionalism?
<i>Course Content</i>	Some MBAs may have specific courses dedicated to professional development or key dimensions of professionalism, such as ethics.
<i>Pedagogy</i>	Some MBAs report use of practice-based pedagogy, such as consultancy.

Characteristic	Why might it be a factor in selection?
<i>Delivery Mode</i>	Do part-time or executive MBAs have advantage in leveraging the students' workplace? How is professionalism embedded in online MBAs?
<i>Parent Institution</i>	It may be worth exploring if MBAs of publicly owned institution differ in emphasis on professionalism from MBAs of privately-owned institutions.
<i>Curricular Specialisations</i>	Do specific specialist MBAs, e.g. MBAs in Healthcare, demonstrate greater embeddedness of professionalism than others?
<i>Subscription to an Oath</i>	It may be worth exploring the impact on professionalism of programmes whose graduates sign an oath or code of conduct.

There are many more characteristics that could influence selection, such as flagship employers, fees, school mission, professional background of students, faculty mix, student-teacher ratio etc. However, much is contingent on the analysis of the MBA landscape. Each participant, whether student, graduate, educator or, indeed, MBA programme, must weigh-up the benefits, risks and resources involved in participation. To be informed fully, a participant information sheet and consent form will be provided (Appendix VI).

3.6 Differences with Conceptual Framework.

It is important to recognise that the conceptual framework does not necessarily match perfectly the reality of Executive MBAs. Field immersion, through work experience, is not part of mainstream delivery. Its short delivery cycle poses challenges in terms of staged skills development and many students are already highly experienced professionals. The MBA is a post-experience qualification whereas most (not all) higher education programmes designed to prepare students for entry into a profession are pre-experience qualifications.

3.7 Concluding Remarks

The research design relies on the appropriate participation of students, graduates, educators and, perhaps, programmes, that are representative of the broader MBA landscape. Executive MBAs are chosen as their cohorts are typically more mature, may have developed a level of professionalism already and most likely have a working environment in which to apply their learning, making them more amenable to further development of professionalism. The Irish MBA landscape can offer a broad scattering of executive MBAs as a suitable context to the study. Hence, an initial phase of analysis is required to articulate a detailed description of this context and fine-tune the selection of participants. Once participation is finalised, data collection through in-depth interviews and focus groups can proceed.

4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

“If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk to them?” Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.xvii).

4.1 Introduction

After securing commitment for participation in the study, the next logical step will be to pursue data collection. This section outlines three data collection processes to be used, namely semi-structured interviews, focus groups and acquiring supporting documentation. At the root of these approaches is a desire to understand the experiences of students, graduates and educators and meanings they make of those experiences, including areas of difference and congruence. All methods focus on acquiring qualitative data to interpret professionalism (Vygotsky, 1987).

4.2 In-Depth Interviews

Interviews are an excellent way to learn from people’s stories. Interviewing is a process of extracting details of experiences, through conversation, reflecting on them, ordering them and, thereby, making sense of them (Schutz, 1967). Educators directly involved in design and delivery of MBA programmes are probably those most qualified to tell the story of their respective programmes. They are tasked with delivering educational processes that lead to intended learning outcomes. MBA programme directors have overall responsibility for programme delivery. Hence, it is proposed to conduct one interview with several directors from across the sector with follow-ups as necessary. Similarly, there may be particular lecturers on the delivery teams that each director may suggest for interview, based on either some aspect of the programme that is of specific interest to the study or on specific expertise or knowledge that they could share. Interviews will be planned to take place at the place of work of each interviewee to assist with generating a relaxed atmosphere in which to collect the information.

4.2.1. Basic Protocol

A basic protocol will be followed to guide implementation and administration of each interview (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Once informal consent has been given to participate, each programme director will be contacted to setup a meeting to explain more about the study, to provide them with a copy of the interview guide and to seek written informed consent (Appendix VII) to be interviewed. It will also be used to build rapport in advance of the interview (Palmer, 1928; Douglas, 1985) so that any apprehensions can be addressed. The interview will take place at an agreed date, preferably on location where the MBA is delivered but, failing that, at a location that is convenient for the interviewee. An introduction will be

read out at the beginning of the interview and written consent will be sought if not already obtained. The interview will proceed with a series of predetermined open-ended questions along with other questions emerging from the dialogue. Written notes from the discussions will be taken. Once all the guiding questions have been asked, the interview will be drawn to a close but not before the interviewee is given an opportunity to add any further information and ask questions. The interviewee will be asked if they are happy with how the interview has been conducted and permission will be sought from them to contact them for further clarifications.

4.2.2 Transcribing

A reliable digital recorder will be acquired and practice using it will be undertaken in advance of the interview. Immediately following the interview, the researcher will listen to the recording, take additional notes and make a list of interview commentaries that require further clarification, verification or supporting documentary evidence. The recording will be sent for transcribing (under signed confidentiality). A password protected and encrypted copy of the transcripts will be stored securely in the cloud and a copy will be sent to the relevant interviewee. Given that there can be issues with the accuracy of transcripts (Poland, 2002), the transcript will be read (by the researcher) while listening to the original recording to ensure that meaning has not been lost. Once this is complete, original recordings will be destroyed.

4.2.3 Navigating Ethical Issues

Although wider ethical issues associated with this study will be covered in Section 6, there are specific issues with respect to interviewing that must be handled appropriately. Semi-structured interviews are not totally prescribed. The very act of listening and reflecting back information to interviewees can unfold in unforeseen ways (Warren, 2002). Interviewees may unintentionally provide information that could jeopardise their own roles or damage their MBA. This information will be kept anonymous and protected. The full purpose of the study and commitments required of MBA programme directors (and other lecturers) will be made explicit in advance. The success of the study relies on continued engagement by participants. Care will be taken so as not to put interviewees in any position such that they feel they must disengage. They will be afforded all opportunity to stop any line of questioning at any time, so they continue to remain comfortable at all stages during the interviews. Each interview is expected to last 90 minutes, although a pilot interview will be undertaken in advance to confirm the duration. The pilot will be used as an opportunity to practice technique, fine-tune questions and to surface unpredicted answers. Data from the pilot will may be included in the study.

4.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups represent a data gathering technique, which relies on interviewing several participants simultaneously (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Three separate focus group sessions will be conducted with identified students who are at the beginning, middle and end of the MBA studies with an additional focus group with a collective of MBA graduates. Groups will be kept to between 9 and 12 students. This provides a reasonable balance between having enough participants for diversity of information and creating an atmosphere where students feel comfortable sharing their experiences (Onwuegbuzie, et al., 2009). The students, themselves, are well qualified to render judgment on how the MBA's educational processes contribute to the development of their professionalism. As they encounter all aspects of their programme (Ory, 2001), they can contribute to a reflection-in-action of professionalism in their MBA. It is anticipated that each focus group session will last between 1 and 2 hours.

The decision to pursue focus groups with students, instead of interviews, is a pragmatic one. Less threatening than individual interviews, focus groups are ideal for conducting enquiry with a class of students that have a shared experience and unarticulated norms. It is not an attempt to short-circuit acquisition of data from several students individually (Duggleby, 2005). The benefits associated with group dynamics (Carey and Smith, 1994; Morgan, 1997) may help to overcome communications barriers that would exist if students were interviewed individually and to unearth multiple perspectives of professionalism. Students will be recruited through their respective schools. If possible, a time will be agreed with each school for a very brief presentation to be given to the students on the purpose of the research and to seek informed consent, a few weeks in advance of each focus group session.

Some basic house-keeping issues, including that of confidentiality, reminder of purpose and that the focus group will be audio-recorded, will be highlighted at the beginning of each session (Krueger and Casey, 1994). Focus group activities will follow an inductive design (Stewart et al., 2007) to minimise the possibility of students reflecting the rhetoric of their teachers or pre-dispositions of the researcher. In addition to the questions outlined in the interview guide, students will be first asked individually to complete a worksheet with open-ended questions on professionalism and then to confer in groups (Appendix VIII). The focus group will then proceed, largely along the lines of questioning in the interview guide. Each sub-group of three students will be given A0 paper and markers to summarise text and diagram answers. Each student within a sub-group will be assigned a role of timekeeper, note-taker or speaker.

Answers will be shared in discussion format before moving to the next question. When all questions are complete, each sub-group will be asked to highlight key findings.

There will, therefore, be two types of data acquired from the focus groups. The first is the audio-recording, which will be subject to the same transcription procedures, destruction and transcript storage as those for the interviews. The second is the individual worksheets that students will complete and the third refers to the large A0 sheets collected from student groups after each question. The focus group with graduates will follow a similar format except for two additional questions related to [i] what do they think professionalism means to their employers and [ii] how has the MBA impacted on their professional development?

Compared with individual interviews, it is more difficult to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants using the focus group approach (Smith, 1995). However, the benefits of the group effect (Carey and Smith, 1994) and of the diversity of perspectives outweigh the risks given that the discussions of the focus groups are limited to relatively non-sensitive information. All participants will be asked to sign a non-disclosure declaration. The moderator will also outline to each group the procedures for data capture and storage to protect anonymity. Whilst focus groups and interviews can provide valuable insights into the perspectives of students and educators, they capture their versions of reality (Hewitt, 2007) only. For this reason, supplementary evidence will be sought through available documentation.

4.4 Documentary Evidence

To support the analysis, several documentation types common to the relevant MBA will be sought from programme directors prior to interview. These include course descriptors and programme outcomes; examples of learning activities to support the development of professionalism; assessments of professionalism; and examples of curricula that address individual dimensions of professionalism. After each interview, additional documentation may be sought from the MBA programme director to support claims made in the interviews. All documentation will be treated confidentially.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

The decision to use interviews, focus groups and support documentation to collect the data is hardly surprising given the qualitative nature of the data being sought. However, the data is likely to be high in volume, detailed and highly contextual, making it more difficult to analyse and extract key findings. The next section outlines the processes for the analysis of the data.

5. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

“.. that all talk through which people generate meaning is contextual, and that the contexts will inevitably somewhat colour the meaning” (Dahlgren 1988, p. 292).

5.1 Introduction

The data collection activities will yield data in several formats (Table 5). Different lenses are required for a complete analysis. For example, some data may be relevant to a specific MBA programme whereas others, such as the graduate focus group transcripts, may be more reflective of the wider sector. Different perceptions from different participant groups may corroborate or conflict with each other, thereby enriching the analysis.

Table 5: Different Data Types Arising from Proposed Data Gathering Activities

Type	Description	Format	Perceptions
1	Interview Transcripts	Text (Originally Audio)	Educators
2	Focus Group Transcripts	Text (Originally Audio)	Students
3	Focus Group Transcript	Text (Originally Audio)	Graduates
4	Focus Group Worksheets	Text / Diagrams	Students
5	Supporting Documents	Text	N/A
6	Focus Group A0 Notes	Text / Diagrams	Students

This section outlines how a thematic analysis, will be conducted in line with the framework outlined in section 2.3.4. Given that this will inevitably involve analysing large amounts of text, diagrammatic and audio data, NVivo will be used to support analytical techniques.

5.2 Constant Comparison

A constant comparison analysis will be used to inductively code data into themes. While some suggest that this should only be used with grounded theory (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967), others (e.g. Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) argue that it can be used with any qualitative data. A first step analysis involves open coding, whereby chunks of text are allocated a descriptive code or label. A second step involves organising and clustering these codes or labels into a smaller number of categories. The final stage, referred to as focused coding, is a “process of integrating and refining theory” (Strauss and Corbin, 1988, p. 143). This approach is aligned with constructivist-interpretive epistemology, in which substantive theory is constructed from participant interactions (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014).

5.3 Immersion Crystallisation

As a form of validation, anthropologists often immerse themselves in qualitative data and conduct iterative analyses to identify emerging themes and create new insights about the meaning of their data. This process of immersion and crystallisation can be particularly useful in articulating intuitive and subjective findings and tracking themes from one phase of immersion to the next. Given the subjective nature of professionalism, immersion-crystallisation will be interspersed with the coding process to enhance the analysis. This will require taking a step back from coding and independently listening to interviews and re-reading transcripts and associated notes, i.e. becoming thoroughly immersed in the data.

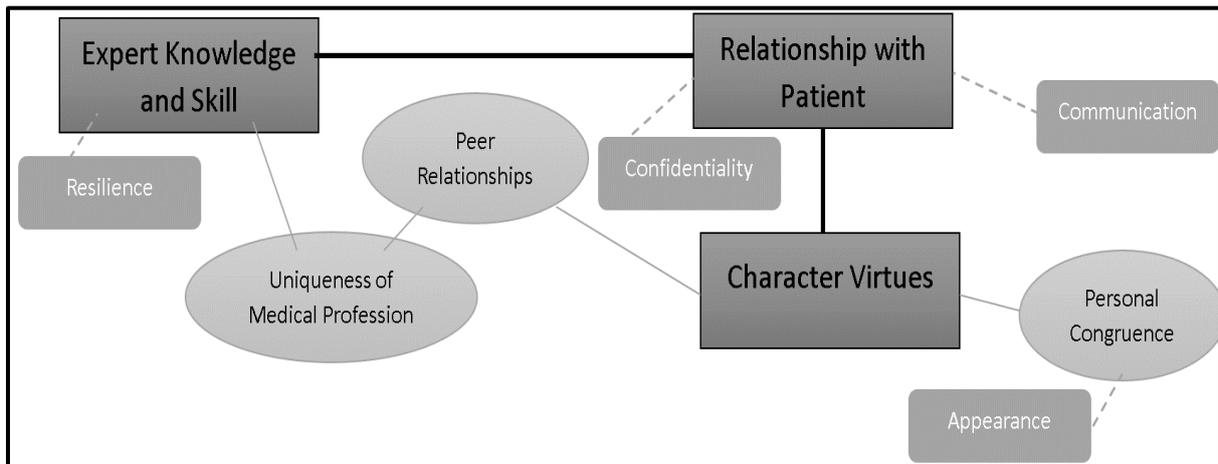
5.4 Qualitative Comparison

Rather than construct a series of individual case-studies associated with specific MBAs, it is proposed that qualitative comparison (Ragin, 1987) will be used to examine similarities and differences and identify key trends and patterns across the executive MBA sector. This quasi-quantitative method attempts to bridge the gap between rich and detailed findings associated with case-study research and broader quantitative research conducted on a sectoral basis. It relies on the construction of truth tables, which list all unique configurations of variables and participants in the study (as inputs) and corresponding incidents or events (as outputs). In essence, qualitative comparison facilitates the assessment of causation that involves different combinations of causal conditions by using Boolean logic to allow configurations to be merged into simpler but more abstract representations (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

5.5 Data Display

A challenge in displaying findings from qualitative data in a way that facilitates conclusion making is in the volume of data and detail. Extended texts, such as large volumes of field notes or transcriptions are not particularly suited to making well-founded conclusions. There is a tendency to become lost in the detail. Raw data, therefore, needs to be first reduced, abstracted and organised into a more compact form. Concept maps are particularly useful for visualising data in summary format. As an example, in a study of the development of medical professionalism, Wagner et al. (2007) use concept maps to display in concise format how meanings and perceptions of medical professionalism evolve during the developmental process (Figure 8). Their map displays tentative relationships between emergent themes, both primary and secondary, as a means of concisely summarising the key message from the data.

Figure 8: Typical Concept Map used in a Qualitative Study of Professionalism



Source: Adapted from Wagner et al. (2007)

In a similar manner, key themes arising from interviews with MBA educators will be integrated into concept maps and refined through discussions in the student focus groups. The maps will be used to convey the relative strength of each theme, the relationship between themes and how emphasis on themes may shift from one focus group to another as students progress through the MBA. NVivo 11 provides a facility to generate concept maps directly based on codes generated and the identified relationships between them.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

A natural extension of the data analysis is to investigate how the data either fits with existing theory or helps to inform new theoretical propositions. Both constant comparison and immersion-crystallisation can help to form initial impressions, key themes and concepts and even tentative relationships between constructs. Qualitative comparison, on the other hand, can be used to identify variations (if any) across the MBA sector and across time, i.e. depending on whether students are at the beginning, middle or end of their studies. A crucial step in the analysis, for example, will be to examine how well (or poorly) the current conceptual framework and supporting theories fit with emerging themes and concepts. However, this presupposes that the data, itself, is of sufficient quality. The final section of this paper explores some of the key issues related to the quality of data generated and how it is proposed to address them. These issues primarily relate to the proper collection and analysis of qualitative data and include data validity, reliability, bias, the conceptual and methodological limitations of the study as well as its potential contributions to methodology, theory and practice. Ethical issues specifically related to interview and focus-group data collection, such as confidentiality, are also addressed in the next section.

6. QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

“Unlike quantitative research, there are few conventions the researcher can rely upon to defend against self-delusion or the presentation of unreliable conclusions” (Schell, 1992, p. 8).

6.1 Contributions of the Study

In articulating the quality implications of the study’s methodology, it is important, first, to outline potential contributions. There are renewed calls to reinvigorate the professional mission of business schools (Rousseau, 2012). The prospect of adapting aspects of professional education is worth exploring in the context of better preparing MBA graduates for managerial roles. However, there is no baseline data to indicate the extent to which professionalism is embedded in MBAs. This study seeks to bridge this gap and to inform educators on the direction their MBAs must take if they are to develop along professional lines. In terms of contributions to theory, the study, while exploratory in nature, can explore the applicability of the Stark et al. (1984) framework to MBAs, how well concepts of professionalism travel from other professions to management and offers an opportunity to test supporting theories, such as Hilton and Slotnick’s (2005) theory of proto-professionalism. The inherent strengths in seeking qualitative data, e.g. local groundedness, richness and holism, are well suited to analysing the meanings that students and educators attribute to professionalism.

Building theories from the data follows an inductive process. The methodology, itself, while exploratory, offers the opportunity to take a fresh look at professionalism without being tied to existing concepts. Professionalism in other disciplines has struggled with definition and measurement. Taking a step back and constructing an understanding of professionalism based on the perceptions of the key actors, namely students and their teachers, may well be necessary before management education can evolve further along the lines of a professional model. In terms of contribution to practice, the value of this exploratory approach lies not in its generalisability, in a statistical sense, but in its relevance to the participants. A workshop on key findings delivered to MBA educators will provide a starting point for more systematic and scalable research that can offer practical guidelines and survey tools to embed professionalism.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Notwithstanding, the study has significant limitations, which cannot be ignored. The study is limited to three participant groups: students, graduates and educators. It ignores other key stakeholders. The study is primarily limited to the educational context and, therefore, does not include the perspectives of employers, MBA associations, the public and many other

stakeholders in the management ‘profession’. Scope is conceptually limited to education processes and professional preparation outcomes. While it does not ignore completely the wider influencers on those processes, such as accreditation, ranking, academic governance and a whole host of other factors, they are not the primary focus. The study’s qualitative emphasis, too, has limitations. The detail of the data sometimes makes it difficult to see the wood from the trees. It may be difficult to abstract theories that are not idiosyncratic. Qualitative research is often dismissed as unsystematic and unable to deal with bias. Even if findings are accepted, it will be difficult, time-consuming and expensive to scale the study. There is an inherent paradox in that qualitative methods are often strongest when the researcher has an ‘insider’ understanding, adding to its relevance but, at the same time, raising issues of objectivity. The nature of qualitative study implies that that meanings attributed to professionalism will not be experimentally examined nor will causal relationships be statistically proven.

6.3 Ethical Issues

There are several ethical issues that must be navigated carefully. An application to WIT Graduate School of Business ethics committee will be presented to the next available sitting, outlining how the ethical issues will be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

6.3.1 Collaboration versus Competition

It is likely that MBAs being delivered in Ireland are competing with each other for students. The study, therefore, must be transparent about the information it intends to publish, reassure participants of protocols with respect to sensitive information and have mechanisms for feedback. Confidence in the research must be seen in the context of its benefits to the wider MBA community without compromising individual programmes.

6.3.2 Engagement with Students

The study requires interactions with, and identifiable data about, students. To protect students, the study seeks to minimise risk of inadvertent disclosure of individual-level information. All audio data will be transcribed and saved as protected documents before being destroyed. The only individual-level data to be collected is the student’s name, the institution and programme in which they are enrolled and the date of commencing studies. There will be no academic incentives offered or penalties incurred for participation in the study.

6.3.3 Multiple Phases of Research

Each phase requires different consent and participant information. Later phases are, to a degree, contingent on outcomes of earlier phases. Selection of participant MBA programmes, for

example, depends on the analysis of the MBA landscape. Hence, it is difficult to establish precisely the procedures for later phases. Notwithstanding, tentative guidelines, participant information sheets and consent forms are provided in the appendices.

6.3.4 Individual Interviews

Interviewing must also comply with interview-based research ethics (Allmark et al., 2009). Maintaining confidentiality is a difficult balancing act. On one level, the study seeks to highlight exemplars of educational practice. On another, it must not disclose sensitive information on individual MBAs. Whilst interview guides may help participants to anticipate what to expect, interviews sometimes probe unexpected areas. Hence, to give full informed consent at the outset is problematic. Transcripts will be given to interviewees for approval, protecting confidentiality (Wiles, 2008) and ensuring accurate reporting.

6.3.5 Focus Group Ethics

Compared with individual interviews, it is more difficult to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants using the focus group approach (Smith, 1995). However, the benefits of the group effect (Carey and Smith, 1994) and of the diversity of perspectives outweigh the risks given that the discussions of the focus groups are limited to non-sensitive information. All participants will be asked to sign a non-disclosure declaration. A critical ethical issue relates to subjectivity. Qualitative analysis requires skill and training. As a novice researcher, there is increased risk of bias and personal idiosyncrasy. While these risks can be addressed by supervision and training, they cannot be eliminated entirely. There must be, for example, recognition of the researcher's background as an MBA graduate and as an educator in higher education. It is impossible, therefore, to make interviews or focus groups a neutral exchange. Hence, they carry unavoidable risk of bias (Scheurich, 1995).

6.4 Data Quality

Several frameworks can be used to evaluate the rigour of qualitative research, including approaches to dealing with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability data (e.g. Cook and Campbell, 1979; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Triangulation is considered to be a key method in confirming findings. The proposed methodology deploys triangulation by data source, method and data type. Three data sources – students, graduates and educators – will either corroborate or contradict each other's findings. An additional quality control can also be implemented, whereby researcher interpretations can be validated by participants, by giving them the opportunity to clarify their interpretation and contribute new perspectives.

6.4.1 Construct Validity

Construct validity is particularly important in the data collection phase of the study in dispelling criticism of subjectivity. Multiple sources of data and supporting evidence, such as documentation, can assist in establishing a clear chain of evidence to support construct validity during the data collection processes.

6.4.2 Internal Validity / Credibility

Given that the study is exploratory in nature, internal validity may not be seen as important as construct validity. However, if any inferences are made, such as tentative propositions, then internal validity becomes an important issue. Gibbert et al. (2008) suggests three strategies for enhancing internal validity, which include pattern matching, constructing clear statements of causality and triangulation.

6.4.3 External Validity / Transferability

External validity refers to the ability to generalise the findings, i.e. to demonstrate that findings are transferrable to the wider MBA context. Undertaking an analysis of the Irish MBA landscape is, therefore, critical to establishing the extent to which findings are transferable. It is aimed at providing a detailed description of the context.

6.4.4 Reliability/ Dependability

Detailed protocols and a database of interview and focus group audit trails will be recorded and stored as files using NVivo. This approach should facilitate replication of the study with minimum error and transferability to new contexts.

6.5 Next Steps

Although this paper documents the methodology for the proposed study, the methodology will remain a work-in-progress. Not everything can be prescribed completely in advance, particularly as much of the research is planned in phases. The immediate priority will be to conduct an analysis of the MBA landscape on the island of Ireland and, by extension, to articulate a solid basis for purposive selection of participant MBA programmes. Completion of the MBA landscape analysis along with a provisional list of MBA programmes for consideration prior to September 2017 is a prerequisite to approaching MBA directors and seeking written informed consent. The critical path for conducting much of the field research will occur during the 2017-2018 academic year. To undertake this research, beginning in September 2017, MBAs have to be selected and ethical approval by Waterford Institute of Technology and, possibly, by participating institutions, needs to be sought in advance.

APPENDIX I: SAMPLE OF MBA PROGRAMMES

Considerable thought has been dedicated to the issue of what would constitute a representative sample of MBA programmes for the study. A common conceptual framework centred around managing the private-sector firm, and shared discourse in MBAs reduces variations across programmes. Accreditation mandates common educational processes. This can enhance transferability of findings. Notwithstanding, to be representative, the sample should take account of variations across the much larger population of MBAs while, at the same time, be pragmatic, i.e. facilitate reasonable access to data.

Approximately 15 MBAs (Table 6), operational in Ireland, are deemed to be representative of the wider MBA landscape (Business Plus, 2016). These MBAs vary in delivery mode, ranking, accreditation, curricular specialisation, age, entry requirement and many other characteristics.

Several organisations publish rankings that have become important benchmarks for programme quality. The Financial Times Global MBA rankings, which takes account of alumni feedback, salary career progression, research impact of academics and internationalisation, place UCD's full-time MBA as the only MBA in Ireland ranked within the top 100 globally. Edunival's rating of MBAs places Trinity College Dublin's MBA as among the best in Europe.

Similar accreditation has become a strong indicator of programme quality. University College Dublin, Open University, Henley and Queens University Belfast offer MBAs that are triply accredited by AMBA, AACSB and EQUIS.

Several providers have also offered specialist MBAs that focus on management for a specific discipline, such as healthcare, finance, aviation management, technology management and international business.

The MBA Association of Ireland is also an important umbrella organisation, representing over 6000 MBA graduates living and working in Ireland. Although it has neither a regulatory nor an accreditation function, it nevertheless, has a mission to improve the practice of management through continuous learning.

APPENDIX I: SAMPLE OF MBA PROGRAMMES (CONTINUED)

Table 6: List of MBAs Delivered in Ireland

Provider	Accreditation	2016 Ranking	Delivery Mode	Entry Criteria (above primary degree)	2016 Fees	Stated Notable Features (referenced from programme brochures)
University College Dublin	Triple	FT 79 th Globally	Full-Time MBA Executive MBA	GMAT > 600 three years' professional experience	€30,700	Leadership Development Career Service
Trinity College Dublin	AMBA	Eduniversal 5 th in Europe	Full-Time MBA Executive MBA	GMAT >550	€32,000	Strategic Company Project NGO Project
Dublin City University	AMBA AACSB	Eduniversal 46 th in Europe	Full-Time MBA Executive MBA	3 years relevant managerial experience	€25,500	Evidence-Based Management Enterprise Engagement
Griffith College	N/A	N/A	Full-Time MBA Executive MBA			Qualification recognised by Heriot Watt University.
Dublin Business School	N/A	N/A	Full-Time MBA Executive MBA	NQF L8 Degree	€8,300	Specialist stream in Cloud Computing.
Dublin Institute of Technology	AMBA		Executive MBA	3 Years Managerial Experience	€18,000	International Study Visit - Silicon Valley -
University College Cork	N/A	N/A	Executive MBA	2 Years Significant Managerial Experience	€27,000	“Anyone looking to make the move from middle management up to the next level”.
University of Limerick	AMBA PRME	N/A	Executive MBA	4 Years Experience	€27,000	Stated focus on entrepreneurial skills, strategic thinking, and leadership capability.
NUI Galway	AMBA	N/A	Executive MBA	3 Years Relevant Business Experience	€27,700	Masterclass series devliered by CEOs.
Queens University Belfast	Triple	N/A	Full Time	2.1 Honours Degree	€21,200	Focus on International Busines.
Irish Management Institute	Triple	N/A	Executive MBA	3 Years Relavant Experience	€27,500	Offers renowned Henley MBA.
Waterford Institute of Technology	N/A	N/A	Executive MBA	3 Years Relevant Business Experience	€17,900	Action Research. International Study in Boston.
Open University	Triple	N/A	Flexible	Three years' experience in a managerial or professional role.	N/A	Blended Delivery facilitates distance learning.

APPENDIX II: EXAMPLES OF MBA VALIDATION REPORTS

Institution	Year	URL
Dundalk Institute of Technology	2013	https://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=7&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjcpbbZxonUAhWBACAKHViyDIcQFghAMAY&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dkit.ie%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2_Report_Response_Master_of_Business_in_Business_Administration.pdf&usg=AFQjCNGzUvExrtY228r985ECoyii199aOA&sig2=xSPc2O406WbLrJmVcAyEmA
Dublin Institute of Technology	1999	https://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwjcpbbZxonUAhWBACAKHViyDIcQFggjMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dit.ie%2Fmedia%2Fqualityassuranceandacademicprogrammerecords%2Freviewreportsandresponses%2Fmba_report.doc&usg=AFQjCNGbf5PqSICH1NIG4KmXIj97Li1BJA&sig2=p6xXNftkTmFIGyboNJiiIA

APPENDIX III: EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW REPORTS

Institution	Year	URL
Dublin Business School	2013	http://www.qqi.ie/sites/docs/PanelReportsLibrary/ProgID-26834_Panel_Reports_PG19604.pdf
Trinity College Dublin	2011	https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/quality/assets/pdf/Provost%27s%20report%20to%20Council%20for%20Business.pdf

APPENDIX IV: EXAMPLES OF MBA RANKING REPORTS

Institution	Year	URL
Smurfit Graduate Business School	2017	http://rankings.ft.com/businessschoolrankings/university-college-dublin-smurfit/global-mba-ranking-2017#global-mba-ranking-2017
Trinity Business School	2016	http://www.economist.com/whichmba/trinity-college-dublin-school-business/2016

APPENDIX V: SAMPLE COURSE DESCRIPTOR

Module Title	Personal Leadership & Management Skills		
Module Code	HR5000A		
ECTS Credits	5	NQF Level	9
Pre-Requisites	None		
Description	This module will equip students with insights and skills to work effectively in teams and their personal management and leadership skills. The module will provide students with opportunities to identify key areas for personal development and support their efforts to achieve this change.		

Learning Outcomes

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess the effectiveness of their team work 2. Apply strategies to assist effective teamworking 3. Demonstrate key presentation skill competence 4. Evaluate self and peer assessment of their management competencies 5. Set medium terms (10 month) personal development goals and progress these 6. Critically evaluate ethical considerations in applied work settings 7. Reflect on their personal learning journey across the MBA 8. Assess their career goals and plot proactive career goals
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Workload

Type	Hours	Description
Seminars	40	Structured Workshops
Group Work	24	Team Exercises
Independent Study	138	Personal Competency Review, Goal Planning and Work
Assessment	24	Personal Reflection and Review of Goal Planning
Lecture	24	Coaching, Assessment and Support

Indicative Content and Learning Activities

<p>MBA Induction and Teambuilding Workshop</p> <p>Two day induction focused on self and team development, goal setting, engaging in team exercises, case study work and contracting.</p> <p>Presentation Skills Day</p> <p>Students assess various presentation styles. The workshop identifies a portfolio of presentation strategies they can use and student prepare and present on topic using their strategies. Their presentations are peer and expert assessed.</p> <p>Ethics Workshop</p>
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APPENDIX V: SAMPLE COURSE DESCRIPTOR (CONTINUED)

Students are introduced to Ethical Theory and then assess a series of workplace ethical dilemmas using the assesment toolkit

Careers Workshop

Student assess their current career satisfaction and an understanding of how they arrived at this point. They assess their desired career goals and plot a career development map.

Personal Leadership Goal setting Workshops

Based on the 360 degree assessment of their competencies, students identify their "zones for development". This becomes a 12 month journey with facilitated coaching across the journey (4 Dedicated Workshops over 2 years)

Negotiations Skills Workshop

A full day Negotiation Skills Workshop involving casework, simulation and role play.

Assessment

Type	Description	Weighting
Assignment	Students present a structured report on their selected key developmental goals from their 360 competency assessment test. The report identifies the goals they identified and the strides they took to achieve these goals and their personal affective and cognitive and behavioural impacts.	100%

Source: Adapted from DCU (2017)

APPENDIX VI: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

STUDY TITLE

Exploring Professionalism in MBA Programmes: Student, Graduate and Educator Perspectives

INVITATION

My name is Cormac MacMahon. I am currently undertaking my DBA at Waterford Institute of Technology. My thesis is focused on exploring the embeddedness of professionalism in MBAs. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being conducted and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Professionalism is commonly used as a discourse for occupational improvement in the more established professions, such as law or medicine. How to develop patterns of professional behaviour is subject to extensive research in the education of these professions but it is only an emergent research area in management education. Consequently, I am seeking participants for a study of professionalism in MBAs which will be based on in-depth interviews with programme directors and lecturers as well as focus group sessions with students and graduates.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The challenge in this study relates to the nebulous nature of professionalism itself. Whilst some professions have sought to internalise it, they struggle with definition and measurement. The challenge of interpreting diverse perceptions of professionalism in MBAs is accentuated by limited prior research and the embryonic nature of statements on managerial professionalism. Hence, there is a need to explore, through the reflections of students, graduates and educators, the extent to which professionalism is embedded in MBAs, in terms of competencies, values and behaviours that they perceive are developed. The aim of this study, therefore, is to explore the extent to which students and educators perceive professionalism is embedded as a mechanism for managerial development.

RQ1: What are MBA students', graduates' and educators' perceptions of professionalism?

RQ2: What professional values, competencies and behaviours do students, graduates and educators perceive are developed in an MBA programme?

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

There are circa. fifteen executive MBA programmes being delivered in on the island of Ireland. They vary in delivery mode, ranking, accreditation, curricular specialisation, entry requirements and many other characteristics, representing a microcosm of the wider global MBA landscape. I would like to invite you to participate in the study because: -

- you are a programme director or among the key teaching staff of a recognised executive MBA
- you may be able, therefore, to shed light on what managerial professionalism means and how it is used as a discourse to develop MBA students as professional managers.
- you may have unique insight into how MBA students develop professionalism values, competencies and behaviours.
- you may be able to identify key educational processes that lead to professional outcomes for students.

There may well be other distinctive aspects of MBA education that can inform this study and, therefore, I would be interested in constructing a thesis that illustrates these features.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR TAKING PART?

The entire study will be constructed on: -

- interviews with MBA Programme Directors during the 2017-2018 Academic Year;
- subsequent interviews with lecturers on the MBA.
- A student focus group at the beginning, mid-way and towards the end of their MBA studies;
- A focus group with graduates from across the MBA sector or a representative programme.
- Supporting documentary evidence, such as syllabi, learning outcomes, assessment guidelines, student handbooks or other documents deemed relevant to the study.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS IN TAKING PART?

The study seeks to understand students and educators' perceptions of professionalism. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the experiences of the principle agents, namely students and lecturers, with exemplar educational processes that lead to professional preparation outcomes, i.e. outcomes that can assist students prepare for the complexities of managerial practice. It is not intended to publish information attributable to specific MBA's that might damage in any way the reputation of individual programmes. To mitigate against any risk of this happening: -

- interview and focus group guides will be provided in advance;
- all audio recordings of interviews will be transcribed and then destroyed;
- interview transcripts will be shared with interviewees;
- information attributed to individual MBAs will be anonymised;

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE STUDY?

Whilst the study may highlight exemplar practice, it is intended to neither promote nor damage any individual programme. Professionalism is considered as a possible means to improving graduate management education. Hence, there is potentially a collective benefit in enhancing the knowledge and skills of educators on this topic. The findings of the study will be shared with relevant MBA staff through an interactive workshop. It is intended that it will provide space and perspective to reflect on professionalism as is it is currently embedded in MBA programmes.

WHAT IF THERE IS AN ISSUE?

The success of the study relies on continued participation once commitment is made to participate. Where a problem, conflict or issue arises, for any reason, you can contact me at cormac.macmahon@gmail.com or +353 831885802.

If the issue/problem/ conflict is unresolved, then you can complain formally to Waterford Institute of Technology.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND USAGE OF DATA

All reasonable efforts will be made to keep information, attributed to individuals and MBAs strictly confidential. Original recordings of interviews will be destroyed once transcribed. Contracted transcribers will be asked to sign non-disclosure agreements and transcripts will be stored securely by the researcher. Individual interviewees will be given a transcript of their own interview. While it is impossible to maintain confidentiality of focus group discussions, students and graduates will also be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement and be reminded at the beginning and end of each focus group of their responsibilities. Items of information attributable to any individual MBA will be minimised. However, if there are noteworthy items of interest that do not impact on an individual MBA's competitive positioning, then permission will be sought in advance for their inclusion in the DBA thesis.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The overall findings from the study will be submitted as part of a DBA thesis in 2018 and, possibly, in a management education journal, such as the Academy of Management Education and Learning. Findings will also be shared in a dissemination workshop.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Whether or not to take part is entirely your choice and I appreciate it may require some deliberation as well as ethical approval. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to give a reason. This information sheet is primarily written to help you decide whether or not you would like to participate. It outlines why I am undertaking the study, what your participation would involve, what the benefits and risks to your school might be, and what happens when the study is completed. Please study the information carefully and feel free to question anything or seek clarification on that is unclear.



Cormac MacMahon,
DBA Student, Waterford Institute of Technology.

APPENDIX VII: INTERVIEW GUIDE AND INFORMED CONSENT

<p>Introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you • My Name • Doctoral Dissertation • Purpose of Interviews • Confidentiality • Duration • How interview will be conducted • Opportunity for Questions • Signature of Consent 	<p>First, I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Cormac MacMahon and my doctoral research is focused on exploring the extent to which professionalism is embedded in MBAs. I am keen to get your perspectives on the issue and would like to discuss your experiences of dealing with professionalism in the context of your own MBA.</p> <p>The interview should take no more than 90 minutes. I will be recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. I will also be taking some notes.</p> <p>Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to, and you may end the interview at any time. If you want to stop at any time, just let me know.</p> <p>All responses will be kept confidential between you and me. I will destroy the audio recording once it has been transcribed and I will subsequently share the transcript with you. Any information about your institution in the final thesis will be subject to you and your institution's approval.</p> <p>Have you any questions? Are you willing to participate in this interview?</p> <p align="right">_____ Interviewee Interviewer</p> <p>Date _____</p>	<p>Conceptual Aspect to Questioning</p>
<p>Background Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your MBA • How long?? • Profile • Focus of MBA • Notable Features • Your Role • Achievements 	<p>Q1: Just to get some history on the programme, can you outline the MBA at XYZ so far? e.g. when, why did it start? Major milestones in its development?</p> <p>Q2: What about the current profile of the MBA, its students, staff, graduates, employers, accreditation, ranking etc?</p> <p>Q3: What sort of focus does the MBA have? Are there notable features?</p> <p>Q5: Could you tell us about your role in the MBA? What sort achievements are you proud of?</p> <p>Q6: If you look at your MBA what have been the main influences on shaping the programme as it is today? <i>Prompts ... employers, staff, validation, reviews, accreditation, institution, school.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive Characteristics • Influencers

<p>What are MBA students, graduates and educators' perceptions of professionalism?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticisms of MBAs • Management v Other Professions • Concept of Professionalism • Using professionalism to develop students. • Professional Jurisdiction • Dimensions of Professionalism • MBA Oath • Educational Processes 	<p>Q1: There are a lot of criticism of MBAs both in the popular press and in academic publications. I would like to get a feel for your perspective on these criticisms and how you have sought to address them in your own MBA.</p> <p>Q2: There is also considerable debate on whether or not management is best described as a profession, like medicine, engineering or law. What's your perspective on this?</p> <p>Q3: As it has become difficult to agree on what is or is not a profession, scholars have reverted to this vaguer concept of professionalism. What do you understand professionalism to be?</p> <p>Q4: What about the notion of using professionalism to develop MBA students for managerial roles?</p> <p>Q5: Professionals rely on a body of knowledge or expertise to articulate a jurisdiction of relevant problems that they are best positioned to solve. What would you say constitutes an expert body of knowledge for MBA graduates?</p> <p>Q6: Professionals typically have a strong ethical disposition and social citizenship. Can you provide examples of how ethical or altruistic values are developed on the MBA?</p> <p>Q7: Can you provide examples of how the MBA develops self-confidence, communication and leadership skills [<i>self-concept</i>]?</p> <p>Q8: To what extent is problem-solving through critical thinking or integrative thinking developed on the MBA [<i>autonomy of judgement</i>]?</p> <p>Q9: One way that graduates of professional education have been prepared for self-regulation is through a public declaration of an oath or code? Could you comment on this idea from an MBA perspective [<i>self-regulation</i>]?</p> <p>Q10: What about the educational processes within the MBA itself – selection, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, role-modelling. Are there specific processes that can you pinpoint that facilitate the professional development of students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticism of MBAs • Professionalism • Professional Jurisdiction • Body of Knowledge • Ethical Disposition • Sense of Responsibility • Self-Concept • Self-Regulation • Autonomy • Educational Processes
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<p>RQ2: What professional competencies, values and behaviours are perceived to be acquired?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Outcomes • How are they achieved? • Practice Based Pedagogy • Assessment • Selection • Role-Modelling 	<p>Q1: The notion of professionalism seems to be quite a nebulous concept. Some people describe it almost an x-factor – a complete package of behaviours, skills and values. <i>Do you think this lack of definition makes it difficult to measure or assess? How to you overcome it?</i></p> <p>Q2: A lot of analysis has been undertaken on the alignment of MBA curricula and learning outcomes to managerial competencies. What are the competencies that students acquire on the MBA? <i>Prompt types is required</i></p> <p>Q3: Same question again for values: What is the typical value profile acquired by MBA students? <i>Prompt types if required...</i></p> <p>Q4: Same question again for behaviours: What are the typical professional behaviours acquired by MBA students? For behavioural assessments what measurement instruments do you use?</p> <p>Q5: I am interested in the idea of practice-based pedagogy, which is a hallmark of professional qualifications. Is there a structured transition from theory to more practical learning in the MBA?</p> <p>Q6: In professions, such as medicine, assessment of professionalism is done in a work environment. Are there equivalent environments in the MBA? <i>How do you factor in context?</i></p> <p>Q7: Student tend to prioritise aspects that are assessed. Are there any examples you could give on the types of assessments used to evaluate students’ professionalism? How is feedback given?</p> <p>Q7: What do you think about the idea of qualitative assessment and feedback? This is a regular approach by employers. Is this something you do and how?</p> <p>Q8: Medical schools, in particular, pay attention to screening applicants for professionalism values and behaviours, how are MBA students selected (for professionalism)? <i>Selection</i></p> <p>Q9: Do you use role-models? There is also merit in suggesting that students assimilate the value and behaviours of teachers? Is this something you have given thought to? <i>Role-Modelling</i></p> <p>Q10: Decisions made by managers tend to be by reflection-in-action. How do you give students time and space to reflect on their own development towards a professional identity?</p> <p>Q11: It’s probably fair to say that the MBA is not a magic wand but if you were to try to sum-up what it is about the MBA that helps students develop professionally, what is it?</p>	<p>Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical • Integrative • Adaptive • Contextual <p>Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics • Identity • Social Conscience • Marketability • Research • Professional Development <p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance • Effectiveness • Integrity • Respectfulness • Collaborative • Responsibility • Conscience
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Concluding Remarks	<p>Thank you very much for your time given to this interview today. The interviewing recording will be transcribed within the next two weeks. As soon as I have it, I will provide a copy of the transcript for your records. Comments will be anonymised so that they cannot be attributed to you individually and a final copy of the individual case-study will also be provided to you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you happy with the way the interview has been conducted?• Do you mind if I revert to you with any clarifications or questions?• Have you any questions about what happens next?	
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APPENDIX VIII: FOCUS GROUP WORKSHEET

Can you tell us a little bit about you?				
Gender			M	F
Involved in hiring decisions?			Y	N
Professional Qualifications Earned?				
Bachelors Qualification?				
Masters or PhD Qualification?				
Years Employed since Graduation	2 - 5	5 - 10	10 - 5	15+

Complete each of these open-ended questions individually (15 minutes) then confer in groups of three and modify your worksheet accordingly (15 Minutes).

1. To me, personally, professionalism means

2. To my lecturers, I believe that professionalism means

3. How important is it for managers to behave professionally?

4. How does the MBA help you to develop professionalism?

5. How important is professionalism vis-a-vis your own technical knowledge?

6. How is your professionalism assessed and fed-back to you on the MBA?

7. List five actions (verbs) and descriptions (adjectives) that exemplify high professionalism in your opinion.

Actions (e.g. being on time)

Descriptions (e.g. polite)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

8. Are there any examples of actions or descriptions that exemplify poor professionalism, in your opinion?

9. Here is a copy of the MBA Oath, signed by Harvard MBA students. How well prepared do you believe you are to be in a position to commit to such an oath?

10. Any additional comments?

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PREFACE TO PAPER 3

“The principal benefit of conducting a pilot study is that it provides researchers with an opportunity to make adjustments and revisions in the main study” (Kim, 2010, p. 191).

Introduction

This short narrative provides a preface to Paper 3. It outlines the research journey between the submission of Paper 2 and the submission of Paper 3. The preface describes some of the key amendments made to the initial draft of Paper 3 based on the examiners’ feedback and summarises the key findings, documented in the final version of Paper 3, which follows.

Evolution of the Research Journey

There were three strategic decisions made with respect to the direction of the study between Paper 2 and Paper 3. These decisions have had significant implications for the scoping of the fieldwork and, consequently, for the nature of the findings from the study.

First, although satisfied with the content of Paper 2, the examiners stated that it was vitally important to articulate a detailed understanding of the MBA landscape and to firm-up on plans for undertaking the fieldwork. Hence, in Paper 3, considerable effort is invested in providing an analysis of MBA programmes on the island of Ireland as a context for the study. Paper 3 documents this analysis in two stages. A cursory analysis identified fifteen providers, which were compared and contrasted using parameters, such as ranking, accreditation, governance and ownership, membership of PRME, tuition fees, whether not the provider offers a full-time MBA, GMAT entry criteria, geographical jurisdiction and provider status. A content analysis (Berelson, 1952) was then undertaken of secondary data available in the public domain, such as news articles, provider websites and programme brochures, to explore how these providers convey professionalism in their respective executive MBA programmes to prospective students. This analysis identified eleven content categories relevant to the research questions.

Second, in recognising some key differences, primarily in student profile, between full-time and executive MBA programmes (Bruce, 2009), the context for the study was narrowed solely to executive MBAs programmes. Given that executive MBA learners intertwine their studies with professional practice, executive MBA programmes have arguably a greater professional orientation (Han and Liang, 2015) than have their full-time equivalents. The narrowing of the context for the study to executive MBA programmes provides a greater focus for the study. The ‘MBA’ is an umbrella term and its analysis needs to appreciate the diversity of programme

types. Executive MBA qualifications are highly sought-after as a substitute for full-time study for a management qualification (Page et al., 2004). Many aspiring senior managers and their employing organisations have embraced the executive MBA, with senior managers viewing it as a pathway to career success and employers as a mechanism for solving issues, such as retention, succession and sustaining competitive advantage. Executive MBA programmes attempt to overcome the limitations of more traditional offerings through flexible delivery, providing students with the benefit of being able to apply their classroom learning immediately in their work environment (Schneider, 2001). Most executive MBA programmes require more extensive professional experience of prospective students than do full-time MBAs. They typically require less time in the classroom and are often tailored towards the specific requirements of their students and sponsoring employers. These programmes tend to adopt wider executive education values and practices, which seek to address participant training needs, customise content, foster integrative thinking (Latham et al., 2004) and, in some cases, directly address the organisational challenges of sponsoring corporations (Conger and Xin, 2000). The vast majority of MBAs offered on the island of Ireland are of the executive type. With only a few of the larger providers with sufficient market access and the necessary resources to offer full-time MBAs, most providers lean towards a more sustainable offering of the executive version, targeted as much at sponsoring employers as at individual students.

Third, in recognising the ethical challenges in accessing MBA students during their studies (Clark and McCann, 2005) and in achieving the necessary granularity for a longitudinal study (Singer et al., 2003), it was decided to abandon the beginning, middle and end student focus-groups in favour of graduate focus-groups only. In essence, the methodology shifted from trying to capture the real-time development of professionalism in a quasi-longitudinal study to capturing retrospective learner reflection on professionalism. The decision to focus the exploration of educator perspectives on graduates only, as opposed to students, whilst subtly changed the nature of the study, provided a more realistic basis for sufficient data collection. The initial research design outlined in Paper 2 would have required repeated access to students, which was problematic ethically and logistically. In any event, it would have amounted to what may be perceived as some form of action-research or quasi-longitudinal study, which was unlikely to yield sufficient data within the timeframe of the DBA.

Hence, considerable refinement of the study is evident in Paper 3. The research questions focus on educators and learners, as opposed to educators, students and graduates. The research design is simplified and the context for the study is confined to executive MBA programmes.

Consideration of Examiner Feedback in Revising Paper 3

The examiners identified three main issues with the initial draft of Paper 3: [1] the need to undertake a pilot study that would guide extension of the research, [2] that it was becoming evident that much of the literature on MBAs is focused on full-time MBAs and [3] to avoid the use of quantitative language that might convey the wrong impression of what the study was seeking to achieve. The examiners' feedback on the initial Paper 3 submission stated that: -

“Some pilot interviews will be needed to validate the interview approach prior to proceeding to the paper 4 interviews” and that “the paper would be more complete if some pilot interviews were already conducted to validate the plans for paper four”.

Hence, the most significant revision to Paper 3 based on examiner feedback is the inclusion of a pilot study of professionalism in one executive MBA programme as a prelude to extending the research. Pilot studies are typically used to refine the research instrument, foreshadow potential issues, highlight gaps and potential waste in data collection and in considering the critical research issues, such as data quality and ethics (Sampson, 2004). In the context of this research, the pilot study provided an opportunity to refine the interview guide, identify preliminary themes and to evaluate the feasibility of extending the research.

The revised Paper 3, which follows, takes into account a point made by the examiners, namely that the academic literature, which so often criticises MBAs, refers primarily to full-time MBAs whereas as the focus of the study is narrowed to executive MBAs. Hence, revisions to Paper 3 explore differences between full-time and executive provisions and the extent to which executive MBAs are tarnished by association. The revised paper includes subtle changes to language to reassert that the study is qualitative in nature. For example, references to ‘generalisability’ were replaced with the term ‘transferability’. The validity of the research is stipulated in terms of how data collection captures the emic perspectives of participants whilst addressing the research questions and any room for inferring that the sample sizes are statistically justified is set aside by explaining that interviews will proceed until saturation.

Concluding Remarks

Paper 3 concludes with an evaluation of the pilot study based on criteria that considers the validity of the research instrument, the logistics involved in extending the study, participant recruitment and how well the pilot addresses the research questions. Content categories and the pilot themes prove to be a useful combination. The content analysis hints that the pilot themes

are potentially transferrable to other executive MBAs, thereby providing a basis for extending the study.

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Paper 3: Pilot Study and Initial Findings

“Executive MBA admission criteria typically mandate that matriculants have years of managerial experience requiring additional heightened fiduciary responsibilities” (Franco, 2011)

EXPLORING PROFESSIONALISM IN EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAMMES: FINDINGS FROM INITIAL ENQUIRY

ABSTRACT

The literature review highlights an opportunity to study the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs. It suggests a qualitative-interpretive approach, engaging with educators and learners, as a legitimate basis for enquiry. This paper aims to validate this approach by documenting the findings from a pilot of the primary data collection and analysis processes.

A content analysis of extensive secondary data on executive MBAs on the island of Ireland helps to dispel and affirm what we claim to know about these MBAs as a context for exploring professionalism. From one of these MBAs, the pilot generates data from educator interviews of which a thematic analysis captures perceptions of professionalism and how it is developed.

A synthesis of these two analyses implies that criticisms of MBAs apply less to the executive version. Professional development appears to stem from the integration of a broad range of unfamiliar knowledge domains in practice-based experiences, which necessitate ethical reasoning and behavioural moderation. Hence, the study must not be held hostage to prior models of professionalism, which can misrepresent the *raison-d'être* of management learning.

Themes emerging from the pilot that appear to support professionalism include andragogic principles, bridging the rigour-relevance gap, curriculum design, educator roles and practice-based pedagogy. Whilst no claims are made about transferability, the secondary data hints at the validity of these themes in other executive MBAs. In addressing the research questions, albeit in a limited context, qualitative rigour appears sufficiently imbued for enquiry to proceed.

Key Words - *Executive MBA, Managerial Professionalism, Emerging Themes, Pilot.*

Paper Type – *Pilot Study and Initial Findings.*

1. INTRODUCTION

“The best time ... to do an MBA is when they realise that they require an understanding of broader concepts ... across ... their organisations” (Buckley, 2016, p. 48).

1.1 Introduction

With greater acceptance of management as a profession, albeit not a particularly cohesive one (Squires, 2001), the embryonic nature of research on managerial professionalism offers an opportunity to explore its embeddedness in executive MBAs. The nebulous nature of professionalism obscures its measurement and definition (Trathen and Gallagher, 2009). Hence, a qualitative approach, guided by two research questions, is proposed.

RQ1: What are executive MBA educators’ and learners’ perceptions of professionalism?

RQ2: What professional competencies, values and behaviours do educators and learners perceive to be developed on an executive MBA?

The intent behind this paper is to validate the methods underlying this approach by outlining the findings from an analysis of secondary data and a pilot of the primary data collection and analysis processes. A synthesis of findings from these analyses can signal potential themes and tentative propositions and facilitate refinement of the data collection and analysis processes. Validity is stipulated in terms of how these processes capture participant perspectives whilst addressing the research questions (Lehnerer, 1996). Executive MBAs on the island of Ireland represent a potentially apt microcosm in which to study professionalism. Extensive secondary data from sources, such as provider websites and programme brochures, offers insight into how educators pitch these executive MBAs to prospective students and their employers. A content analysis of this data can help to develop an insight into these programmes as a context for the study and, in turn, guide the pilot of the data collection and analysis processes.

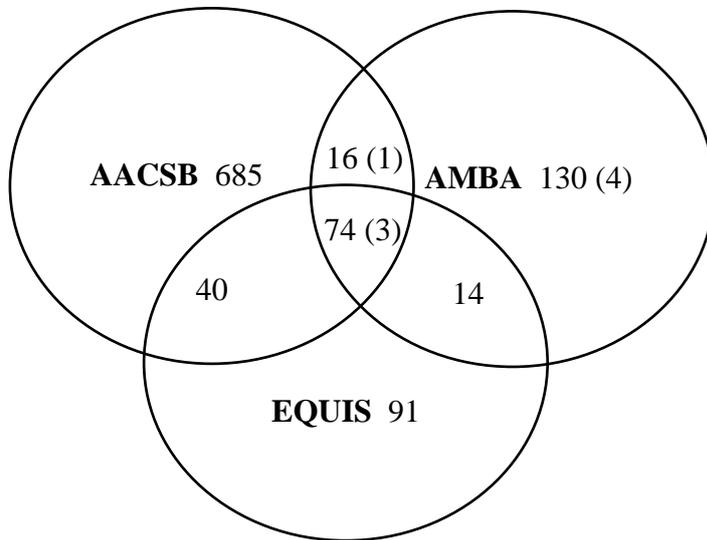
1.2 Rationale for Initial Enquiry

Much of the critique of MBAs remains focused on the full-time MBAs. The executive version, whilst quite different in its student profile and pedagogy, is often tarnished by association. Given that executive MBAs appear more aligned to professional education than do their full-time equivalents, the rationale for the study relies on better understanding them.

GMAT enrolments, which cover over 300 MBAs (GMAC, 2016), exemplify the global footprint of the MBA ‘industry’ (Wilson and McKiernan, 2011). The Association of MBAs (AMBA) extends accreditation to 200+ MBAs in 54 countries. The Association of Advanced

Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accredits 800+ schools, mainly in the US and the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) accredits 200+ schools. Figure 1 presents the number of accredited providers worldwide with those on the island of Ireland in brackets.

Figure 1: Accreditation of MBA Providers Worldwide



Source: MBA Today (2017)

There are 74 MBA providers with the "triple accreditation" from AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS, including three offering MBAs on the island of Ireland: University College Dublin, University of Reading¹ and the Open University. Yet, triple accredited schools represent less than 1% of MBA providers worldwide. Many more providers are working towards accreditation.

Transnational organisations, such as accrediting bodies, have driven standardisation to the extent that MBAs have become homogeneous based on a shared discourse for managing private enterprise (Spender, 2014). Although this isomorphism makes representative sampling easier, the study's qualitative orientation is less concerned with generalisability than it is with ensuring that the context is well articulated. In this respect, understanding executive MBAs on the island of Ireland as a context for exploring professionalism is an important step in instilling qualitative rigour in the study (Gioia et al., 2013). An analysis of secondary data is, therefore, justified on the basis that a thorough understanding of these MBAs is as important as the phenomenon under study. With context and phenomenon interlinked, translating that understanding to primary data collection is also important. Hence, an initial enquiry based on piloting the primary data collection and analysis processes is justified on the basis that it can serve to validate and fine-tune these processes and to identify emerging themes.

¹ University of Reading is the parent institution of the Henley Business School. Some refer to its executive MBA as the Henley MBA, which the Irish Management Institute (IMI) offers in Ireland.

1.3 Structure of This Paper

Having provided a rationale for this enquiry, the paper proceeds as follows. Using secondary data, Section 2 characterises the executive MBA landscape on the island of Ireland. This characterisation compares and contrasts 17 executive MBAs using 9 parameters, which are discernible from the data. On a conceptual level, these parameters are potential factors influencing education processes that may lead to “professional preparation outcomes” (Stark et al., 1986, p. 2). A content analysis of the secondary data follows in Section 3, in which the data is systematically summarised into fewer content categories (Stemler, 2001). Not all categories are relevant to the professionalism concept. Hence, Section 4 filters the categories to those linked to professionalism by embedding them in prior literature or postulating how they diverge from traditional professionalism concepts. Guided by the secondary data analysis, Section 5 describes a pilot of the primary data collection and analysis processes from one MBA. It outlines steps to ensure rigour, including the interview protocol, the audio recording of the interviews, notetaking and transcription. It details a thematic analysis, progressing from raw data to emerging themes (Tracey, 2010), and examines their fit with existing professionalism concepts or their potential to suggest new concepts. Finally, Section 6 deals with refinement of the primary data collection processes before extending the field research. An ethics application identified sensitivities related to anonymity, confidentiality and student engagement, solutions to which are outlined. Refinements to interview questions are made to gain efficiencies in data collection. Selection of executive MBAs of particular interest to the study are outlined.

1.4 Concluding Remarks

Having outlined the research methodology in Paper 2, the focus of this paper shifts to validating the research methodology and uncovering initial findings. In this respect, the analysis of secondary data on executive MBAs available in the public domain can provide a vital understanding of the context for the study. Similarly, a pilot study can be used to refine the primary data collection and analysis processes, to take stock of potential researcher bias, to signal emergent themes that can inform our theoretical understanding of managerial professionalism and to forecast potential risks and flaws (Sampson, 2004). There are also other practicalities required to prepare for primary data collection. Whilst there may be a tendency to enhance the research by maximising the scope for collection, this will be curtailed by pragmatism in recruiting willing participants and in meeting the time constraints of the DBA. To support a pilot study, the next section of this paper provides an analysis of the executive MBA landscape on the island of Ireland.

2. SUMMARY OF EXECUTIVE MBA PROVISION IN IRELAND

“The calibre of Irish MBA programmes is high and the focus on applied learning is strong across the board” (Corbett, 2016, p. 48).

2.1 Introduction

A feature of qualitative research is its sensitivity to context. Hence, the study requires an understanding of the executive MBA landscape. This section offers a comparison of executive MBAs on the island of Ireland. A map of the landscape is constructed using characteristics of programmes and their providers, sourced from secondary data in the public domain.

2.2 Scope of Analysis

Providers listed by the MBA Association of Ireland offer a basis for analysis (MBAI, 2016). As Queens University Belfast offers only a full-time MBA, it is excluded. Secondary data sources include brochures, websites, news articles, validations and rankings. They provide a flavour of the executive MBAs on offer to articulate a context for the study (Appendix I).

2.3 Descriptive Characteristics.

Although there are many characteristics that could be included in an analysis of executive MBAs, nine were discernible from the secondary data. The nine characteristics are: -

[i] Accreditations cite important conditions for professionalism. AMBA requires that students “build on their professional experience to acquire a broad base of ... management ... skills” (AMBA, 2016, p. 7). AACSB requires schools to demonstrate “professional engagement” through “field trips, internships, consulting projects and research” (AACSB, 2017, p. 41.). Some claim the role of accreditation in professionalising management to be positive (e.g. Porter and McKibbin, 1988). Others criticise it as unhealthy (e.g. Lowrie and Willmott, 2009). Providers are categorised by the number of accreditations they have (Appendix II).

[ii] The UN principles for responsible management education (PRME) recognise schools who seek to legitimise social agency (Alcaraz and Thiruvattal, 2010), i.e. how students perceive their role in addressing social issues. This is a key aspect of managerial professionalism (Romme, 2016). Providers are categorised as ✓ or ✗ for having or not having PRME.

[iii] Executive MBAs on the island of Ireland are offered by either universities (U), institutes of technology (IoT), private colleges (PC) and overseas providers (OS). Stark et al. (1986) cite ownership and governance as influencers on a programme’s education processes.

[iv] Some providers claim that their MBAs appear in global rankings. Ranking criteria include salary enhancement, which, Podolny (2009) believes, mitigates against professionalism as it fails to promote MBAs on the basis of positive impacts that MBA graduates have. A category of ‘✓’ is given to providers whose ranking is evident in the secondary data.

[v] Most executive MBA providers do not offer a full-time version of the qualification. However, some providers with sufficient finance, expert faculty and international networks, offer a full-time MBA in addition to their executive MBA. These providers are categorised as ‘Y’. Providers who offer the executive MBA only are categorised as ‘N’.

[vi] Brewer et al. (2002) classifies providers into prestigious (P) and reputation-seekers (R). Prestigious schools recruit top students and elite faculty. They enjoy stable rankings and a global audience. Reputation-seekers seek partnerships and accreditations to build reputation.

[vii] The island of Ireland comprises two regulatory jurisdictions, the United Kingdom (UK) and Republic of Ireland (IRL). Given the strength of transnational regulations, such as accreditation, executive MBAs are unlikely to differ substantially across jurisdictions.

[viii] Several studies seek to evaluate the GMAT’s predictability of student performance (e.g. Hancock, 1999), focusing on younger students on full-time MBAs (Siegert, 2008). Differences also exist in GMAT criteria for executive MBAs. GMAT requirements are classified as high (≥ 550), low (≤ 400), medium (> 400 and < 550) and none, if the GMAT is not required for entry.

[ix] Student fees for executive MBAs vary (Appendix II). How fees translate into resources is unclear. For categorisation purposes, fees exceeding €30,000 are considered ‘high’, between €12,000 and €30,000 as ‘medium’ and less than €12,000 as low.

2.4 Comparison of Executive MBA Providers

Table 1 provides a comparison of executive MBA providers on the island of Ireland based on nine descriptive characteristics, conveying a sectoral perspective. Over 50 percent of providers have none of the major accreditations, suggesting that they are not essential to their prospective students. Yet, accreditation requires that professional development be a part of the educational experience and that providers develop “values, skills and behaviours to equip students in their professional lives as managers” (EQUIS, 2013, p.27). Three providers are also committed to the PRME. They are required to report progress on embedding sustainability, ethical practice and social responsibility in their programmes. Learners and educators, therefore, may consider PRME to influence social agency aspects of managerial professionalism.

Table 1: Executive MBA Providers on the island of Ireland

Provider	Accreditation	PRME	Governance	Ranked	Full-Time	Status	Regulation	GMAT	Fees
Athlone Institute of Technology ¹	0	✘	IoT	✘	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Dublin Business School	0	✘	PC	✘	Y	R	IRL	Low	Low
Dublin City University	2	✘	U	✓	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Dublin Institute of Technology	1	✓	IoT	✘	N	R	IRL	Medium	Medium
Dundalk Institute of Technology ²	0	✘	IoT	✘	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Griffith College	0	✘	PC	✘	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Institute of Technology Carlow	0	✘	IoT	✘	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
University of Reading	3	✘	OS	✓	Y	P	IRL / UK	Medium	Medium
National College of Ireland	0	✘	PC	✘	Y	R	IRL	None	Low
NUI Galway	1	✘	U	✘	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Open University	3	✘	OS	✘	Y	R	IRL / UK	Medium	Medium
Trinity College Dublin	1	✘	U	✓	Y	R	IRL	High	High
University College Cork	0	✘	U	✘	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
University College Dublin	3	✓	U	✓	Y	P	IRL	High	High
University of Limerick	1	✓	U	✘	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
University of Ulster	0	✘	U	✘	Y	R	UK	None	Medium
Waterford Institute of Technology	0	✘	IoT	✘	N	R	IRL	None	Medium

¹ Athlone Institute of Technology is not listed by the MBA Association of Ireland. Yet, it has an updated website providing details of the programme for 2017/2018.

² Dundalk Institute of Technology is not listed by the MBA Association of Ireland. Some evidence suggests that it has validated an executive MBA programme.

The impact of governance on MBAs can be considered in terms of the influence of their parent institutions on their education processes (Stark et al., 1986). How MBA educators perceive their institutions support professionalism is a possible avenue for enquiry. Whilst overemphasis on career enhancement may mitigate against professionalism, other ranking criteria, such as “exchanges, research projects and internships” (Ortmans, 2016, p. 1) may foster it. In addition to offering an executive MBA, some providers also offer a full-time version. Whether this additional delivery creates critical mass in student enrolments and expertise, contributing to a professional learning environment, is unclear. The status of providers as a reputation-seeker or prestigious institution is subjective. Using Brewer et al.’s (2002) definition, prestigious institutions must be ranked and have a global audience, an indicator for which is triple accreditation. Only two providers fit these criteria. Three providers are subject to regulation in the UK. The Open University provides distance learning. University of Reading’s MBA is offered through the Irish Management Institute. University of Ulster’s MBA is delivered in Northern Ireland. Remaining providers are based in the Republic of Ireland. Many providers do not to require a GMAT score. Whilst some suggest accreditation as a rationale for the GMAT (e.g. Wright and Palmer, 1997), AMBA has no rule requiring it (Gropper, 2007). The setting of other entry criteria, such as professional experience (Adams and Hancock, 2000), is a key aspect of programme design. Table 1 also highlights variation in fees. Most providers charge a (medium) fee between €12,000 (low) and €30,000 (high). This classification does not reflect value-for-money nor based on any international comparisons of fees.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

The intent behind this section was to articulate an understanding of the context for the study. This was undertaken by constructing a map of the executive MBA landscape on the island of Ireland. Table 1 compares 17 providers using characteristics, sourced from secondary data in the public domain. Many of these characteristics are identified by Stark et al. (1986) as potentially influential factors. Although the list of characteristics in Table 1 is by no means exhaustive, it illustrates the extent to which executive MBAs on the island of Ireland are alike yet exhibit noticeable variation. Similarity, driven by accreditation, appears to be a by-product of meeting international standards. Yet, programmes also vary in characteristics, such as fees and GMAT requirements. The next section aims to provide a content analysis of the secondary data available in the public domain for executive MBAs on the island of Ireland. The intention behind this analysis is to identify content categories in the data and to articulate how they fit with or diverge from our conceptual understanding of professionalism in executive MBAs.

3. A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY DATA

“The MBA can be a crucial step in your career progression ...” (Styles, 2016, p. 1).

3.1 Introduction

This section documents a content analysis of the secondary data, the purpose of which is to identify key messages in the data about executive MBAs on the island of Ireland and how they relate to professionalism. Categories are interpreted using constant comparison (Glaser, 1965).

3.2 Sources of Data

Table 2 outlines the sources of data, details for which are provided in Appendix I. The data was placed into a repository as a series of PDF documents in NVivo 11.

Table 2: Coverage of Executive MBA Providers by Data Source

Provider	WS	BR	MB	NA	DB	VR	PR	RK
Athlone Institute of Technology	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Dublin Business School	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Dublin City University	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Dublin Institute of Technology	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Dundalk Institute of Technology	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Griffith College Dublin	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Institute of Technology Carlow	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
University of Reading (Henley)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
National College of Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
NUI Galway	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Open University	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Trinity College Dublin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
University College Cork	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
University College Dublin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
University of Limerick	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
University of Ulster	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Waterford Institute of Technology	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

WS = Website, BR = Brochure, MB = MBA Association of Ireland, NA = News Articles, DB = Online Discussion Boards, VR = Validation Reports, PR = Programme Review and RK = Ranking

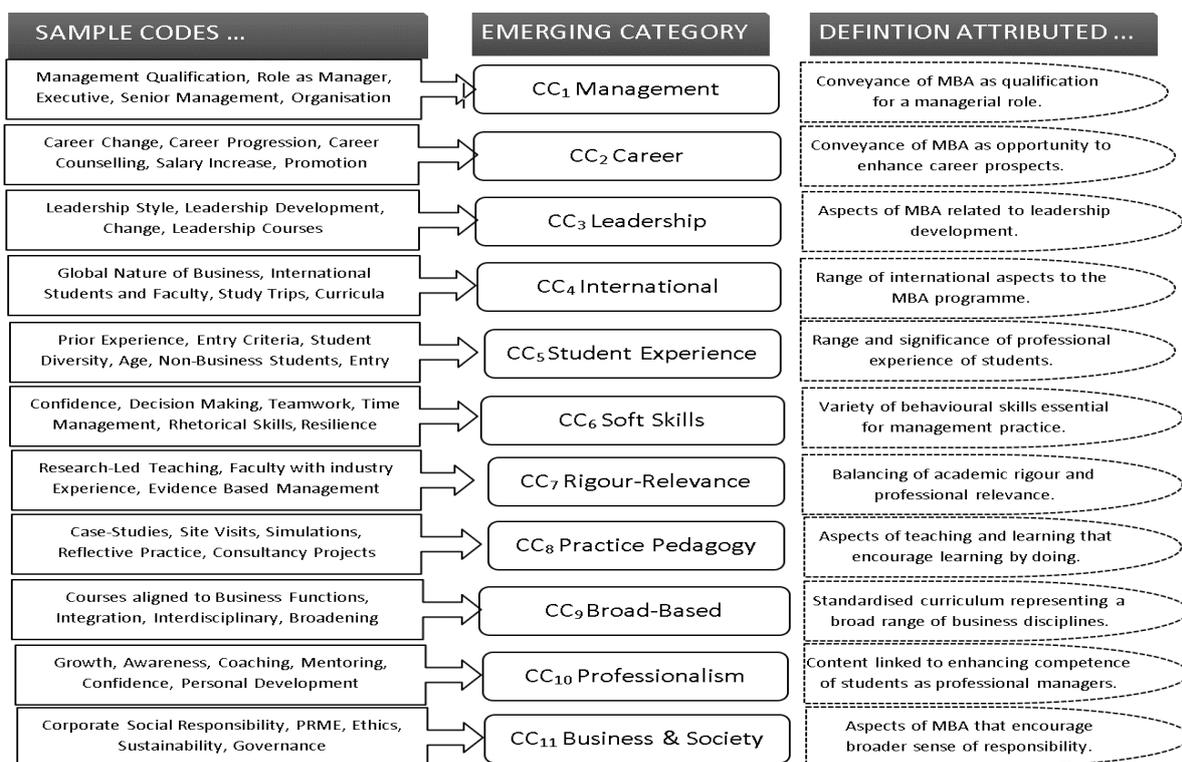
Executive MBA websites were found for all providers. Websites deemed to introduce executive MBAs were considered as parent pages, which, along with subpages, were converted to PDF formats using NCapture. A brochure for most executive MBAs is available for download as a standalone document or in a prospectus. The MBA Association of Ireland lists all providers (MBAI, 2016) except Athlone Institute of Technology and Dundalk Institute of Technology.

An online search for articles using the following parameters (keyword, MBA; localisation, Ireland; date, 1st Jan'12 to 16th Nov'17; category, news) yielded 400+ results. A review for subject matter relevance yielded 26 articles for analysis. Online discussion boards provided limited data from prospective students. One validation report was found, providing insight into programme design. Programme review reports were found for four MBAs.

3.3 Analytical Approach

A content analysis sought to relate recurring patterns in the data to the research questions (Figure 2). Content analysis applies to "any technique for making inferences by ... identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). A summative approach (Schreier, 2014) was used to quantify key words (Appendix III). However, the analysis extended beyond word counts by interpreting their underlying meaning (Babbie, 1992).

Figure 2: Aggregation of Codes into Content Categories



Rather than being procedural, the analysis was flexible (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), the key to which was the process of coding. Codes or categories are “labels for assigning units of meaning to ... information” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Codes generated were used to cluster chunks of data of similar meaning, keeping in mind the purpose of the analysis (Appendix IV). Initial themes were coded inductively by placing data into nodes, each containing multiple references and data sources. The number of references and sources was indicative of a node’s prevalence in the data. Nodes were categorised with a note recorded for each category on how

it contributed to the overall message of the data. The aim was to capture key messages as they emerged without being constrained by procedures or influenced by theory. This proceeded until saturation. Some categories emerged quickly whereas others required further analysis. This process took several days to complete and was, arguably, subject to researcher bias.

3.4 Identification of Main Content Categories

Whilst it may be argued that the secondary data sources convey a version of MBAs that educators want prospective students to hear, they, nevertheless, influence student perceptions of executive MBAs. Key content categories are outlined below.

3.4.1 Career Enhancement [CC₂]

The data depicts executive MBAs as career accelerators or as a place for changing careers. “Studying for an MBA ... is a cost-effective acceleration of your career” (Irish Central, 2017, p. 1). A criticism of MBAs relates to their emphasis on salary enhancement. “The average payback ... was three years” (Irish Central, 2017, p. 1). Some question this emphasis, implying that a “salary lift from doing an MBA may disappoint” (Reddan, 2017, p. 1).

3.4.2 Leadership [CC₃]

Leadership is referenced frequently in promotional material (e.g. NUIG, 2016; DCU, 2017). University College Dublin’s executive MBA is focused on “delivering the next generation of ... business leaders” (EMBAC, 2017, p. 1). This mantra is repeated across many MBAs with some claiming to have entire strands dedicated to leadership development.

3.4.3 Internationalisation [CC₄]

Many providers offer international study visits (e.g. TCD, 2017; UCD, 2017, UL, 2017) for learning about the global nature of business (Schuster et al., 1998). In addition, many constituent course titles appear with ‘international’ or related synonyms.

3.4.4 Experience [CC₅]

What distinguishes the executive MBA, from its full-time equivalent is the experience profile of its students (Appendix V). Stark et al.’s (1986) framework applies to pre-experience programmes in which students are exposed gradually to practice. Executive MBA students, on the other hand, carry their professional experience into the programme.

3.4.5 Soft Skills [CC₆]

A lack of emphasis on soft skills has been a past criticism of MBAs (Bedwell et al., 2014). Yet, these skills manifest strongly in promotional material, conveyed in various guises, such as teamwork and communication. Peer learning and teaming surface regularly in the data.

“Team building in a ... off-line environment in Belmullet peninsula” (TCD, 2017, p. 4).

“By working with challenging content, expert lecturers and accomplished peers, you will learn, examine, reflect, debate and grow in new and exciting ways” (UL, 2017, p.5).

Inclusion of classroom debate suggests a focus on rhetorical skills (Spender, 2014).

3.4.6 Rigour and Relevance [CC7]

Management education is often maligned for its struggle to balance academic rigour with professional relevance (Galvan et al., 2009). Yet, the data implies that executive MBAs integrate theory with real business issues, giving an “opportunity to link theory with practice” (UCC, 2016, p. 4). They are depicted as responding to criticisms by prioritising real-world dilemmas over traditional disciplines, the very essence of synthesis and design.

3.4.8 Practice Based Pedagogy [CC8]

Practice based pedagogy is inherent in professional education (Somers et al., 2014). Executive MBAs offer students an opportunity to learn and work concurrently. Some pedagogical techniques appear to take advantage of this (Appendix VI), contradicting Mintzberg’s (2004) criticism of MBAs as theoretical learning.

3.4.9 Broadening Based Curriculum [CC9]

Contradicting the idea that professionalism requires expert knowledge (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933) is the MBA’s focus on broadening knowledge to different business functions. MBAs are expected to broaden student’s skills “by providing a flavour of other aspects ... within business” (NUIG, 2016, p. 15). The data suggests that MBAs transcend core business functions by providing an integrative understanding of management (e.g. UCC, 2016).

3.4.10 Professionalism [CC10]

A notable category is the portrayal of the executive MBA as a professional qualification. It suggests that it blends academic study with opportunities to “discover how far you can go professionally” (UL, 2017, p. 2). Emphasis on coaching, career advice, psychometric testing, peer learning and networking hint at ways this is achieved.

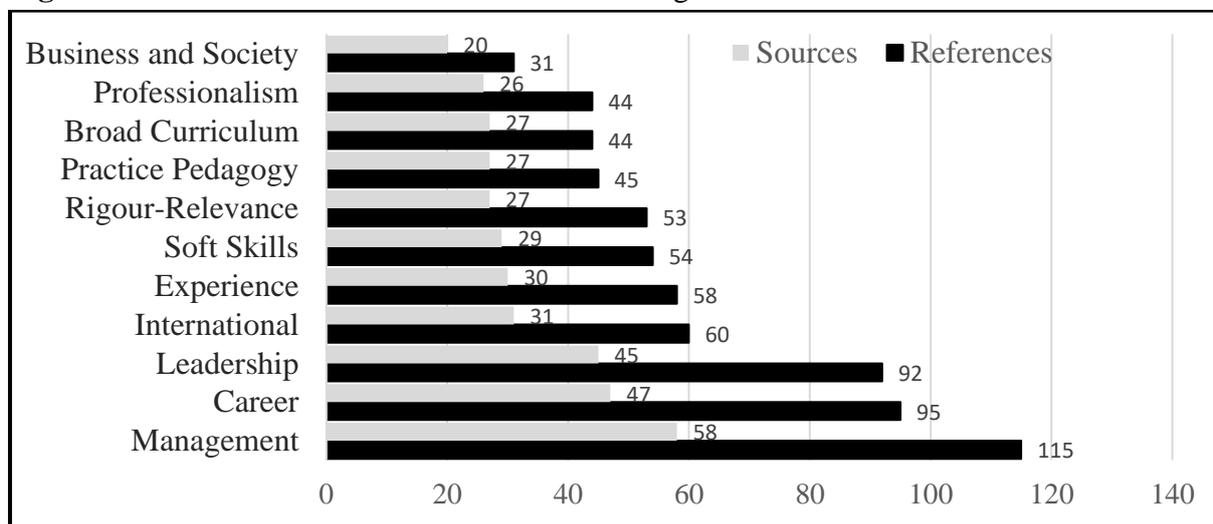
3.4.11 Business and Society [CC11]

Programme review comments on one MBA noted that its teaching was “conducted in a manner that is morally and professionally ethical” (NCIRL, 2015, p.13) These reflect a recurring pattern in the data on the ethical role of managers. For example, there is content in the data on ethics (NCIRL, 2017), business in society (TCD, 2017), sustainability (Henley, 2017) and corporate social responsibility (NCIRL, 2015).

3.5 Concluding Remarks

Some content categories affirm what we know about executive MBAs, e.g. that they are concerned with management and that they are promoted on the basis of career progression. Yet, some categories appear to contradict criticisms of MBAs. For example, the portrayal of consultancy projects as a practice-based pedagogy that facilitates synthesis belies Mintzberg's (2004) pedagogical critique. Whilst past criticisms are targeted at full-time MBAs, they are also levelled at executive MBAs, whose students sustain professional activities with their studies. Either educators are adept at addressing criticism or promotional material inflates the extent to which these criticisms are addressed. A weakness in the analysis is that the data echoes educator, not learner, perceptions. Some findings are consistent with prior literature. The broadening knowledge and practice-based pedagogy categories imply that graduates broaden their perspectives and develop into more integrated generalists who handle senior management issues in less siloed ways (Lawrence, 2012). This is supported by projects (e.g. NUIG, 2016) in the form of research or consultancy (Boehner and O'Neil, 2010). Finally, the analysis suggests that graduates experience increased self-awareness (e.g. UCD, 2017) and confidence (e.g. TCD, 2017). If the number of sources and references linked to professionalism are indicative of its importance, then it would be considered a lesser category (Figure 3).

Figure 3: References and Sources for Content Categories



Yet, this is misleading. Some categories relate to professional education or to components of professionalism. Practice-based pedagogy, for example, is a feature of professional education (Somers et al., 2014) and ethics relates to the concept of social agency (Nino, 2012), also a key component of professionalism. The next section aims to articulate the relationships between content categories and conceptualisations of professionalism in executive MBAs so that a clearer picture of what the secondary data tells us about professionalism can be conveyed.

4. MAPPING OF CONTENT CATEGORIES TO CORE CONCEPTS

“Companies see nothing less than a transformation in the individual” (Faller, 2015, p. 1).

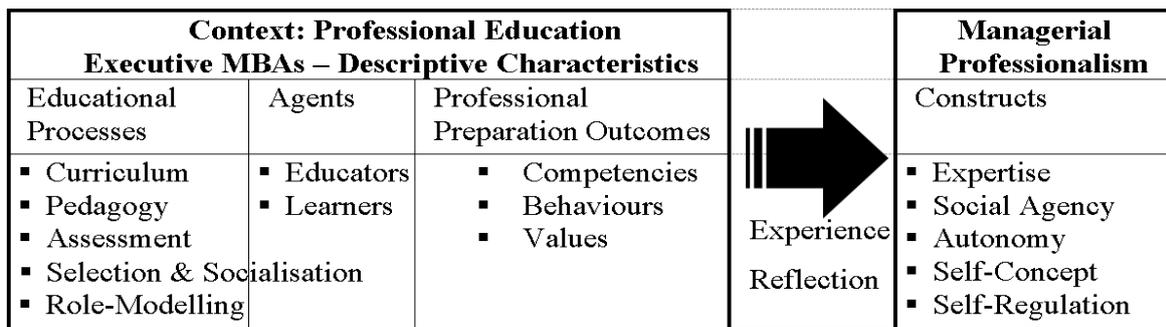
4.1 Introduction

Although aspects of professionalism were conveyed in the content analysis of secondary data, it is possible to relate other content categories in Section 3 to professionalism by embedding them in the literature. Beginning with the theoretical underpinnings, this section maps the content categories to concepts of professionalism and to its development in executive MBAs.

4.2 Summary of Theoretical Underpinnings

Figure 4 provides a conceptualisation of managerial professionalism in executive MBAs based on the literature review undertaken and reported in Paper 1.

Figure 4: Conceptualisation of Professionalism in Executive MBA Programmes



Executive MBAs are conceptualised using Stark et al.’s (1986) framework, which include education processes for teaching professionalism, agents in those processes and professional preparation outcomes. Hilton and Slotnick (2005) imply that professionalism requires learning from experience and reflection. Professionalism can be interpreted as a synthesis of expertise (Romme, 2016), social agency (Jarvis, 2009), autonomy of judgment (Hall, 1968), self-concept (Nino, 2012) and self-regulation (Anderson and Escher, 2010). Whilst trust is a key aspect of professionalism, it is excluded from the conceptualisation as it would require studying relationships external to the MBA. Clark et al.’s (2014) concept of professionalism, based on employability, is also excluded as executives would likely have developed this already.

4.3 Mapping of Professional Education to Content Categories

There are some anomalies with applying Stark et al.’s (1986) framework to executive MBAs, which are post-experience programmes. However, we can still consider the framework’s education processes, agents of those processes and its professional preparation outcomes as reasonable proxies for describing executive MBAs as professional education programmes.

4.3.1 Educational Processes

MBA students follow a common management curriculum [CC₁] guided by accreditation (AMBA, 2016) to the extent that standard exit tests (ETS, 2017; CPC, 2014) are growing, although not yet in Ireland. Executive MBAs also emphasise leadership [CC₃] to tender to their experienced students. Table 3 summarises an analysis of curricula from the secondary data.

Table 3: Indicative Executive MBA Courses (Generic Titles)

Generic Course Title	Programmes ¹	Type ²	Year ³	E/M ⁴
Economics	75%	A	1	M
Financial Statement Analysis	100%	A	1	M
Marketing	90%	F	1	M
Business Research Methods	35%	A	1	M
Organisational Behaviour	70%	A	1	M
HRM	95%	F	1	M
Business Strategy	90%	S	1	M
CSR; Ethics; Sustainability; Business & Society	35%	E	1	M
Operations Management	55%	F	1	M
Management / Cost Accounting	55%	A	1	M
Corporate Finance	65%	F	2	M
International Business	60%	F	2	M
Entrepreneurship	50%	S	1 or 2	E
International Study Visit	50%	S	Summer	E
Management Skills / Professional Development	60%	PD	1 or 2	M
Leadership	70%	S	2	M
Corporate Governance	35%	E	2	M
Business Law	15%	F	1 or 2	E
Project Management	30%	F	1 or 2	E
Innovation Management	30%	T	1 or 2	E
Management Information Systems	20%	T	1 or 2	E
Analytics/Cloud Computing /Digital Marketing	50%	T	1 or 2	E
Strategic Consultancy Project or Thesis	100%	S	2	M

¹ Refers to percentage of programmes covering the course. Figures are estimates based on course outlines on provider websites. ² Type – F Functional, A – Analytical, E – Ethical, S – Strategic, T - Technological. ³ Refers to most common year in which course appeared, ⁴ E – Typically offered as an elective course, M – typically offered as a mandatory course.

Mandatory curriculum typically comprises courses aligned to business disciplines [CC₉] or to enhance analytical skills [CC₇]. Ethics, evident in courses, such as Sustainability or Corporate Social Responsibility, can also be embedded in the curriculum [CC₁₁]. The MBA thesis usually comprises a combination of a literature review to diagnose a management problem, a case-study analysis, an adaptation of a management principle to a business scenario; or an analysis

of unpublished data. Some providers support the thesis with courses in research methods and some offer a consultancy project as an alternative [CC7]. Table 3 suggests that MBA curricula is broad and aligned to business disciplines, including internationalisation [CC4]. Whilst courses, such as Strategy and Leadership, aim to synthesise curricula, it is difficult to ascertain if the curricula as highly integrated (Boni et al., 2009). Interdisciplinarity appears limited to two providers (OU, 2016; NUIG 2016). In relation to pedagogy, whilst the data suggests that the executive MBAs deploy practice-based pedagogy [CC8], it is unclear if practice is grounded in management research. Students appear to apply classroom theory in their work environment [CC7], practice soft skills [CC6] and undertake international study visits [CC4].

“... it’s about constantly taking material that’s delivered in the classroom back to your organisation to use to solve a current problem” (DCU, 2017, p. 5).

Abbot’s (1988) concepts of professional work are also evident in the data. Diagnosis and treatment are reflected in learning activities that de-emphasise didactic teaching and provide opportunities to integrate foundation knowledge in practice-based experiences (Appendix VI). Development of inference skills seems less evident. Evidence based management is explicit in the DCU and Henley MBAs [CC7] but not in others.

“We also using an evidence-based approach because we want our MBAs to be able to use good quality scientific data in making decisions” (Gubbins, 2016, p.56).

A typology of pedagogical practice in executive MBAs can be derived from Somers et al.’s (2014) path to practice-based learning for management education. Figure 5 implies that executive MBAs impart foundational knowledge of business disciplines for integration in initial practice-based experiences, thus developing diagnosis and treatment skills.

Figure 5: Typology of Practice-Based Pedagogies in Executive MBAs

Foundational Knowledge	Initial Practice Pedagogy	Field Immersion
Pedagogy: Knowledge of Business Disciplines	Pedagogy: Behavioural or Computer Simulations.	Pedagogy: Application of knowledge in the workplace
Aim: Develop ability to define routine problems in management practice.	Aim: Improve diagnosis and treatment skills.	Aim: Develop inference skills and provide nascent identity as manager.
Examples in Secondary Data: Case-Studies, Team Exercises.	Examples in Secondary Data: Company Visits, Roleplay, Debate.	Examples in Secondary Data: Consultancy Projects. International Study Visits.

Source: Adapted from (Somers et al., 2014)

Yet, managerial work is more than merely applying foundation knowledge for diagnosing routine problems. Students require inference skills to solve complex problems. Assessments tend not to be detailed explicitly in the secondary data. Where commentary on assessment exists in the data, it tends to problematise high assessment loads.

“The panel observed that the assessment load ... seems to be very heavy and recommends that a schedule of assessment hand-ups be developed” (DIT, 2009, p. 2)

A second context in which assessment surfaces is in relation to leadership [CC₃] and self-awareness [CC₁₀]. In particular, self-assessment, which has been used in other professions (e.g. Rees and Shepherd, 2005), appears to have some traction in executive MBAs.

“Through case studies, dialogue, coaching and self-assessment, you’ll expand your ideas of leadership and deepen awareness of your own abilities” (UL, 2017, p. 6).

In terms of selection, providers tend to place priority on professional experience [CC₅] over GMAT scores. Less clear from the data is evidence of socialisation, i.e. processes for inculcating the values and behaviours for entry into a profession (Weidman et al., 2001). Role-modelling surfaces in the context of masterclasses from CEOs and entrepreneurs (e.g. NUIG, 2017). However, given the seniority of executive MBA students, emphasis appears to be placed on learning from interaction among students [CC₅] [CC₈].

4.3.2 Educators and Learners

There was little detail in the data about the agency of educators except in terms of conveying their research and industry expertise [CC₇].

“Our faculty thrives on real-life research questions and many of them have vast experience in the corporate world” (Henley, 2017, p. 11).

As promotional material is targeted at prospective students, there are many soundbites from students in the data. A sample of quotes and related content categories are provided below.

“the opportunity to apply the learning in my organisation” (NUIG, 2016, p. 3) [CC₈].

“The diversity and calibre of my peer group ... added to my ... learning experience. I ... learnt a huge amount by ... listening to other people’s ...” (O’Dwyer, 2016, p. 1) [CC₅].

“The MBA gave me a rounded view of all disciplines” (McGuire, 2009, p. 17) [CC₉].

“The focus on problem solving using real life scenarios ...” (TCD, 2017, p. 4) [CC₆].

These quotes convey a positive experience based on peer-learning, diversity of student backgrounds, broad curricula covering the business disciplines and application of learning.

4.3.3 Professional Preparation Outcomes

RQ2 seeks to identify values, competencies and behaviours that learners and educators perceive are developed in executive MBAs. A useful starting point in this endeavour is to examine the secondary data for patterns in professional preparation outcomes. Professional competence is referenced in the secondary through the notion that students require “an understanding of functions outside of their existing professional competence” (UCC, 2016, p. 2) [CC₉]. Integrative competence [CC₉] is reflected in the outcome “to act effectively and autonomously in complex, ill-defined situations” (NUIG, 2016, p. 6). Interpersonal competence, i.e. an ability to relate to others [CC₆], is also evident (e.g. UL, 2017). Adaptive competence is exemplified in the Henley MBA’s claim to enable students to “adapt to change in all spheres of life” (Henley, 2017, p. 17). Conceptual competence is reflected in the broad theoretical foundations of the basic business disciplines. There is little evidence in the data that sheds light on MBA values. Yet, accreditation requires evidence of “values to succeed in complex environments” (AMBA, 2016, p.1), including ethical values (p. 9). Whilst ethical values [CC₁₁] are evident in curriculum (e.g. NUIG, 2016) and pedagogy (e.g. TCD, 2017), the low percentage of MBAs with mandatory ethics courses requires further exploration. The strength of CC₂ relative to CC₁₁ in Figure 3 suggests that career marketability is prioritised over professional ethics. Behavioural outcomes in the secondary data tend to be framed in terms of self and teams with emphasis on reflective practice [CC₈] and professional development [CC₁₀].

“Through ... self-reflection ... interactive workshops, 360° peer review and ... coaching, you’ll gain insight into your ... behaviour” (UCD, 2017b).

“You will be placed in diverse teams that will focus on understanding the emotional ... intelligence of others ... improving relationship management skills” (UCD, 2017b).

“Coaching sessions and reflective journal work ... designed to accelerate awareness, insight and new ... management behaviours and outcomes” (UCC, 2016).

This sub-section maps the conceptual components of professional education, using the Stark et al. (1986) framework, to the content categories of the secondary data. Education processes appear to focus on leadership and soft-skills, closing the rigour-relevance gap, practice-based pedagogy and a broadening of knowledge aligned business disciplines. Professional preparation outcomes appear to emphasise career enhancement over professionalism or ethical values. Behaviours, which exemplify honesty, integrity and fair treatment of others do not manifest themselves strongly in the data.

4.4 Mapping of Experience and Reflection to Content Categories

Hilton and Slotnick (2005) depicts professionalism as being acquired from experience and reflection [CC₅]. It has two implications for our conceptualisation. First, prior experience matters and, hence, the selection of students with professional experience. Second, Roglio and Light (2009) advocate for executive MBAs to provide space for reflective practice, which is conveyed as a key learning process in most programme brochures.

“Personal reflection is a key component of all assessments” (Henley, 2017, p. 9).

“... reflection can help identify our personal biases and limitations in recognising and developing effective leadership in ourselves and others” (UL, 2016, p. 13).

“The module aims to challenge your own ... practice by reflecting upon it critically in light of the ideas you encounter, and through debates with others” (OU, 2016, p. 14).

Andragogic principles for adult learning (Knowles, 1984) evident in data that are designed to facilitate reflective practice include: experiential learning (e.g. NUIG, 2017), action learning (e.g. Trinity, 2017) and case methods (e.g. UCC, 2016).

4.5 Mapping of Professionalism Concepts to Content Categories

Important dimensions to managerial professionalism, identified in Paper 1, are summarised in Table 4. Romme’s (2016) concepts of ethical disposition and sense of responsibility are subsumed into the broader social agency concept (Nino, 2012) for this analysis.

Table 4: Constituent Dimensions of Managerial Professionalism

Construct	Relevant Literature
Expert Body of Knowledge	Nino (2014); Somers et al. (2014); Romme (2016)
Social Agency	Jarvis (2009); Pouryousefi (2009); Romme (2016)
Autonomy	Hall (1968); Haywood-Farmer and Stuart (1990)
Self-Regulation	Hall (1968); Romme (2016)
Self-Concept	Haywood-Farmer and Stuart (1990); Nino (2014)

4.5.1 Expert Body of Knowledge

Traditional professions have a body of knowledge that articulates the societal problems that they are equipped to solve (Abbott, 1988). Barker (2010) and Pfeffer (2011) stress the need to define a jurisdiction for managers. Business schools have grappled with this (Datar et al., 2010) as critics question the MBA’s relevance to practice (Navarro, 2008).

Table 3 implies that MBA curriculum is focused on foundational knowledge in the first year and more strategic perspectives and practical applications of that knowledge in the second.

Using Somers et al.'s (2014) attempt to cast a jurisdiction for managers, Figure 6 maps the curricular content evident in the secondary data [CC₉] to expertise for managerial work. It conveys graduates as professional managers trained to integrate four forms of capital with the ethical component in order to balance stakeholder needs [CC₁₁].

Figure 6: A Jurisdiction for Management from the MBA's Body of Knowledge

<p>Managing Structural Capital</p> <p>Typical MBA Courses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MIS ▪ Financial Accounting ▪ Technology Management ▪ Management accounting 	<p>Managing Human Capital</p> <p>Typical MBA Courses Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HRM ▪ Leadership ▪ Organisational Behaviour ▪ Management Skills 	<p>Integration</p> <p>Typical MBA Courses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business Strategy ▪ Strategic Consultancy Projects ▪ Thesis ▪ Leadership
<p>Managing Relationship Capital</p> <p>Typical MBA Courses Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business and Society ▪ Corporate Social Responsibility ▪ Marketing Management ▪ International Business 	<p>Managing Process Capital</p> <p>Typical MBA Courses Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Operations Management ▪ Supply Chain Management ▪ Entrepreneurship ▪ Corporate Governance 	

Adapted from Somers et al. (2014)

The MBA graduate's role appears less to do with narrow professional expertise and more to do with integrative thinking across a broad range of business domains (Martin, 2009).

4.5.2 Social Agency

Managers require an ethical disposition to generate trust and respond efficiently to information asymmetries (Pouryousefi, 2013). Several codes in Appendix IV relate to social agency (Nino, 2012), including ethics, sustainability and corporate social responsibility [CC₁₁]. Providers who sign-up to PRME seek to educate their students as “future generators of sustainable value for business and society” (O’Connell and Sweeney, 2015). In classifying courses in ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’, ‘Sustainability’ and ‘Business and Society’ as labels for courses on ethics (Christensen et al., 2007), it is possible to ascertain that only 35% of the executive MBAs offer courses in this domain. Yet, social agency may be embedded in other ways (e.g. Rasche et al., 2013). How it is embedded requires further exploration.

“... that business should be measured solely based on shareholder value has come into disfavour, and mercifully so ...” (Begley, 2009, p. 2).

If Begley's (2009) sentiment is reflective of other MBA educators, then understanding the embeddedness of social agency in practice-based pedagogy [CC₈] is worthwhile.

4.5.3 Autonomy of Judgement

Moore and Rosenblum (1970) suggest that a key attribute of professionalism is autonomy of judgment. Yet, references to judgment in one programme brochure (UCC, 2016) appear to be the exception, not the rule. Moreover, the data appears to associate decision-making with analysis. A learning outcome in one MBA is to demonstrate “data analysis, decision making ...” (NUIG, 2016, p. 6). Barnard (1995) suggests that the judgment of experienced managers tend towards intuition over analysis. As such, it is worth exploring the extent to which and what type of judgment is exercised in practice-based pedagogy [CC₈].

4.5.4 Self-Concept

Baumeister (1999) refers to self-concept as an individual’s beliefs about oneself. Haywood-Farmer and Stuart (1990) suggest that professionals tend to have a superior sense of self-concept over others. Indicated by leadership [CC₃], self-confidence, self-awareness [CC₁₀], self-concept signifies a readiness to execute managerial responsibilities. Its development for senior management is worth exploring.

“Our MBA provides you with the knowledge, transferable skills and confidence required for innovative and effective management and leadership” (NUIG, 20116, p. 2).

How MBAs develop self-awareness and awareness of others is worth exploring given their focus on coaching and professional development.

“This ... will increase your self-awareness and confidence” (Henley, 2017, p. 17).

Shamir et al. (1993) demonstrate a strong correlation between leadership effectiveness [CC₃] and the motivating effects of self-concept.

4.5.5 Self-Regulation

The secondary data does not support the idea that executive MBA graduates are self-regulated through a code of conduct. Yet, codes exist (Nohria, 2012) to the extent that Podolny (2009) calls for qualifications to be revoked for violation. Why self-regulation appears not to be part of managerial professionalism warrants further exploration.

The conceptual framework did not include behavioural skills valued by employers (Clark et al., 2014) as it was assumed that these skills is more relevant to younger professionals. Yet, the secondary data suggests that behavioural content [CC₆] and career marketability [CC₂] in executive MBAs is significant. Skills, such as teamwork (AIT, 2017), presentation skills (UCD, 2017), problem-solving (UCC, 2016) and oral communications (UCD, 2017) are evident.

4.6 Concluding Remarks

Mapping the conceptualisation of professionalism in executive MBAs to content categories of the secondary data reveals a degree of embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs on the island of Ireland (Figure 7). This offers a basis for exploring educator and learner perceptions of professionalism in executive MBAs during and beyond the pilot.

Figure 7: Mapping of Professionalism Concepts to Content Categories

Conceptualisations	CC ₁	CC ₂	CC ₃	CC ₄	CC ₅	CC ₆	CC ₇	CC ₈	CC ₉	CC ₁₀	CC ₁₁
Curriculum	■		■	■			■		■		■
Pedagogy				■		■	■	■			
Assessment			■							■	
Selection & Socialisation					■						
Role-Modelling											
Educators							■				
Learners					■	■		■	■		
Competencies						■			■		
Behaviours								■		■	
Values		■									■
Learn from Experience					■						
Learn from Reflection										■	
Expertise									■		■
Social Agency								■			■
Autonomy of Judgment								■			
Self-Concept			■							■	
Self-Regulation											
Employability		■				■					

Unless contradicted by primary data, self-regulation can probably be ruled-out as an aspect of professionalism in executive MBAs. The exclusion of professionalism based on behaviours sought by employers, however, needs to be revisited given that the secondary data signals a focus on soft-skill development. The secondary data revealed little about the agency of educators. Their role in fostering professionalism merits exploration in the pilot.

It appears to be the integration of strategic issues in unfamiliar knowledge domains with professional development training that enhances graduate capabilities for bridging functional expertise as professional managers. Primary data collection should also focus, therefore, on the professional development components of executive MBAs. Informed by these conclusions, the next section outlines the pilot of the primary data collection and analysis processes.

5. PILOT OF PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

“... a piloting session before carrying out their interviews ... will not just refine the interview content, but ... determine its usefulness as a research instrument” (Alshenqeeti, 2009, p. 41).

5.1 Introduction

The study aims to analyse qualitative data from the two key actors, namely educators and learners. To facilitate data collection, an interview guide for educators and a focus group guide for learners were included in Paper 2. The purpose of this section is twofold. First, it is to document a pilot of the primary data gathering and analysis processes. Second, it is to discuss themes from the pilot in terms of how they address the research questions. The study’s philosophical positioning and primary data acquisition and analysis processes are first outlined. A summary of the data collection and analysis processes in the pilot follows. Amendments are made to these processes for scaling the study and themes emerging from the pilot are discussed.

5.2 Philosophical Positioning of the Study

Whilst the conceptualisation of managerial professionalism identifies constituent components, such as expertise and social agency, professionalism is a nebulous construct, which precludes a widely accepted definition. Different professions seek to define it differently (e.g. Swick, 2000; Veloski, 2005). Even within management, scholars interpret it widely. The embryonic nature of research on managerial professionalism supports an exploratory approach to enquiry. Hence, dialogue is needed to converge on a common understanding of professionalism with sufficient consensus for it to be used effectively in management education. Given its nebulous nature, the study’s philosophical positioning, as outlined in Paper 2, leans towards an interpretive approach (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Such an approach is needed to construct a normative definition of managerial professionalism that reflects the perceptions of educators and learners. Although Figure 7 suggests that elements of professionalism are embraced by learners and educators, vast differences in emphasis between the two agents’ perceptions would be problematic. In the study’s quest for a common ground, in which professionalism is assumed to be subjectively, interpersonally and socially constructed, the data sought is qualitative in nature. Qualitative data collection and analysis is progressive in that subsequent interviews are informed by previous interviews, assimilating more targeted questioning. Hence, some (e.g. Holloway, 1997) argue that a pilot is unnecessary in qualitative research. However, a pilot can be used to establish a clear focus for the study, helping to narrow enquiry.

5.3 Summary of Proposed Data Collection and Analysis from Educators

As MBA directors have responsibility for design and delivery of their respective programmes, they are deemed best placed to articulate their programmes' education processes and outcomes. Interviews are planned with programme directors and recommended educators from across the executive MBA sector on the island of Ireland. The number of interviews to be conducted will depend on how quickly themes emerge. It is intended to audio-record all interviews and take notes during each session. Recordings will be transcribed and coded for key themes and patterns through an immersion /crystallisation process (Borkan, 1999). The intention is to proceed until saturation. Some themes may crystallise quickly whereas others may warrant further interviews. Hence, collection and analysis are interlinked with alternation from immersion to crystallisation occurring in interim periods between interviews. Findings from each interview will be reflected on to examine how they contribute to emerging patterns.

5.4 Summary of Proposed Data Collection and Analysis from Learners

The original research design, outlined in Paper 2, sought to run three focus group sessions with identified students who are at the start, middle and finish of their studies. The intention was to capture from the students a real-time reflection-in-action of professionalism in their MBAs. However, as reflected in feedback received from the WIT Graduate School of Business ethics committee, the ethical complications associated with engaging with students outweighs the potential benefits of real-time feedback. Additionally, the level of granularity sought from three snapshots during an academic year is unrealistic in its attempt to capture longitudinally the development of professionalism in students. Instead, it is proposed to run a single graduate focus group after the educator interviews for three reasons. First, graduates can provide more holistic feedback, connecting their MBA experience to their managerial roles. Second, the findings from the educator interviews can inform the focus group. Third, the approach provides triangulation by source with less risk of learners merely reflecting back educator perspectives.

5.5 The Pilot Process

Given that the graduate focus group follows the educator interviews, a significant contribution to validity rests with data collection and analysis from educators. Hence, the pilot is focused on trialling the interview process with educators from one MBA programme listed in Table 1. The pilot involved two interviews, one with a programme director (PD_P) and another with a senior lecturer (E_P), both who share responsibility for MBA_P. MBA_P is also listed in Table 2 and, hence, has been subject to secondary data analysis. To maintain confidentiality, these

codes replace the provider's name and the names of those interviewed. The selection of MBA_P as a context for the pilot was a pragmatic decision based on availability.

5.5.1 Data Collection

PD_P and E_P were invited to participate in advance of the interviews. Each were emailed a participant information sheet with written informed consent given before each interview. The interviews took place in November 2017 at the campus premises where MBA_P's students undertake their studies. They were semi-structured in that the interview guide kept the questioning focused but other questions were asked based on conversation flow. Each interview lasted circa. 90 minutes and were audio-recorded. Field notes were made of commentary of interest during the interviews. Immediately afterwards, the field notes were reviewed, and initial perceptions were noted with some considered comments. The audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim (by the interviewer) with word-for-word replication of the recording (Poland, 1995). Verbatim transcription was undertaken to capture non-verbal aspects, deemed critical to the validity of data collection (Silverman, 1993). A copy of each transcript was given to the respective participants so that they could remove sensitive information or to make amendments. Verbatim transcription requires clerical skill. In scaling the study, it is proposed to contract transcription, under confidentiality, to a service provider. The time associated with the transcription was underestimated with verbatim transcription adding to the complexity. As transcription is prone to human error (Gilbert, 1993), future transcripts will be accuracy-checked by listening to each audio-recording and reading the transcript text concurrently.

5.5.2 Data Analysis

Transcription is subject to interpretation and, thus, forms the initial part of the data analysis. Whilst the interviews yielded data that amounted to 18,000+ words, the volume of data was much less than the secondary data analysed in Section 3. Whilst this made pattern recognition more difficult, the purpose of the pilot was not to make premature predictions on the basis of pilot data but to identify potential themes for future exploration. Once confident that the transcripts accurately reflected the interviews, a thematic analysis was undertaken to elicit emerging themes. The process was similar to that of the content analysis of the secondary data. Transcripts and field notes were stored in PDF formats using NVivo. The identification and quantification of key words and phrases (Appendix III) was used to guide the coding process. Initial codes (Appendix IV) were inductively generated and aggregated into seven emerging themes, as presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Aggregation of Initial Codes into Emerging Themes

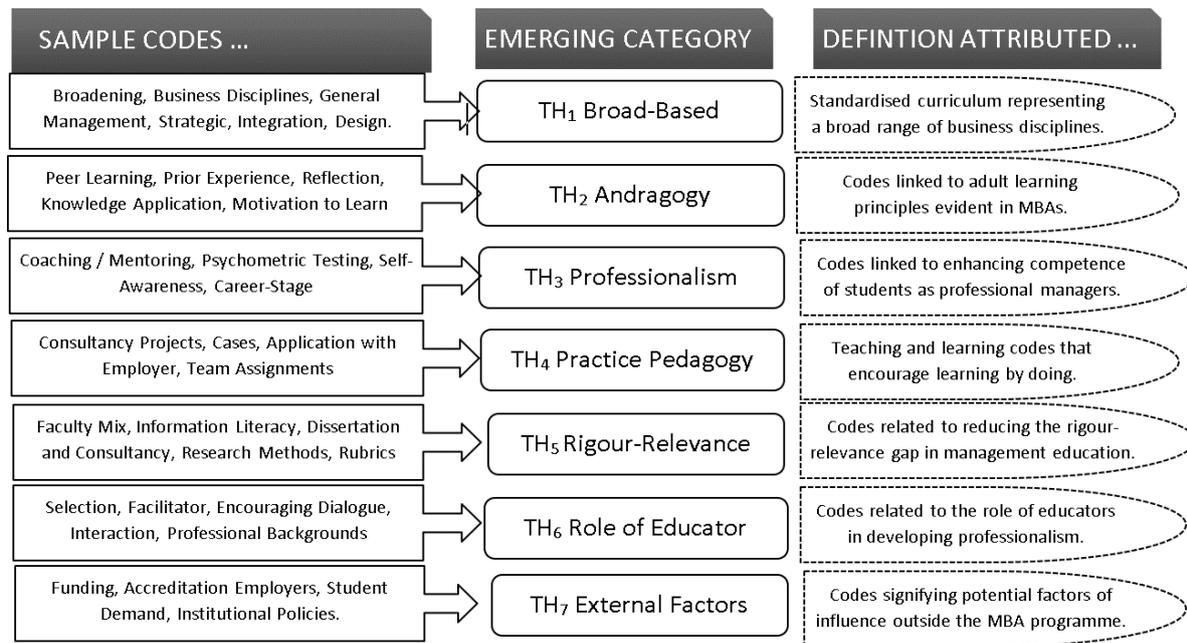


Figure 7 and Figure 2 appear to align. Whilst this may be due to the thematic analysis being influenced unduly by the prior secondary data analysis, it is possible that the pilot themes merely reflect educator perspectives, which are echoed in the secondary data.

TH₁ Broad-Based Curriculum: Aligned with CC₉ from the secondary data analysis, both interviews implied that MBA_P had a broad curriculum covering a wide range of business disciplines. PD_P emphasised that MBA_P was focused on general management, requiring students to engage with disciplines outside their professional expertise.

TH₂ Andragogy: Adult learning surfaced in the context of Hilton and Slotnick’s (2015) model in which learning from experience and reflection was a key element in developing professionalism. These principles were cited on several occasions during the interviews, including peer learning, application of learning in the workplace and reflective practice.

TH₃ Professionalism: E_P referred to a focus on professional development of mid-ranking executives for more senior roles. Aligned with CC₁₀, PD_P cited psychometric testing as a tool for developing self-awareness, soft-skills as a means of developing professional behaviours and practice-based pedagogy for developing autonomy and self-confidence.

TH₄ Practice-Based Pedagogy: Although PD_P suggested that the first year of MBA_P was driven by knowledge content and, hence, “quite theoretical”, this was redressed in Year 2 in which students complete a team-based consultancy project. Other aspects of TH₄ that surfaced in the interviews, such as case-studies and role-play, align with CC₈.

TH5 Rigour-Relevance: Also, a content category of secondary data, CC₇, efforts to address the rigour-relevance gap were noted in both interviews. PD_P and E_P stressed that students must undertake a dissertation (rigour) and consultancy project (relevance).

TH6 Role of the Educator: With little reference to the role of educators in the secondary data, PD_P claimed that the MBA_P teaching team chosen was based on criteria of having a track-record of research in business or significant management experience. PD_P favoured those who could interact with adult learners through a facilitative delivery style.

TH7 External Factors: Some external factors were deemed to influence MBA_P's education processes. AMBA accreditation was being considered although PD_P felt that MBA_P was not yet accreditation-ready. Whilst student demand appeared sustainable, the class size was kept small for a more intimate learning environment.

5.6 Emerging Findings - Programme Characteristics (Context)

Interview data affirmed much of what was gleaned previously from the secondary data. PD_P described MBA_P as a “management qualification”. E_P affirmed that it is pitched to students as an “opportunity for career progression”. Although leadership did not surface in interview discussions, it is included MBA_P's curriculum. Whilst MBA_P does not offer an international study trip, PD_P suggested that international aspects were covered in its Economics course. PD_P confirmed that applicants had to have “at least five year’s professional experience” and stressed the significance of leveraging the students’ prior experience in the programme design.

“The programme is about cementing that knowledge, building on that knowledge and ... certifying that they are at a particular level” [E_P].

The development of soft-skills was evident in MBA_P with examples of group-work, presentations, debate, creative problem-solving, role-play and an emphasis on peer-learning.

“I have seen them here in the library during the week, working in their groups. They have a lot of presentations ... we place a big emphasis on learning from one and other” [PD_P].

The rigour-relevance theme surfaces in the two largest courses (in terms of academic credits) in MBA_P's second year. The Management Consultancy Project and Dissertation, orthogonally displaced in Pasteur’s quadrant (Stokes, 2011), complement each other.

“The professional relevance of the Management Constultancy Project is significant in that it gets students to work in teams on a genuine business problem for a client company” [E_P].

“One of the first courses they do is Research Methods and they use this in their final thesis, which is totally separate from the Management Consultancy Project” [PD_P].

Additionally, E_P and PD_P confirmed that marking rubrics were used to encourage students to engage with academic literature in their assignments to promote an evidence-based approach.

“The library gave them a workshop on how to access these journals in the third week and ... marking rubrics include the use of appropriate referencing” [PD_P].

Practice-based pedagogy surfaced primarily in the context of the Management Consultancy Project whereby students get to apply in practice the theory that they learn in their first year.

“... you have learned all this theory here ... now you go and apply it” [PD_P].

Whilst the courses were primarily along disciplinary lines, integration was evident in the Management Consultancy Project to “bring together that knowledge into application” [PD_P].

E_P highlighted a strong emphasis on professional development in MBA_P with the students undertaking Meyers-Briggs (1962) evaluations at the beginning of the programme.

“It’s a fantastic way of developing self-awareness. So, they have a good understanding of where they feel they are at.” [E_P].

Given that the interviews confirmed much of the findings from the secondary data analysis, a reasonable level of confidence can be drawn on the contextual validity of the processes piloted.

5.7 Emerging Findings - Perceptions of Professionalism (RQ1)

The pilot also provides insight into educator perceptions of managerial professionalism. When asked if they considered management to be a profession, there was some general agreement.

“Most definitely ... and skills can be learned. There should be a noticeable difference between a manager who is professionally trained and one who is not” [PD_P].

“Yes, I would see management as profession in its own right” [E_P].

Yet, PD_P considered it to be “less defined in terms of attributes” than traditional professions and felt that MBA_P plays a role in the professional development of managers.

“Managers need certain characteristics that I believe can be developed ... tenacity, resilience, judgement and I believe that our programme has a strong role to play” [PD_P].

When asked about their perceptions of professionalism, the educator answers varied.

“it is acting in a moral ... ethical manner consistently” [PD_P].

“it is about judicious use of knowledge in a way that builds trust...” [E_P].

E_P stressed managers' wide client base, hence, a need for advanced skills in ethical reasoning.

".. there is an inherent moral hazard associated with the role ... and managers must meet and trade a lot of different stakeholder needs" [E_P].

PD_P stressed that "it's really the way you behave", highlighting the role of human interaction in management practice and the specific importance of behavioural moderation.

5.8 Emerging Findings - Development of Professionalism (RQ2)

Both educators felt that professionalism, although not explicitly framed, was used in MBA_P to develop students as managers.

"Oh, very much so, yes ... it manifests itself in many ways" [PD_P].

PD_P suggested that the first-year courses were quite theoretical, "really just cementing what they already knew" and "broadening ... understanding of different areas of business". Yet, E_P felt that the overall programme was "less academic and more professional" in its nature. PD_P suggested that the students grow in self-confidence after being given the tools to be self-aware.

"Self-awareness, yes exactly. That was one of the things that struck me. That [Meyers Briggs] was possibly one of the very first activities they did." [PD_P].

"They gain a sense of achievement and confidence in their own abilities" [PD_P].

E_P suggested that a major aspect of MBA_P was its emphasis on reflective practice, particularly in the practice-based assignments, such as the Management Consultancy Project.

"In addition to their team presentation, students also have to do an individual reflective report ... linking their own prior experience to what they have learned on the project" [E_P].

Both educators emphasised the broad nature of the knowledge acquired by MBA students.

"I think ... traditional professionals have a much narrower area of expertise" [PD_P].

"No, not experts, but they certainly need a working knowledge of a very broad range of business disciplines financial statements, supply chain and so on" [E_P].

Although both educators highlighted the role of immersion in practice environments, they also suggested that their students appreciated simulated environments as practice-based pedagogy.

"Students are already working in management roles... so simulated practice ... the case-studies, the group work, the role-play ... they can see their relevance straight away" [E_P].

When quizzed about the ethical aspects of MBA_P, PD_P highlighted several learning outcomes with an ethical dimension to them. Whilst there was no course in Business Ethics, ethical responsibility for the decision-making was implicit in the Consultancy Project.

“Students are responsible for the ethical implications of their recommendations” [PD_P].

The interviews were, therefore, quite illuminating as an instrument for exploring how professionalism is perceived and developed and will inform the next iteration of interviews.

5.9 Synthesis of Findings from the Pilot and Secondary Data

Findings from the pilot suggest key features in MBA_P that warrant further exploration for their potential to develop managerial professionalism in other executive MBA programmes. These features include: [1] a broad-based curriculum aligned to business disciplines, [2] the use of andragogic principles for adult learning, [3] the inclusion of a professional development stream within programmes, [4] the use of practice-based pedagogy to develop diagnosis, treatment and inference skills, [5] efforts to balance academic rigour with professional relevancy and [6] the role of the educator as a facilitator of professional interaction and dialogue. Although no assertions are made about the transferability of these findings, evidence from the secondary data suggests that they may be relevant to other executive MBAs (Appendix VIII).

5.10 Concluding Remarks

This section outlined the study’s philosophical positioning, the primary data collection and analysis processes to be used and the pilot of those processes based on interviews with educators from one executive MBA. The pilot was informed by the conceptualisation of professionalism in executive MBAs (Fig. 4) and a content analysis of secondary data on executive MBAs. Given that the pilot focused on interviewing educators, it is not surprising that there is some alignment between content categories from the secondary data and themes emerging from the pilot. An arguable weakness of the pilot is that it does not reflect learner perceptions. However, the research design is such that there is considerable refinement ahead, through a series of educator interviews, before learner perceptions are explored.

The pilot identifies key educational features critical to developing professionalism in one executive MBA programme. In this respect, the data generated by the pilot provides the basis for a strong theoretical scaffolding for framing managerial professionalism, which can be used to guide future interviews. When asked to summarise what was the executive MBA’s “secret formula” for professional development, PD_P suggested that it was a “provision of a broad knowledge base of the business disciplines, opportunities to integrate that knowledge in a practice setting and opportunities to enhance soft [behavioural] skills” that creates the magic. The challenge now is to explore if this assertion holds true with other educators or gets morphed into something else. In this respect, the pilot provides a useful anchoring point for the study.

6 NEXT STEPS – PROGRESS TOWARDS PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

“Because the objects of enquiry in interviewing are humans, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them” (Fontana and Frey, 2008, p. 142).

6.1 Introduction

Whilst a synthesis of findings from the analyses identifies themes for future exploration, the pilot represents only the beginning of the research. Although there are some who argue that a pilot in qualitative research is not necessary, as subsequent interviews will likely become more targeted, there are many reasons why a pilot can be beneficial. Beginning with a reflection on the utility and efficacy of the pilot, this section articulates the next steps in transitioning to a full-scale study. An important issue discussed is whether or not to include the data generated from the pilot in the final findings. A discussion of ethical considerations is also included. The section concludes with suggested modifications to the research instruments.

6.2 Reflection on the Pilot Process

Given the researcher’s engineering background, the pilot represented a first attempt at qualitative enquiry. The pilot was considered essential to gaining confidence in the interview method and thematic analysis. In this respect the content analysis of secondary data was also helpful in that it provided practice in analysing qualitative data using NVivo. A considerable portion of interview time was dedicated to exploring MBA_P as a context for the pilot. In retrospect, much of the data generated on context had been previously identified from the secondary data. This is a “good” outcome as it reduces the time needed to be spent in future interviews on context, providing an opportunity to refine the interview guide (Appendix VII).

A challenging aspect of the interviews was attempting to draw-out from the participants the meaning of professionalism. This challenge reaffirms the subjective nature of professionalism and suggests that more “energy” will need to be exerted in constructing a normative definition for managerial professionalism. A possible approach is to present the conceptualisation of professionalism in executive MBAs during each interview. Although this maybe too suggestive, there was nothing in the conceptualisation that immediately suggests the emerging themes. Note-taking during the interviews and reflection on those notes in the aftermath of the interviews also proved useful. This process can be considered a form of internal validation. Some considered reflections post-interview contributed to the emergence of themes. Using VanTeijlingen and Hundley’s (2001) reasons for conducting a pilot guide, an evaluation of the pilot study is summarised in Table 5, overleaf.

Table 5: Evaluation of the Pilot Study

Evaluation Criteria	Comment
Research Instrument	Sufficient coverage of research questions in interview guide.
Feasibility of Study	Interviews confirmed that extension of study is feasible.
Appropriate Protocols	Participant information, consent forms, interview duration, research guide and recording are appropriate.
Participant Recruitment	Recruitment of MBA educators likely to be practical.
Logistical Issues	Travel required for the study is manageable.
Resources Required	Two voice recorders, pen and notebook, hard copy of participant information sheets and consent forms required.
Collecting the Data	Interviews were audio-recorded. Verbatim transcription was cumbersome. Note-taking was very useful.
Addressing the Research Questions	Too much focus on context. RQ1 requires more focus on emerging themes provided useful insight into RQ2.
Data Analysis Techniques	Thematic analysis of interviews useful for synopsis key messages and identifying patterns in the data.
Potential Problems	Soliciting perceptions of professionalism required prompting.

Adapted from vanTeijlingen and Hundley (2001)

Given that the pilot's relative success, it is proposed to include the results from the pilot in the overall study. Thematic formation will likely be iterative reducing concerns of 'contamination'.

6.3 Ethical Considerations

A research ethics application to the WIT raised concerns with researching their own students. This was partially behind the reasoning outlined earlier in Section 5.4 for shifting the focus on learners from students to graduates. Separate information sheets, consent forms and guides have been designed for interviews and focus-groups. In Ireland's competitive MBA market, anonymity is important. Names of providers and participants are to be substituted by generic codes, known only to the researcher. Interviewees are to be given an opportunity to amend their transcripts. A modified ethics application was submitted to reflect these changes prior to the pilot and approved. By their nature, semi-structured interviews are flexible, hence, it is difficult to predict how might participants react, or interview interactions unfold (Cohen et al., 2007).

6.4 Purposive Selection and Schedule of Interviews

To enhance transferability, it is proposed to include executive MBA programmes from across the sector on the island of Ireland with a range of characteristics (Table 6). While each MBA has a unique set of reasons for potential inclusion in the study, the sample size is nominal. Interviews will proceed and be refined until saturation.

Table 6: Reasoning for Targeting Specific MBAs

#	Primary Reason for Selection	When
MBA₁	With triple accreditation and global ranking, it is important to explore professionalism in what could be considered a provider chasing elite.	Jan'18
MBA₂	In signing-up to PRME, exploring how these principles drive the development of professionalism in MBA ₂ should be a fruitful enquiry.	Jan'18
MBA₃	MBA ₃ 's international study-visit merits exploration as a professional development experience.	Jan'18
MBA₄	As most executive MBAs are delivered at evenings or weekends, exploring the impact of atypical delivery, e.g. online, is worth pursuing.	Feb'18
MBA₅	As a private college, it its worth exploring the impact of governance structure on the key education features of MBA ₅ .	Feb'18
MBA₆	As MBA ₆ emphasises evidence-based management, it is worth exploring how EBM impacts the development of managerial professionalism.	Feb'18
MBA₇	As a provider that offers service-learning opportunities to develop social agency, it is worth exploring how they impact on professionalism.	Mar'18
MBA₈	As a provider that promotes its professional development programme, how this aspect of MBA enhances professionalism is worth exploring.	Mar'18

Should further interviews be required, educators from other executive MBAs will be invited to participate. Whilst the schedule of interviews is constrained by the DBA timeframe, it provides sufficient time for reflection after each interview. The graduate focus-group aims to provide a voice to learner's perceptions of professionalism and how it is developed. It is intended to run the focus-group after the educator interviews at which point themes should be crystallising.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

The analysis of secondary data and the pilot study were useful preparation for extending the study. Given that interviews will be iteratively refined as the study progresses, prior interviews can be considered pilots for later interviews. Attention is needed to ensure that interviews focus on the research questions. Yet, some interesting themes have emerged. The broad nature of MBA curriculum, whilst at odds with traditional notions of professionalism, seems key to the development of managers. MBA_P provides opportunities for integration and application of that knowledge and the secondary data hints that this approach is evident in other executive MBAs. Integration, rather than expertise in specific disciplines, seems particularly relevant to managerial professionalism. Adult education principles seem to be important for developing professionalism, including recruitment of students with professional experience, facilitation of reflective practice, immediate application of knowledge in the workplace and peer learning.

APPENDIX I

SOURCES OF SECONDARY DATA ON EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAMMES

MBA Association of Ireland: Full-time MBAs are immersive programmes delivered over one academic or one calendar year. They target a younger cohort of students, many from overseas. Executive MBAs target an older cohort of working students, often sponsored by their employers. These programmes are typically delivered part-time, often at evenings or weekends. The MBA Association of Ireland represents over 6,000 graduates living in Ireland. Although it has neither a regulatory nor accreditation function, it has a mission to improve the practice of management through continuous learning. It provides a synopsis of all MBAs except for Athlone Institute of Technology and Dundalk Institute of Technology. However, Athlone Institute of Technology is running an executive MBA and Dundalk Institute of Technology has an executive MBA validated. The Open University offers an MBA through distance learning. Although its delivery mode differs from that of a typical executive MBA, it targets working professionals and, hence, is included in the secondary data analysis. As Queens University Belfast does not offer an executive MBA, it is excluded from the secondary data analysis.

Programme Brochures: A GOOGLE search was undertaken for brochures for all executive MBAs on the island of Ireland. In some cases, an online form or email request was required to receive the brochure. Brochures dated earlier than 2012, were excluded from the analysis. If a brochure was not dated but available on the provider website, it was deemed current to 2017.

Programme Brochures Included in NVivo Analysis as PDFs

Code	Executive MBA Provider	Reference
BR1	Waterford Institute of Technology	(WIT, 2017)
BR2	University of Limerick	(UL, 2017)
BR3	University College Cork	(UCC, 2016)
BR4	NUI Galway	(NUIG, 2016)
BR5	Trinity College Dublin	(TCD, 2017)
BR6	University College Dublin	(UCD, 2017)
BR7	Dublin Business School	(DBS, 2017)
BR8	National College of Ireland	(NCIRL, 2017)
BR9	Open University	(OU, 2016)
BR10	Dublin City University	(DCU, 2017)
BR11	University of Reading	(Henley, 2017)
BR12	University of Ulster	(UU, 2017)
BR13	Athlone Institute of Technology ¹	(AIT, 2017)

¹ Not listed by MBA Association of Ireland but included for completeness of analysis.

Provider Websites: An online search was undertaken for provider websites. Parent sites and their sub-pages were converted PDF formats using NCapture. A list of websites is provided.

Code	Executive MBA Provider	URL
WS1	Waterford Institute of Technology	www.wit.ie/wd504
WS2	University of Limerick	https://www.ul.ie/business/professional-education/mba_programmes/program
WS3	University College Cork	https://www.ucc.ie/en/mba/
WS4	NUI Galway	http://www.nuigalway.ie/mba/
WS5	Trinity College Dublin	https://www.tcd.ie/business/mba/index-part-time.php
WS6	University College Dublin	http://www.smurfitschool.ie/programmes/thesmurfitmba/executivevemba/
WS7	Dublin City University	https://www4.dcu.ie/courses/Postgraduate/dcubs/Executive-MBA.shtm
WS8	Dublin Institute of Technology	http://www.dit.ie/studyatdit/postgraduate/taughtprogrammes/allcourses/dt348ptditmbaprogramme.html
WS9	Dublin Business School	https://www.dbs.ie/masters-business-administration/mba
WS10	Athlone Institute of Technology ²	https://www.ait.ie/courses/executive-master-of-business-administration-mba
WS11	Open University	http://business-school.open.ac.uk/study/postgraduate-qualifications/mba
WS12	University of Reading	https://www.henley.ac.uk/
WS13	Griffith College	https://www.griffith.ie/faculties/graduate-business-school/courses/master-business-administration
WS14	Dundalk Institute of Technology ²	https://www.dkit.ie/programmes/mba-business-administration
WS15	Institute of Technology Carlow	https://www.itcarlow.ie/study/postgraduate-rd/postgraduate-programmes-taught/business-digital-marketing-design/master-of-bus-admin-mba.htm
WS16	National College of Ireland	https://www.ncirl.ie/Courses/Course-Details/course/Master-of-Business-Administration-MBA
WS17	University of Ulster	https://www.ulster.ac.uk/campaigns/executive-mba

² Not listed by MBA Association of Ireland but included for completeness of analysis.

News Articles: A GOOGLE search was undertaken for news articles published in the Irish media from 1st January 2012 to 17th November 2017. Articles not primarily focused on executive MBAs were excluded from analysis.

Code	Publisher	Date	URL
NA1	Irish Times	12.11.12	http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/because-you-re-worth-it-is-an-mba-right-for-your-career-1.550646
NA2	Irish Times	21.10.13	http://www.irishtimes.com/business/ucd-business-school-ascends-global-mba-rankings-1.1568068
NA3	Silicon Republic	24.02.14	https://www.siliconrepublic.com/jobs/mbas-now-much-more-than-just-industrial-management-training-michael-flynn-tcd-video
NA4	Irish Times	11.03.14	http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/the-business-of-mbas-1.1715422
NA5	Irish Times	06.05.14	http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/so-what-is-the-value-of-that-expensive-mba-1.1781547
NA6	Irish Times	17.05.14	http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/generationemigration/2014/05/17/asia-scholarships-offer-20-graduates-mbas-and-experience/
NA7	Irish Times	09.09.14	https://www.irishtimes.com/business/is-getting-an-mba-worth-it-1.1921909

Code	Publisher	Date	URL
NA8	Irish Times	26.01.15	http://www.irishtimes.com/business/work/ucd-smurfit-school-rises-18-places-to-73rd-in-financial-times-mba-rankings-1.2079074
NA9	Irish Times	10.03.15	https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/mba-programmes-the-stepping-stone-to-a-leadership-role-1.2128968
NA10	Irish Times	02.09.15	http://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/mcwilliams-to-deliver-course-on-global-economics-at-trinity-1.2337501
NA11	Irish Independent	19.10.15	https://www.independent.ie/business/smurfit-schools-mba-climbs-global-rankings-34120014.html
NA12	Irish Times	07.12.15	http://www.irishtimes.com/business/ucd-smurfit-slips-down-the-rankings-1.2457195
NA13	Irish Times	25.01.16	http://www.irishtimes.com/sponsored/start-your-mba-journey-at-ucd-smurfit-school-1.2509803
NA14	Irish Examiner	15.02.16	http://www.irishexaminer.com/sponsored-content/when-is-the-right-time-to-study-an-mba-380929.html
NA15	Business Plus	01.03.16	http://bizplus.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/0316-MBA-.pdf
NA16	Business Plus	08.06.16	https://bizplus.ie/nui-galway-mba-top-tier/
NA17	Irish Times	16.07.16	https://www.irishtimes.com/sponsored/dcu/why-a-part-time-mba-could-unlock-your-potential-1.2712598
NA18	Business Post	16.11.16	https://www.businesspost.ie/business/ucd-smurfit-school-scholarship-association-sunday-business-post-370439
NA19	Irish Times	30.01.17	http://www.irishtimes.com/business/personal-finance/salary-lift-from-doing-an-mba-may-disappoint-1.2956592
NA19	Irish Times	27.04.17	http://www.irishtimes.com/sponsored/gaining-a-broader-perspective-1.3063683
NA20	Irish Central	16.08.17	https://www.irishcentral.com/culture/education/top-five-reasons-to-study-an-mba
NA21	Irish Times	25.08.17	https://www.irishtimes.com/business/work/how-to-study-for-an-mba-and-keep-your-business-going-1.3183930
NA22	Irish Central	31.08.17	https://www.irishcentral.com/culture/education/studying-an-mba-in-ireland-cost-effective-accelerations-of-your-career
NA23	Business World	22.09.17	https://www.businessworld.ie/news/When-Is-an-MBA-Degree-Worth-It--569385.html
NA24	Irish Times	16.10.17	https://www.irishtimes.com/business/financial-services/ucd-smurfit-school-mba-ranked-74th-best-in-world-1.3257510
NA25	Business Post	15.11.17	https://www.businesspost.ie/focus-on/ucd-michael-smurfit-graduate-business-school-mba-experience-day-402766

Programmatic Review and Validation Reports

There were very few programme review documents available in the public domain, either as self-evaluations or as formal reports from *Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)*. Similarly, only one validation report by the QQI could be found.

Code	Provider	Date	URL
PR1	Dublin Institute of Technology	06.09	www.dit.ie/media/qualityassuranceandacademicprogramrecords/2Previewreportsandresponses/2Fmba_report.doc&usg=AOvVaw2sPhceS_sPTF8svWQIbHNZ
PR2	Griffith College	05.13	www.qqi.ie/sites/docs/PanelReportsLibrary/ProgID-27081_Panel_Reports_PG19851.pdf
PR3	Dublin Business School	08.13	http://www.qqi.ie/sites/docs/PanelReportsLibrary/ProgID-26834_Panel_Reports_PG19604.pdf
PR4	Dublin Institute of Technology	12.14	https://www.dit.ie/media/qualityassuranceandacademicprogramrecords/reviewreportsandresponses/College_Review_Business_response.pdf
PR5	National College of Ireland	05.15	http://www.qqi.ie/sites/docs/PanelReportsLibrary/ProgID-34228_Panel_Reports_PG21887.pdf
VR1	Dundalk Institute of Technology	05.13	https://www.dkit.ie/system/files/2_Report_Response_Master_of_Business_in_Business_Administration.pdf

APPENDIX II

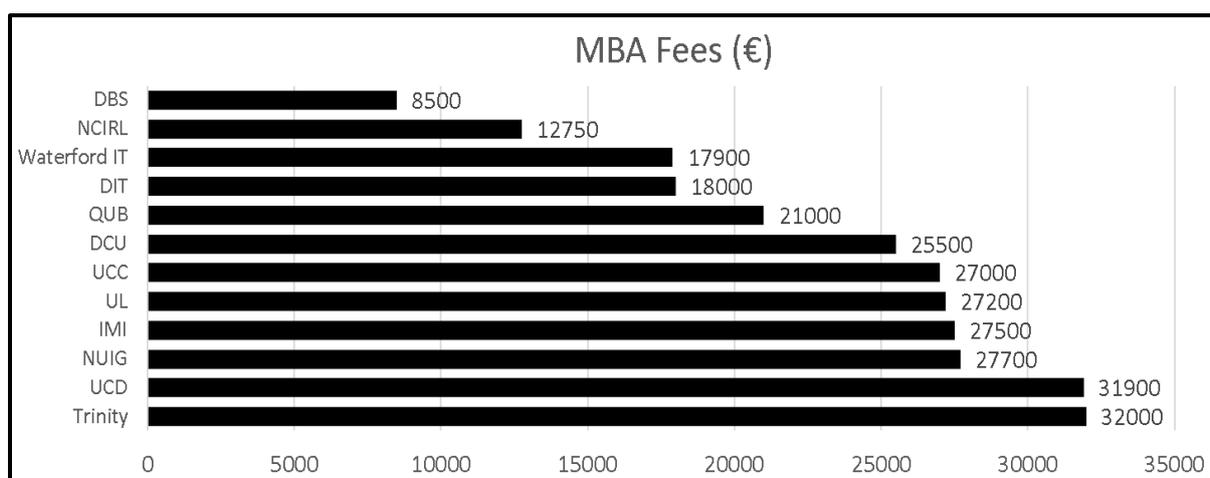
ACCREDITATIONS AND STUDENT FEES OF SELECTED MBA PROGRAMMES

Only University College Dublin, the Open University and University of Reading have triple accreditation. AMBA provides programme accreditation, specific to MBAs whereas EQUIS and AACSB provide school accreditation. University of Limerick and Dublin Institute of Technology both adhere the UN's principles for responsible management education` (PRME). Whilst PRME is not an accreditation as such, it is recognition of acceptable standards for responsible management being applied by these providers

	AMBA	AACSB	EQUIS	PRME
Dublin City University				
Dublin Institute of Technology				
NUI Galway				
Open University				
University of Reading ¹				
Trinity College Dublin				
University of Limerick				
University College Dublin				

¹ University of Reading is the parent institution of the Henley Business School. The Henley MBA is offered in Ireland through the Irish Management Institute.

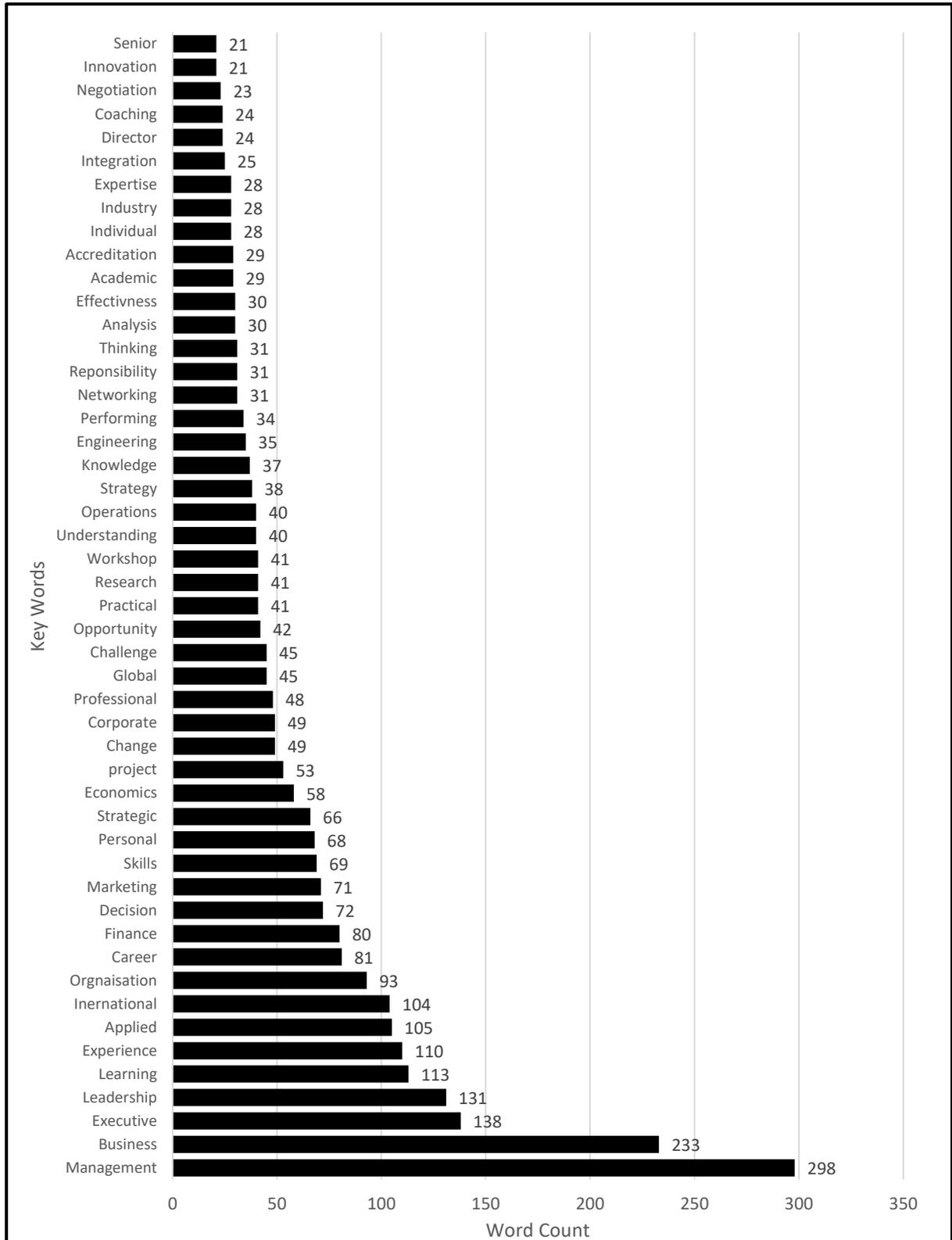
Tuition fees vary from circa. €30,000 for the those chasing elite status, such as Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin to circa. €10,00 for unaccredited degree offered by smaller private colleges, such as Dublin Business School and National College of Ireland.



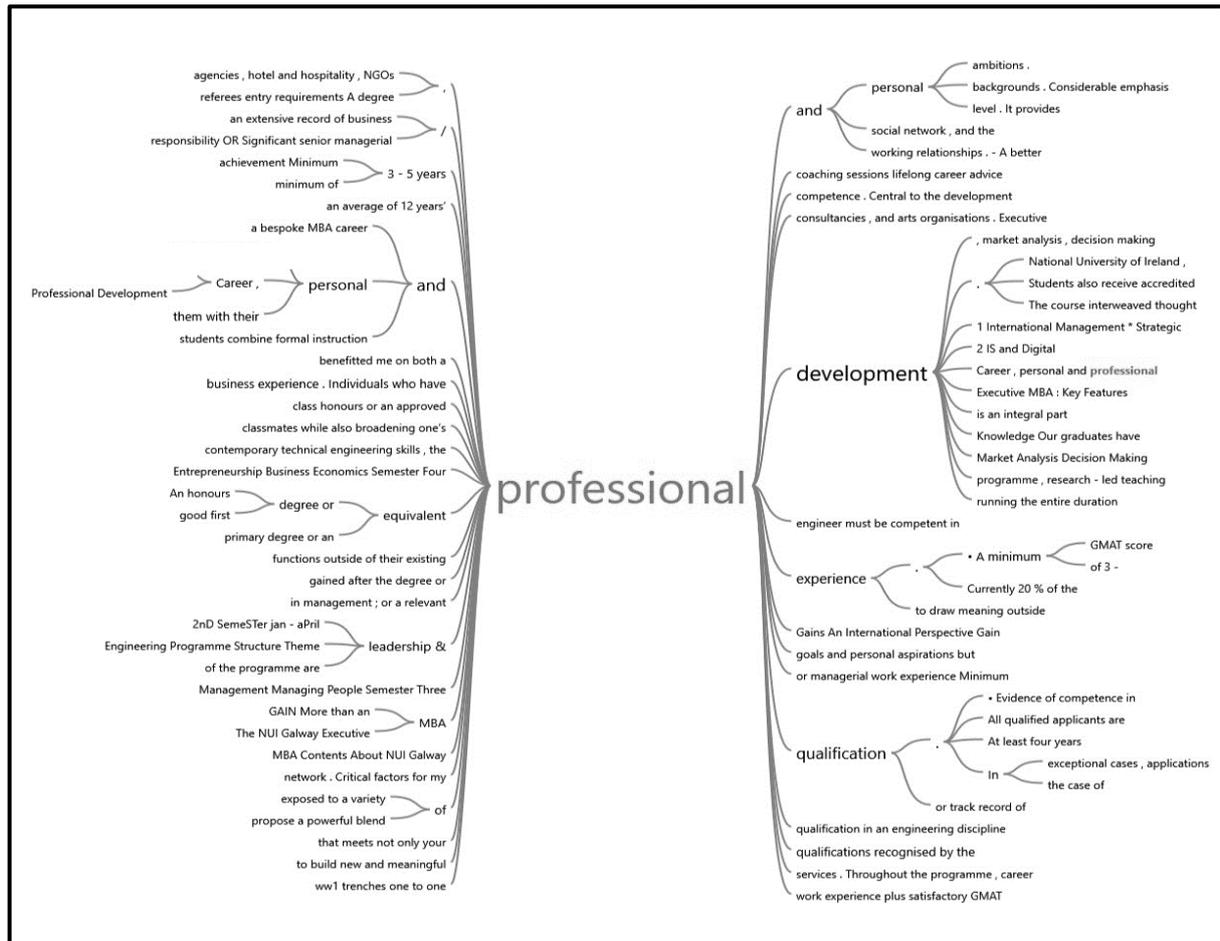
APPENDIX III

SAMPLE SUMMATIVE DEPICTIONS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

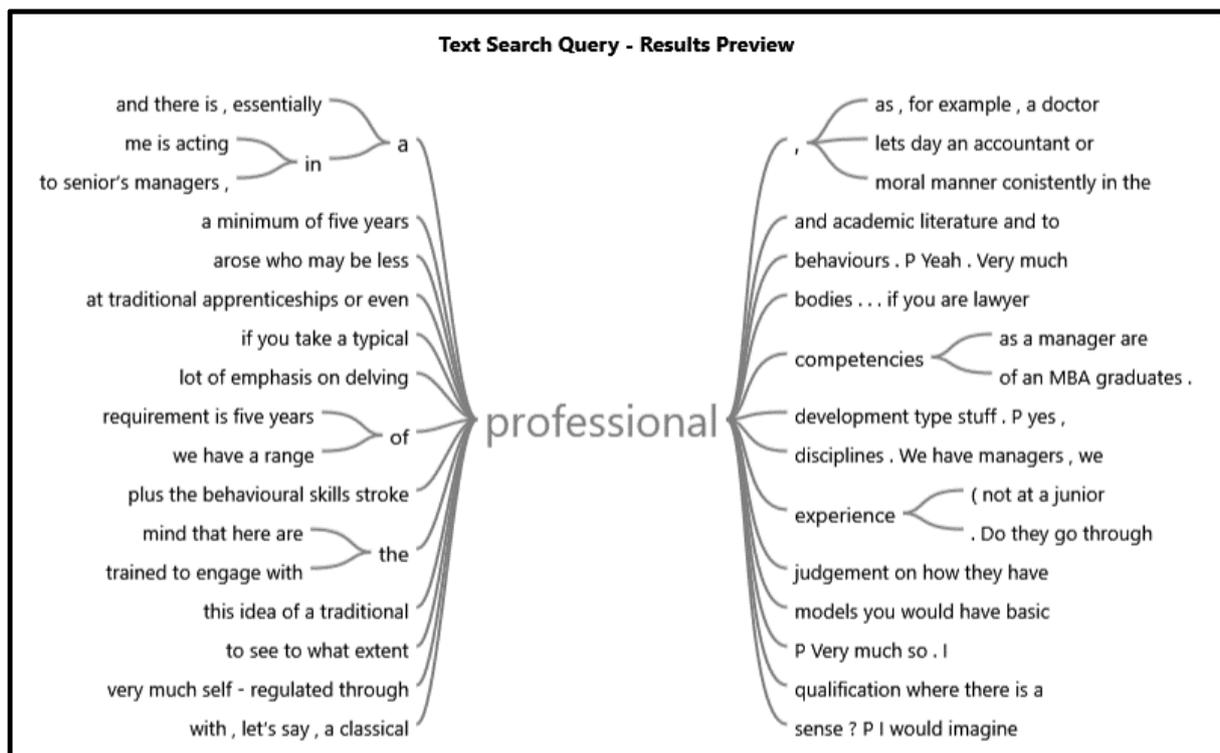
Relative Occurrence of Key Words in Programme Brochures (Secondary Data)



Word Tree for 'Professional' or Synonyms in Programme Brochures (Secondary Data)



Word Tree for 'Professional' or Synonyms in Educator Interviews (Primary Data)



APPENDIX IV

INITIAL CODING OF SECONDARY AND PRIMARY DATA IN NVIVO 11

Initial Coding of Secondary Data			Initial Coding of Primary Data (Pilot)		
Code / Category	Sources	Ref	Code / Category	Sources	Ref
CC₁ Management	58	115	TH₁ Broad-Based Curriculum	14	35
Manager, Executive, Senior	18	40	Broadening	2	9
Planning and Organisation	13	22	Business Disciplines	2	7
Management Qualification	8	18	Analytical Courses	2	3
Management Theory	5	9	General Management	2	5
Managing People	3	7	Integration	2	6
Firm / Company	7	13	Design - Problem-Solving	2	2
Management Qualification	4	6	Strategic	2	3
CC₂ Career	45	95	TH₂ Andragogy	11	23
Adaptability	3	7	Prior Experience	2	6
Career Change	5	11	Reflection	2	4
Counselling / Guidance	4	9	Peer (Collective) Learning	2	5
Career Progression	17	42	Immediate Work Application	2	3
Employer Benefits	5	8	Motivation to Learn	1	1
Promotion	6	10	Experiential Learning	1	2
Salary Increase	5	8	Action Learning	1	2
CC₃ Leadership	45	92	TH₃ Professionalism	10	17
CEO	9	19	Psychometric Testing	2	4
Development	6	14	Behavioural (Soft Skills)	2	4
Potential / Capability/ Aptitude	6	13	Coaching / Mentoring	2	3
Leadership Skills	6	12	Self-Awareness	2	4
Change	7	12	Career Stage Appropriateness	2	2
Leadership Theories	4	9	TH₄ Practice-Based Pedagogy	8	13
Vision	1	2	Consultancy Project	2	5
Leadership Style / Approach	3	4	Case Analyses	2	3
Strategic	3	7	Team-Assignments	2	3
CC₄ International	31	60	Application with Employer	2	2
Global Business	7	14	TH₅ Rigour-Relevance	8	12
International Faculty	3	5	Mix of Faculty	2	3
International Students	5	10	Information Literacy	1	2
International Curricula	7	10	Dissertation & Consultancy	2	4
International Study Visit	9	21	Research Methods	2	2
CC₅ Experience	30	58	Assessment Rubrics	1	1
Age	5	9	TH₆ Role of Educator	8	12
Female Students	2	5	Careful Selection of Faculty	1	3
Non-Business Students	2	6	Facilitator	2	2
Entry Criteria	16	25	Encouraging Dialogue	2	3
Diversity	3	8	Interaction between Faculty	1	2
Employer Benefits	2	5	Guest Speakers - External	1	1
CC₆ Soft Skills	29	54	Professional Backgrounds	1	1
Teamwork	7	13	TH₇ External Factors	13	18
Time Management	2	3	Accreditation	8	11
Relationship Building	5	9	Ranking	5	7

Initial Coding of Secondary Data**Initial Coding of Primary Data (Pilot)**

Code / Category	Sources	Ref
Rhetoric	3	3
Communications	5	11
Problem-Solving	4	9
Decision Making	3	6
CC7 Rigour Relevance	27	53
Evidence based Management	3	7
Research-led Teaching	10	14
Faculty with Industry Experience	2	5
Connecting Theory to Practice	6	11
Real-World Problems	3	9
Validation	3	7
CC8 Practice Based Pedagogy	27	45
Consultancy	6	12
Reflection	3	6
Cases	6	7
Simulation	2	4
Site Visits	5	6
Applications of Knowledge	5	10
CC9 Broad-Based curriculum	27	44
Broad Learning / Broadening	13	22
Functional Areas of Business	7	12
Integration	4	5
Interdisciplinary	3	5
CC10 Professionalism	26	44
Networking	3	6
Coaching and Mentoring	4	8
Confidence	4	5
Personal Development	3	5
Growth	2	4
Peer Learning	3	5
Self-Awareness	4	8
Guest Speakers	1	1
Professional Judgment	2	2
CC11 Business and Society	20	31
CSR	6	10
Ethics	3	3
Governance	3	4
Service Learning	2	2
Sustainability	4	7
Morality	2	5

APPENDIX V

SPECIFIED ENTRY REQUIREMENTS IN RESPECT OF EXPERIENCE

#	Stated Entry Requirements of Targeted Student Profile	Provider
1	“... at the years prior management experience”	NUI Galway
2	“at least five years’ work experience with three years in a management role”	Athlone Institute of Technology
3	“... programme members are usually experienced managers”	University of Reading
4	“The average age on the Executive MBA is 35 and participants have an average of 12 years’ professional experience.”	University College Dublin
5	“an extensive record of business / professional experience”	University College Dublin
6	“Significant senior management / professional work experience”	University College Dublin
7	“... for individuals with significant management experience, as well as those with careers developing into divisional head of chief executive roles”	University of Limerick
8	“at least three years of relevant business experience”	Waterford Institute of Technology

APPENDIX VI
PRACTICE BASED PEDAGOGY LINKED TO PROFESSIONAL OUTCOMES

#	Cited Pedagogical Approach	Professional Development Outcomes
1	Foundation Week Initial Residency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Core Business Functions
2	International Study Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ International Perspective of Business ▪ Appreciation of Cultural Diversity
3	Business Simulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diagnosis and Treatment Skills ▪ Response Under Pressure ▪ Assume responsibility for decision-making.
4	Case Study Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis Skills ▪ Rhetorical Skills
5	Company Based Consultancy Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design and Synthesis ▪ Building Relationships ▪ Integrative Thinking Skills ▪ Autonomy of Judgement
6	Networking Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relationship Building based on Know-Who. ▪ Formation of Professional Identity
7	Career Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-Confidence
8	Service Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social Agency ▪ Broader Stakeholder Awareness
9	Professional Development Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Soft Skills ▪ Self-Confidence
10	Executive Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-Analysis and Improvement Skills ▪ Behavioural Skills
11	Company Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building Relationships ▪ Understanding Professional Environments
12	Learning in Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participating in and Managing Teams ▪ Collaborative Ability
12	Debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rhetorical Skills ▪ Understanding Diverse Perspectives ▪ Public Speaking Ability
13	Masterclass Series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Motivation and Inspiration ▪ Role-Modelling
14	Presentations and Pitches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communications and Rhetorical Skills. ▪ Appearance and Presentability
15	Enterprise Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creativity and Innovation. ▪ Opportunity Recognition and Evaluation
16	Reflective Logs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-awareness, Reflexivity and Criticality

APPENDIX VII

MODIFICATIONS TO INTERVIEW GUIDE REPORTED IN PAPER 2

<p>Background Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your MBA • How long?? • Profile • Focus of MBA • Notable Features • Your Role • Achievements 	<p>Q1: To get some history on the programme, can you outline the MBA at XYZ so far? e.g. when, why did it start? Milestones in its development?</p> <p>Q2: What about its current profile, i.e. its students, staff, graduates, employers, accreditation etc?</p> <p>Q3: What sort of focus does the MBA have? Are there notable features?</p> <p>Q5: Could you tell us about your role in the MBA? What sort achievements are you proud of?</p> <p>Q6: What have been the main influences on shaping your MBA as it is today? <i>Prompts ... employers, staff, validation, reviews, accreditation, school.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive Characteristics • Influencers
<p>What are MBA graduates' and educators' perceptions of professionalism?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticisms of MBAs • Management v Other Professions • Concept of Professionalism • Using professionalism to develop students. • Professional Jurisdiction • Dimensions of Professionalism • MBA Oath • Educational Processes 	<p>Q1: There are a lot of criticisms of MBAs in the press and in academic publications. I would like to get a feel for your perspective on these criticisms and how you have addressed them in your own MBA.</p> <p>Q2: There is also considerable debate on whether management is best described as a profession, like medicine or law. What's your perspective on this?</p> <p>Q3: As it has become difficult to agree on what is or is not a profession, scholars have reverted to this vaguer concept of professionalism. What do you understand professionalism to be?</p> <p>Q4: What about the notion of using professionalism to develop MBA students for managerial roles?</p> <p>Q5: Professionals rely on a body of knowledge to articulate a jurisdiction. What do you think constitutes a body of knowledge for MBA graduates?</p> <p>Q6: Professionals typically have a strong ethical disposition. Can you provide examples of how ethical or altruistic values are developed on the MBA?</p> <p>Q7: Can you provide examples of how the MBA develops self-confidence, communication and leadership skills [<i>self-concept</i>]?</p> <p>Q8: To what extent is problem-solving through critical thinking or integrative thinking developed on the MBA [<i>autonomy of judgement</i>]?</p> <p>Q9: One way that graduates of professional education have been prepared for self-regulation is through a public declaration of an oath or code? Could you comment on this idea [<i>self-regulation</i>]?</p> <p>Q10: What about the educational processes within the MBA itself. Are there specific processes that facilitate the professional development of students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticism of MBAs • Professionalism • Professional Jurisdiction • Body of Knowledge • Ethical Disposition • Sense of Responsibility • Self-Concept • Self-Regulation • Autonomy • Educational Processes

<p>RQ2: What professional competencies, values and behaviours are perceived to be developed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Outcomes • How are they achieved? • Practice Based Pedagogy • Assessment • Selection • Role-Modelling 	<p>Q1: Professionalism seems to be a nebulous concept. Some describe it as an x-factor – a package of skills, behaviours and values. Does this lack of definition make it difficult to assess? <i>How to overcome it?</i></p> <p>Q2: A lot of analysis has been undertaken on the alignment of MBA curricula and learning outcomes to managerial competencies. What are the competencies that students acquire on the MBA? <i>Prompt types...</i></p> <p>Q3: Same question again for values: What is the typical value profile developed in MBA students? <i>Prompt types if required...</i></p> <p>Q4: Same question again for behaviours: What are the typical professional behaviours developed in MBA students? For behavioural assessments what measurement instruments do you use?</p> <p>Q5: I am interested in the idea of practice-based pedagogy, which is a hallmark of professional qualifications. Is there a structured transition from theory to more practical learning?</p> <p>Q6: In professions, such as medicine, assessment of professionalism is done in a work environment. Are there equivalent environments in the MBA?</p> <p>Q7: Student tend to prioritise aspects that are assessed. Are there any examples you could give on the types of assessments used to evaluate students' professionalism? How is feedback given?</p> <p>Q7: What do you think about the idea of qualitative assessment? Is this something you do and how?</p> <p>Q8: Medical schools, in particular, pay attention to screening applicants for professionalism, how are MBA students selected (for professionalism)?</p> <p>Q9: Do you use role-models? There is also merit in suggesting that students assimilate the value and behaviours of teachers? Is this something you have given thought to? <i>Role-Modelling</i></p> <p>Q10: Decisions made by managers tend to be by reflection-in-action. How do you give students time and space to reflect on their own development?</p> <p>Q11: It's probably fair to say that the MBA is not a magic wand. How would you sum-up what it is about the MBA that helps students develop professionally?</p>	<p>Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical • Integrative • Adaptive • Contextual <p>Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics • Identity • Social Conscience • Marketability • Research • Professional Development <p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance • Effectiveness • Integrity • Respectfulness • Collaborative • Responsibility • Conscience
<p>Concluding Remarks</p> <p>Have you any questions?</p>	<p>Thank you very much for your time given to this interview. The interviewing recording will be transcribed within the next two weeks. As soon as I have it, I will provide a copy of the transcript for your records. Comments will be anonymised so that they cannot be attributed to you individually.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you happy with the way the interview has been conducted? • Do you mind if I revert to you with any clarifications or questions? 	

APPENDIX VIII: SYNTHESIS OF FEATURES IN MBA_P THAT FOSTER MANAGERIAL PROFESSIONALISM

Theme	Empirical Evidence - Pilot Data	Empirical Evidence – Secondary Data	Supported in the Literature
<i>Curriculum Design</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “...they certainly need a working knowledge of a very broad range of business disciplines financial statements, supply chain” [EP]. ▪ MBA_P courses, such as Strategic Management, move beyond core business functions by providing an integrative understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High degree of commonality of courses aligned to business functions (Table 4). ▪ Brochures convey interlinking of different fields but interdisciplinarity explicit by two providers only (OU, 2017; NUIG 2016). ▪ “The MBA arms you with multidisciplinary tools ... to get the exposure to the total business” NUIG, 2016, p. 4. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standardised broad-based curriculum for managing firm (Spender, 2014). ▪ Curriculum integration and interdisciplinarity (Simon, 1967; Light and Cox, 2001).
<i>Andragogy: Adult Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MBA_P requires at least five year’s professional experience. ▪ Diverse range of students’ professional backgrounds on MBA_P contributes to professional dialogue. ▪ Immediate application of knowledge to professional practice as students work and study concurrently. ▪ Reflective report assessed in MBA_P Management Consultancy Project. ▪ Emphasis on group work with students visibly working together on assignment outside of class contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Selection criteria requires significant professional or managerial experience. ▪ “... taking material ... delivered in the classroom back to your organisation” (DCU, 2016). ▪ “Personal reflection is a key component of all assessments” (Henley, 2017, p. 9). ▪ Explicit reference to experiential learning (e.g. NUIG, 2017), action learning (e.g. Trinity, 2017) and cases (e.g. UCC, 2016) in brochures. ▪ Peer learning evident in four programme brochures (NUIG, 2016; Henley, 2017; UCC, 2016; UL, 2017) and in several news articles (e.g. Gubbins, 2016). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Life experience, readiness and motivation to learn, immediate application (Knowles, 1984). ▪ Experience and reflection essential to professionalism (Roglio and Light, 2009; Hilton and Slotnick, 2005) ▪ Experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), action learning (Raelin and Coghlan, 2006). ▪ Collective learning – interaction among students (Meyers, 1991).
<i>Professional Development “Stream”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Myers-Briggs included in MBA_P as means of developing self-awareness. ▪ “There is also an element of developing behavioural skills ... things like self-awareness, confidence, communications a so on” PD_P. ▪ Selection of students for MBA_P based on CV, interview priorities experience. ▪ Experiential learning activities and opportunities for reflective practice in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Psychometric testing included in MBA programmes (e.g. NUIG, 2016; Trinity, 2017). ▪ Examples of soft skills include teamwork (NUIG, 2016), resilience (Henley, 2017), relationship building and emotional intelligence (UCD, 2017), career services (UCC, 2016), creativity (UL, 2016), oral communications, listening and presentation skills (UCD, 2017). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tools for self-awareness (Costa and McCrae, 1992; Myers-Briggs, 1962). ▪ Emphasis on behavioural and soft-skill development (Bedwell et al., 2014). ▪ Competencies and values appropriate to career stage (Dall’Alba and Sandberg, 2006; Varela et al., 2013)

Theme	Empirical Evidence - Pilot Data	Empirical Evidence – Secondary Data	Supported in the Literature
	MBA _P suggests learning targeted at more advanced skills development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ International study visits designed to develop intercultural understanding and appreciation of global nature of business (e.g. WIT, 2014). ▪ Leadership a flagship course in most MBAs. 	
<i>Practice Based Pedagogy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foundation knowledge on MBA_P acquired “primarily through a lot of case-study analyses” [PD_P]. ▪ “... the consultancy project would represent the clinical environment They’re not there full-time but it’s where professionalism is assessed” [PD_P]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Case studies (e.g. UCC, 2016), role-play, company visits, international visits (e.g. WIT, 2014), business simulations (e.g. UCD, 2017) evident as initial practice-based pedagogy. ▪ Consultancy projects appear to be part of some programmes (e.g. NUIG, 2016; UCD 2017). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Case studies, role-play and teamwork simulate real situations (Christensen 1981). ▪ Integrating different forms of capital to balance stakeholder needs (Somers et al.,2014). ▪ Field Immersion (Nohria, 2012).
<i>Reducing Gap between Academic Rigour and Professional Relevance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MBA_P requires students to undertake a Management Consultancy Project and Dissertation. ▪ Research Methods included as a core course on MBA_P. ▪ MBA_P students provided with information literacy training and marking rubrics include use of appropriate referencing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research methods included in several MBA programmes (e.g. WIT, 2014; AIT, 2017). ▪ Evidence based management explicit in brochures (DCU, 2017; Henley, 2017). ▪ “You’ll be challenged by faculty who have extensive industry experience and whose teaching connects ground-breaking theory with business stories making the news” (AIT, 2017). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning activities to foster synthesis and design skills (Rousseau, 2012). ▪ Evidence based management in MBAs (Charlier et al., 2011; Barends, 2015).
<i>Role of MBA Educator</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “We are very careful about who we have teaching on the programme” PD_P. ▪ Selection of teaching team oriented towards a facilitative classroom style. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Masterclass series includes presentations by CEOs and entrepreneurs (NUIG, 2016). ▪ “The ... modules are delivered by experienced, passionate and dedicated faculty who are experts in their field and who engage in high quality research-led teaching” (NUIG, 2016). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educator as a facilitator (Dewey, 1933), management role-model (Schön, 1983), reflective practitioner (Roglio and Light, 2009), disseminator of research (Burke and Rau, 2010).

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PREFACE TO PAPER 4

“There are educational principles that apply to the teaching of professionalism. It is axiomatic that there is a single cognitive base that applies with increasing moral force as students enter ... progress ... and enter practice” (Cruess and Cruess, 2006, p. 205).

Introduction

As a prelude to Paper 4, this short narrative outlines the progression in the fieldwork as the research extended from the pilot study to a wider participants base. The pilot study, using one executive MBA programme, revealed potentially important themes with respect to educators’ perceptions of professionalism and of how executive MBAs develop it. Yet, there were some notable challenges in extending the research beyond the pilot study. The primary purpose of the pilot study was not to prematurely pre-empt themes but, rather, to assess and to validate the data collection and analysis processes. This preface begins by describing the evolution of the research from Paper 3 to Paper 4. Finally, it reports on how the examiners’ feedback on the initial submission of Paper 4 was incorporated into the final version of the paper.

Evolution of the Research Journey

The examiners’ feedback on Paper 3 noted that it was a lengthy document and a key challenge in extending the research lay in collapsing the data into a digestible format in Paper 4.

“Beware of data saturation and the time implications of what you are planning for paper four (eight MBA programmes with possible two interviews each) plus a graduate focus group – this should lead to extensive findings but will be a challenge to condense into one paper.”

In internalising this feedback, three issues were considered. First, whilst a synthesis of findings from the pilot study and from the analysis of secondary data on executive MBA programmes suggested that the themes emerging from the pilot study may be potentially transferrable, there was no guarantee that this would be the case. This issue reflects a wider challenge in ensuring that the overall findings reflect an appropriate balance between themes from individual interviews and themes emerging from the full study (Willig and Rogers, 2017). Second, whilst, by their very nature, exploratory studies are broad and unearth a wide range of issues that warrant further enquiry, the detail provided in Paper 3 underscored the challenge in synopsising the findings into a concise and succinct format. This was not just a matter of data display (Verdinelli and Sagnoli, 2013) but of distilling the findings into themes that are most relevant to the two research questions. Third, whilst on one hand managing detail can be challenging in

qualitative research, on the other, data collection needed to be extended to saturation (Ando et al., 2014) to achieve an evidence base sufficient for conclusions to be drawn. A rigorous approach to identifying saturation was, therefore, critical to the credibility of the wider study.

The first issue was addressed in the methods used to extend the research beyond the pilot study. Field-notes were taken during all interviews. A reflection of these notes was used to identify “first impression” themes in an immersion-crystallisation process. This process was supported by repeated readings of each interview transcript in search of topics in the data until interpretation became apparent and then situating that interpretation within the conceptual framework or broader theoretical context. These “first impression” themes were recorded and tracked from one interview to the next, making it possible to build up a record of which themes were most prevalent. The process also allowed for later interviews to be more focused. However, these “first impression” themes were only part of the analysis. Informed by the “first impression” themes, a more structured thematic analysis (Aronson, 1995) was undertaken of all the data collected in the study. Thematic analysis is a broadly used tool across a range of analytic traditions in qualitative research, such as grounded theory (e.g. Glaser, 1992), phenomenology (Schultz, 1967), discourse analysis (e.g. Gee, 2004) and narrative analysis (Cortazzi, 2014). The advantage of thematic analysis is in its accessibility to novice researchers. Thematic analysis is theory-neutral and is typically applied across a broad-range of ontological and epistemological domains, most notably in interpretive-constructivist leaning research. The steps taken to undertake the thematic analysis, based on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to applying it to research in psychology, are outlined in Paper 4, which follows.

In addressing the second issue, Paper 4 provides a detailed description of the thematic approach, in which over 200 initial codes were organised and aggregated, through increasing levels of abstraction, into a finalised set of themes. A summary of the themes relating to each research question and their formation is first presented in diagrammatic format (Gioia et al., 2013) without referencing any participant quotes or prior literature. A “thick” description (Ponterotto, 2006) is then written to provide a detailed account of the participant responses obtained during the interviews and focus-groups. Illustrative quotes are woven into the text sparingly (Sandelowski, 1994) as synopsis evidence of emerging themes to give voice to the educators and learners who participated in the study, to enhance readability and, ultimately, to deepen our understanding of professionalism in the executive MBA context. Finally, to synthesise the findings further, a concept map of emerging themes (Daley, 2004) is provided in the final section of Paper 4, summarising participant perceptions of managerial professionalism.

To address the third issue, all “first impression” themes were tracked. The recording of these themes and the interviews in which they surfaced are appended in Paper 4 (Table A8) with repeating occurrences facilitating judgment on the extent to which saturation (Samure and Given, 2008) is reached, (i.e. beyond which collection of additional data appears to have limited interpretive value). A similar approach was taken to analysing focus-group data (Hancock et al., 2016) in which common threads within and across sub-groups were identified.

Addressing these three issues, the findings of the extended study are discussed in the context of the conceptual framework and wider context of prior literature. Amongst its most significant findings is the identification of an executive MBA landscape not so homogeneous as perhaps described in prior literature. Indeed, the extent to which professionalism is embedded in an MBA appears to depend on one of three models to which it is most aligned.

Consideration of Examiner Feedback in Revising Paper 4

Whilst the first submission of Paper 4 was accepted by the examiners without the need for revisions, they suggested three areas for further consideration: [1] potential bias in participants who are all likely to be positively disposed towards MBAs, [2] greater discussion on the three emergent models of MBA education, and [3] the potential risk of cherry-picking quotes to support the arguments articulated in the paper. I was afforded the opportunity to reflect on the examiners’ suggestions in Paper 4 or to consider them during the write-up of Section 3 of the overall thesis. The first suggestion was accommodated in a straightforward acknowledgment within Paper 4 that follows of the positive disposition of participants towards MBAs, which reasserts the polarising nature of the debate on management education. In accepting the point made about the three emergent models of MBA education, I elaborate more on these models in the conclusion section of the paper and in Section 3 of the overall thesis. To address the issue of cherry-picking participant quotes, I emphasise, in the methodology section of Paper 4, that quotes are primarily used for illustrative purposes and acknowledge that, by themselves, they do not constitute conclusive evidence. I outline counterstrategies deployed to avoid cherry-picking, including the aggregation of initial codes into themes without references to quotes.

Concluding Remarks

The submitted version of Paper 4, which follows, presents the findings from the study. The process of arriving at these findings reflects the challenges in extending the research beyond the pilot, in particular in balancing part and whole, in forming themes that are most relevant to the research questions and in maintaining a rigorous approach to identifying saturation.

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Paper 4: Presentation of Findings

“We prefer to see management education as walking... on a high alpine ridge, covered with ice and snow. On one side is a sheer drop – that is the cliff of academic irrelevance...on the other side, the terrain falls off sharply. This is the slippery slope of easy practicality. Start down there and you may never stop” (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002, p.75).

EXPLORING PROFESSIONALISM IN EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAMMES: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

ABSTRACT

The metamorphosis of an eclectic mix of professionals and others into a professional cadre of executives has long been synonymous with MBAs. This study explores the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs. It seeks to discover how their educators and learners interpret managerial professionalism and to identify the professional competencies, values and behaviours that they perceive learners develop, by which mechanisms and in what contexts.

Exploring this embeddedness relies on a qualitative-interpretive approach based on reflections of educators and learners on their perceptions of professionalism and how it is developed. Using executive MBAs primarily on the island of Ireland as the context, semi-structured interviews with MBA educators and graduate focus-groups provide a basis for thematic analysis. Recurring themes of ethical reasoning, behavioural moderation and the integration of a broad range of business knowledge domains emerge as a collective perception of professionalism. The study suggests that executive MBA programmes develop professionalism in reverse order to the proto-professionalism processes of archetype professions by intellectually anchoring, providing reflective space for, and sharing the professional experiences of learners. Learning processes that appear to support professionalism include andragogy, relationship learning and the intertwining of professional relevance with academic rigour. Yet, MBA educators imply that they use a more holistic approach, beyond embedding professionalism into learner performance patterns, through career counselling, personal growth and critical thinking.

A caveat to these findings is that there appears to be three diverging models of MBA education: [1] a traditional model that compartmentalises management knowledge into functional siloes, [2] an intermediate model that scaffolds professional development and [3] an integrated model of personal and professional development. Embeddedness depends on the model with which an MBA is most aligned. The findings also reflect a positive view of executive MBAs from which an inherent bias of its educators and learners contravenes much criticism of MBA education.

Key Words - *Managerial Professionalism, Executive MBAs, Educator and Learner Perspectives, Ethical Reasoning, Behavioural Moderation, Knowledge Integration.*

Paper Type – *Presentation of Findings.*

1. INTRODUCTION

“This promise of professionalizing the managerial role has been at best derailed and at worst entirely undermined” (Rubin and Dierdorff, 2013, p. 6).

1.1 Introduction

This paper presents the findings of an exploratory study of professionalism in executive MBAs, whose raison d'être is to develop a professional cadre of executive managers. In this context, terms, such as professional development, professionalism and professionalisation, broadly refer to the development of professional values, behaviours and competencies for executives.

Two issues make this study challenging. First, lack of consensus on defining managerial professionalism problematises its inculcation into learner performance patterns. Even in the archetype professions, lack of definition is problematic (Jha et al., 2006). Understanding areas of congruence and divergence between educator and learner interpretations of managerial professionalism would likely enhance learning outcomes and processes for its development. Second, professionalism evokes a metaphor for archetype professions underpinned by narrow expertise developed in pre-experience education (e.g. Elliott et al., 2009), undermining its perceived importance to management learning. Raelin (1990), Barker (2010) and Pfeffer (2011) highlight an absence from management of expertise, regulation of entry and ethical codes. Yet, lacking critical attention, their arguments succumb to past trappings on what is a profession. Both early adopters of competency models (Boyatzis, 1982), management and medicine share much in common (Barends, 2015). A metaphor befitting learner development, from experienced professional to professional executive, requires a conceptualisation beyond current notions of professionalism, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of management.

Yet, these challenges fail to justify neglect of pedagogical interest in the matter. With a focus of executive MBAs on managerial success, nurturing professionalism seems central to their legitimacy. This study explores the embeddedness of professionalism in these programmes.

RQ1: What are executive MBA educators' and learners' perceptions of professionalism?

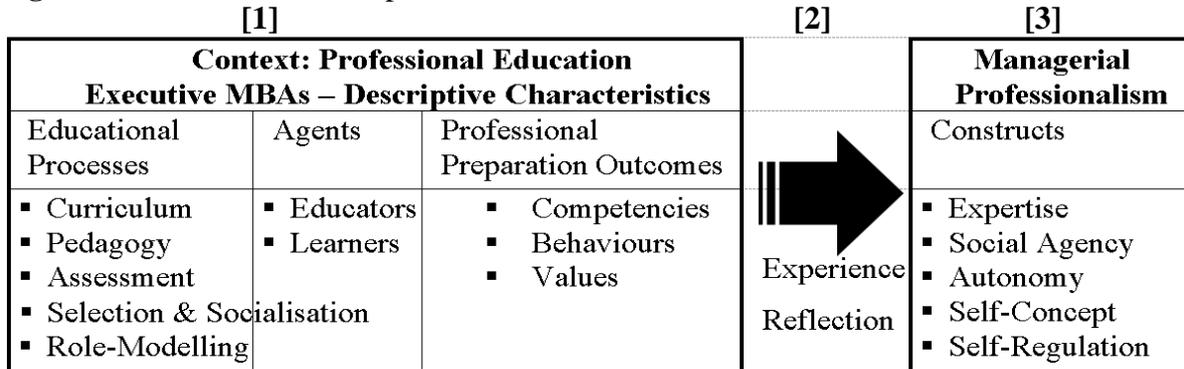
RQ2: What professional competencies, values and behaviours do educators and learners perceive to be developed in an executive MBA programme?

1.2 Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings

Paper 1 derived a conceptual framework from three prior theoretical underpinnings: [1] Stark et al.'s (1986) concept of professional education, [2] Hilton and Slotnick's (2005) professional

development from experience and reflection, and [3] traits of managerial professionalism, such as social agency, self-concept, autonomy of judgment, expertise and self-regulation (Nino, 2012). Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for embedding managerial professionalism in executive MBAs as a synthesis of these three theoretical underpinnings.

Figure 1: Reminder of Conceptual Framework



Prototype statements (e.g. Khurana and Nohria, 2008) reflect an embryonic conceptualisation and reduction-to-practice of managerial professionalism. Hence, Paper 2 orientated the study towards a qualitative-interpretive approach (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), in which professionalism is assumed to be constructed subjectively. Paper 3 documented both the outcomes and processes of the pilot study. The research design encompassed a set of interviews with two MBA educators to garner their perceptions of professionalism and how it is developed. This paper documents the findings from the extended study, encompassing a wider participant base of educators and learners. Graduate focus-groups articulate learner perceptions of professionalism, identifying areas of congruence and divergence. A thematic analysis relates the data to the research objective with concept maps used to aid visualisation of themes.

1.3 Structure of this Paper

Having outlined the study’s research objective, its rationale, its theoretical basis and its methodological approach, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 offers an overview of the research process from the literature review (Paper 1) to the pilot study (Paper 3), synopsis findings along the way. Section 3 outlines the methods of enquiry that extend from the pilot study to the full set of educator interviews and graduate focus-groups. Section 4 outlines a series of themes emerging from the full data set. Section 5 highlights educator and learner perceptions of professionalism, addressing RQ1. Section 6 focuses on the perceived competencies, values and behaviours developed, addressing RQ2. Finally, Section 7 reconfigures the conceptual framework by relating emerging themes and articulating three evolving models of executive MBA education as contexts for professionalising management.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE REVIEW TO PILOT STUDY

“That task proved a bit like squeezing an elephant into a pint container while keeping the poor thing alive and true to form” (Anzul et al., 2003, p. 1).

2.1 Introduction

The findings presented in this paper are best considered in light of the entire research process underpinning the study. First, this section reminds us of the gap in the literature, which supports the research questions (Paper 1). It then articulates the study’s philosophical positioning, its research design and its methods for data collection and analysis (Paper 2). Finally, it outlines the findings from a pilot exploration of professionalism in one executive MBA (Paper 3).

2.2 Summary of Findings from the Literature Review

MBA’s are subject to criticism for their perceived failures to prepare graduates to cope with the complexities of management (Mintzberg, 2004; Khurana, 2007). Paper 1 explored this issue through the lens of professionalism (Abbott, 1988) by reviewing four strands of literature: [i] sociology of the professions; [ii] debate on management as a profession; [iii] critique of MBA education; and [iv] exemplar education processes in the archetype professions, such as law or medicine. The review cited extensive research into professionalism in the education of archetype professions but few attempts to explore possibilities for developing MBAs along professional lines. MBA critiques fell into three categories. “Value” critiques suggest that MBAs struggle to foster ethical values (McDonald, 2017). “Pedagogy” critiques cite the MBA’s prioritisation of analysis over synthesis (Spender, 2012). “Relevance” critiques suggest that MBAs disseminate knowledge of little practical relevance (Tushman et al., 2007). Whilst the review found that the education of archetype professions holds potential solutions to these critiques (e.g. Rousseau, 2012), it identified two challenges. First, the nebulous nature of professionalism obscures its definition. Second, limited prior research on managerial professionalism reflects an embryonic conceptualisation. Paper 1 identified a clear gap in the literature in respect of the embeddedness of professionalism in management education.

2.3 Summary of the Research Design

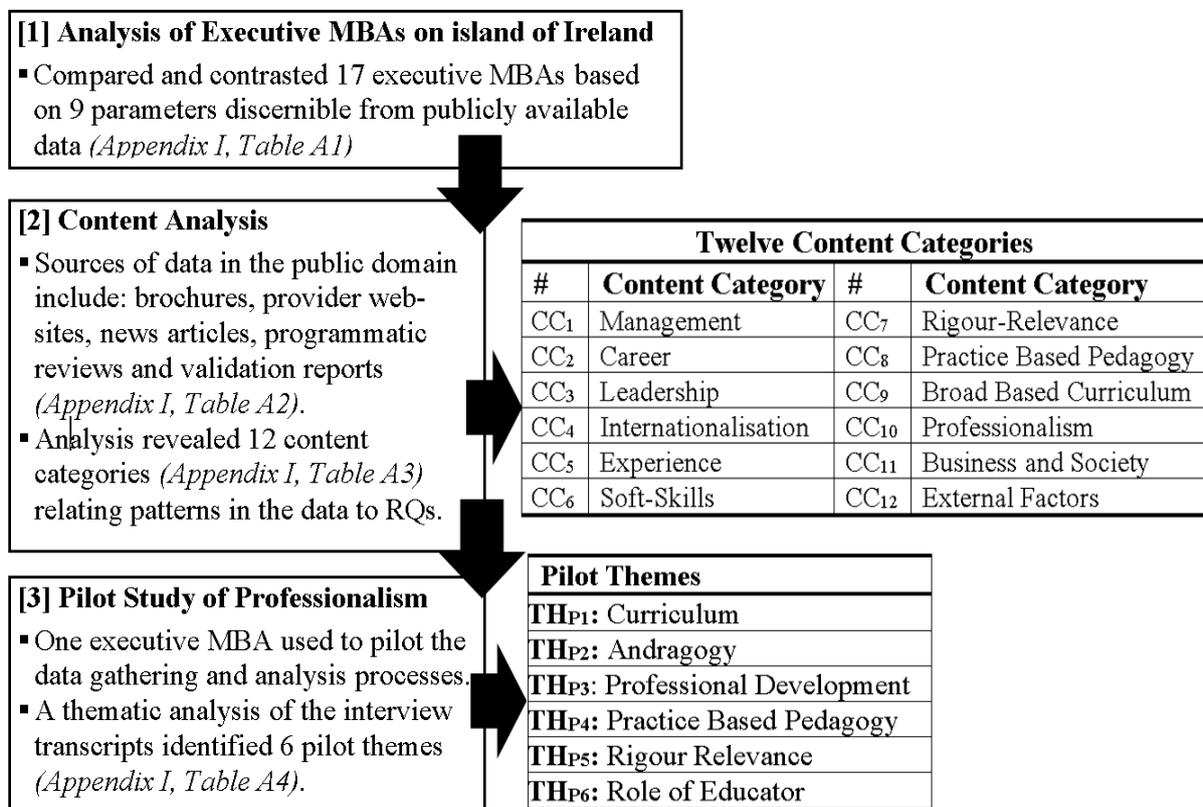
Paper 2 developed a methodological basis for the study. Three theoretical works anchored the study conceptually. [1] Whilst used to evaluate pre-experience degrees, Stark et al.’s (1986) framework was adapted for MBAs. [2] With Hilton and Slotnick (2005) implying that professionalism develops from experience and reflection, the paper narrowed the study’s context to executive MBAs whose students are often more experienced than those of full-time

MBA. [3] A synthesis of five constructs, i.e. expertise, social agency, self-concept, autonomy of judgement and self-regulation, offered a basis for exploring managerial professionalism (Nino, 2012). Hence, Paper 2 proposed an exploratory approach based on interpreting reflections of two key agents in executive MBA education processes, namely educators and learners. To diagnose a conceptualisation of professionalism in executive MBAs, qualitative methods were deemed to be the most suitable form of empirical research for the study.

2.4 Summary of the Findings from the Pilot Study

Paper 3 documented the pilot phase of the study in three stages (Figure 2). Firstly, it constructed a map of the executive MBA landscape on the island of Ireland, comparing and contrasting 17 programmes using nine parameters discernible from data in the public domain. Secondly, a content analysis of secondary data, from sources such as programme brochures and provider websites, identified 11 content categories that summarise how educators convey MBAs to prospective learners. Thirdly, using one MBA, a pilot study generated data from two educator interviews, from which a thematic analysis identified six pilot themes, which captured their perceptions of professionalism and of how it is developed (Appendix I).

Figure 2: Summary of Findings from Pilot Phase



Subscript 'p' denotes that the themes were generated from the pilot interviews.

The analysis of executive MBAs on the island of Ireland found that over half of providers had neither AMBA, AACSB nor EQUIS accreditation with only three committed to the UN's principles for responsible management education (Rimanoczky, 2016). Circa. 30 percent were institutes of technology, 50 percent were universities and the remainder, private colleges. Circa. 25 percent appeared in global rankings. In addition to the executive MBA, 40 per cent offered full-time MBA programmes. Over 70 percent did not require a GMAT with professional experience deemed to be a more important entry criterion. Over 75 percent of providers charged tuition fees between €12,000 and €30,000. The content analysis identified 12 content categories that capture how educators convey MBAs in the public domain. Some categories affirm what we know about executive MBAs, such as their broad-based curriculum (Hunt and Speck, 1986). Others, such as Rigour Relevance [CC₇], contradict past criticisms of MBAs (Trieschmann et al, 2000). Promotional material appears to prioritise career marketability [CC₂] over professionalism [CC₁₀]. The researcher then conducted a pilot study of professionalism in one MBA to pre-test data collection and analysis. For confidentiality, the researcher coded the provider's name as MBA_P and educators as PD_P, for the programme director, and E_P, for a senior lecturer. The thematic analysis identified six pilot themes, which were mapped to the content categories. The mapping suggested that two pilot themes, namely andragogy [TH_{P2}] and role of the educator [TH_{P6}], did not align with a priori content categories.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

Given that the pilot study focused on educator perspectives, it was unsurprising that there was overlap between the pilot themes and content categories. Whilst the pilot interviews and the secondary data reflected little of learner perspectives, they identified key features perceived by educators in one executive MBA critical to developing learners as professional executives. The narrative from the pilot study of professionalism in MBA_P hinted that integration, not a systematic body of knowledge, is core to managerial professionalism, that MBA_P's curriculum facilitates management problems to be rubbed against a breadth of business disciplines, synthesising theory and practice and that soft skills development is key to achieving desired professional behaviour. Whilst Paper 3 made no assertions about the transferability of the pilot themes, their alignment with the content categories hints at their potential relevance to other executive MBAs. From this perspective, the pilot provided a valid basis for extending the study. Given that thematic formation was likely to be iterative, it was proposed to include results from the pilot in the overall study with minimal concern of 'contamination'. The remainder of this paper focuses on the wider study, exploring whether findings from the pilot hold or evolve.

3. SCALING THE STUDY – DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

“Thematic analysis is considered most appropriate for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations. It provides a systematic element to data analysis” (Alhojailan, 2012, p.10).

3.1 Introduction

The literature suggests that managerial professionalism is defined vaguely with little attempt to operationalise it within executive education. With limited a priori evidence of educator or learner perceptions of managerial professionalism, the themes elicited from the pilot study provide a useful starting point. This section extends the research, taking account of themes that emerged from the pilot but facilitating a deeper analysis. It begins by recapping the methods used to collect and analyse the data. It then articulates a process of extending the interviews to a point where no new themes emerge (Bowen, 2008). Finally, it outlines how emerging themes inform the construction of a model of managerial professionalism in executive MBAs.

3.2 Summary of Data Collection Process

Given the embryonic stage of conceptualisation of managerial professionalism and its nebulous nature, the data sought was qualitative in nature. Data collection comprised a string of twelve semi-structured interviews with MBA educators and two focus-groups with MBA graduates. Educators sought for the study were either programme directors or experienced educators with responsibility for courses or modules linked to professional development (Table 1).

Table 1: Educator Participation in the Study

Interview	Participant	Gender	MBA	Date
1	PD _P	Male	MBA _{1P}	27.11.17
2	E _P	Female	MBA _{1P}	28.11.17
3	E ₂	Male	MBA ₂	17.01.18
4	PD ₂	Male	MBA ₃	01.02.18
5	E ₃	Female	MBA ₄	06.02.18
6	PD ₃	Female	MBA ₅	07.02.18
7	PD ₄	Male	MBA ₆	18.02.18
8	PD ₅	Female	MBA ₇	22.02.18
9	E ₄	Male	MBA ₈	01.03.18
10	PD ₆	Female	MBA ₉	04.03.18
11	E ₅	Male	MBA ₉	07.03.18
12	E ₆	Female	MBA ₁₀	08.03.18

PD – Programme Director, E – Educator responsible for courses lined to professional development, P- Pilot

An interview guide (Appendix II) kept the questioning focused and allowed the conversation to flow. Whilst not absolute, Guest et al. (2006) posits that saturation can emerge as early as

12 interviews. Reflections were made using field-notes taken during interviews, noting “first impression” themes (Appendix II, Table A5). The researcher audio-recorded the interviews. The audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim by a qualified legal transcriber. Captured data comprised 12 interview transcripts and 12 field-note reflections. Two focus-group sessions were then run with a total of 11 graduates (Table 2).

Table 2: Learner Participation in the Study

Focus Group #	Participant	Gender	MBA	Graduated	Experience ¹
Focus Group 1 09.03.18	Grad ₁	Male	MBA ₁	2012	7 Years
	Grad ₂	Male	MBA ₁₁	2015	9 Years
	Grad ₃	Female	MBA ₅	2014	5 Years
	Grad ₄	Male	MBA ₁₀	2015	15 Years
	Grad ₅	Female	MBA ₆	2011	9 Years
	Grad ₆	Male	MBA ₆	2014	12 Years
Focus Group 2 16.03.18	Grad ₇	Male	MBA ₇	2012	8 Years
	Grad ₈	Female	MBA ₇	2016	10 Years
	Grad ₉	Male	MBA ₂	2017	13 Years
	Grad ₁₀	Male	MBA ₉	2015	12 Years
	Grad ₁₁	Female	MBA ₁₂	2015	7 Years

¹ Experience – refers to number of years of professional experience since undergraduate studies.

This size of each focus group provided a balance between sufficient participation and an atmosphere conducive to sharing experiences (Vaughn et al, 1996). Participants graduated from their MBA between 2011 and 2017, providing a spread between those who could provide near real-time reflection and those who could offer retrospective reflection. However, there was selection bias in that the researcher invited graduates to participate based on educator recommendations or professional contacts. Using a guide (Appendix II), the researcher facilitated the sessions, which were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Each session began with 15 minutes allotted to participants individually answering 10 worksheet questions, which encouraged them to reflect on professionalism. Full groups were then broken into sub-groups of 2 - 3 students. Each sub-group wrote bullet-point answers on A0 paper to the questions in the focus-group guide. Each sub-group was also asked to share three highlights from the session. Hence, the resulting data was generated from engagement with two sets of participants, educators and learners. Educator generated data comprised twelve interview transcripts, twelve sets of field-note reflections and supporting documentation provided by interviewees. Learner generated data comprised two focus-group transcripts, A0 sheets from each sub-group and eleven individual worksheets completed during each session (Table 3).

Table 3: Primary Data used for Thematic Analysis

Educators	Interview Transcripts x 12	Reflections on Interview Notes	Supporting documentation –brochures, handbooks, course descriptors.
Learners	Focus Group Transcripts x 2	A0 Sheets Collected from Focus Groups	Individual Focus Group Participants Worksheets

Educators from MBA₁₁ were not represented in Table 1, nor were graduates from MBA₃, MBA₄, MBA₅ or MBA₈ represented in Table 2. Participant selection was not designed to be representative but to provide emic educator and learner perspectives. Focus-groups were run independently from educator interviews. Apart for MBA₁₀, all other MBAs were selected from programmes on the island of Ireland (Appendix I). Guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis, Table 4 outlines steps taken to analyse of the data generated.

Table 4: Steps Taken to Analyse the Data

Step	Action Taken
Step 1 Becoming Familiar with the Data	The researcher read the transcripts whilst concurrently listening to the recordings. This immersion facilitated checking of the transcripts for accuracy. Reflections on field-notes facilitated a crystallisation, of sorts, identifying important messages in the data.
Step 2 Coding the Data	A summative approach (Appendix III, Figures A1, A2, A3) guided dissection of transcripts into initial codes to which meanings were attributed (Basit, 2003). Appendix III, Table 6, includes a codebook developed in NVivo 11.
Step 3 Searching	To capture patterns in the data relevant to the RQs, the researcher aggregated initial codes into “first order” themes, without supporting quotes from participants, assigning preliminary thematic titles.
Step 4 Reviewing Each Theme	Further aggregation into “second order” themes reflected increasing levels of abstraction. This involved a balance between ensuring themes described the coded text extracts whilst reflecting key messages from the overall data.
Step 5 Defining Themes	The researcher populated the properties of each theme with an appropriate descriptive text in NVivo 11, identifying their main features. These were fine-tuned as themes were reviewed, providing gradually better definitions.
Step 6 Write Up	To construct a plausible narrative on professionalism in executive MBAs, a thick description (Ryle, 2009), illustrated by participant quotes, related themes from the data and mapped them to the conceptual framework.

3.3 Steps Taken to Ensure Rigour

Qualitative analysis risks losing its way in detail (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Appendix IV (Figure A4) details actions taken to maintain rigour. To verify transcript accuracy, the researcher read each transcript whilst listening to its audio record. Reflections on field-notes made in the aftermath of each interview facilitated an intuitive process of identifying “first impression” themes. The researcher compared “first impression” themes across interviews, labouring on detail when necessary, whilst cross-referencing them against the initial coding of the entire dataset, balancing part and whole. In essence, alternating periods of immersion and crystallisation ensued. For repeatability, the researcher coded text extracts with annotated explanations of interpretation (Appendix IV, Figure A5). To avoid merely descriptive reporting with selective quotes, the analysis follows Bazeley’s (2009) approach to forming, comparing and relating themes. Findings are drawn from the full data texts. Themes are first presented in Section 4 without supporting quotes. Quotes, whilst add clarity for readers in Sections 5 and 6, strengthen thematic credibility but constitute only one way in which data is reported.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defines saturation as a point beyond which it is no longer possible to gain new insight. Guidelines for recognising saturation are conflicting (Morse, 1995; Flick, 1998, Mason, 2010). As the study is less concerned with statistical generalisability than it is with participant perspectives, sampling is purposive, not probabilistic. To facilitate judgment on occurrence of saturation, the researcher constructed a matrix of “first impression” themes and the interviews in which they surfaced, with repeating occurrences suggesting diminishing returns to learning, hence saturation. (Appendix IV, Table A8). This helped to narrow the focus of subsequent interviews, whilst instilling confidence with respect to thematic identification.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

This section outlined the methods of scaling the research from the pilot study. In summary, a thematic analysis of transcripts, generated by twelve interviews and two focus group sessions, was undertaken. Additional data, in the form of reflections on field-notes, summaries written by focus group participants and supporting documentation, provided a basis for identification of “first impression” themes, which guided the identification of potential saturation. Several steps were taken to maintain rigour in the data collection and analysis with NVivo 11 providing the software platform to store the data, code the texts, record supporting annotations and memos and undertake a thematic analysis. Section 4 provides a detailed description of the high-level themes emerging from the entire data set and the process of aggregating codes, through increasing levels of abstraction, that ultimately led to thematic identification.

4. THEMATIC IDENTIFICATION

“Management may be the very antithesis of the use of a body of rigorous professional knowledge” (Spender, 2007, p.33).

4.1 Introduction

Two sequential processes facilitated thematic identification: [1] periods of immersion and reflection between interviews, enabling an intuitive identification of “first impression” themes, and [2] an iterative process of generating initial codes from the entire data and their subsequent aggregation. A first pass of the entire data, aligned to language of participants, generated over 200 initial codes (Appendix III). A second pass helped to identify similarities, differences and overlaps in codes, allowing them to be collapsed appropriately into smaller numbers of “first order” themes. In this second pass, the analysis transitioned from being purely participant driven to being more abstract. A third pass moved the analysis further into the theoretical domain, with “second order” themes helping to provide a conceptual basis for managerial professionalism and how it is developed in executive MBAs. This section provides a summary description of these themes so that they can be considered in the context of a thick description of interview and focus-group narratives, as evidence, in later sections of this paper.

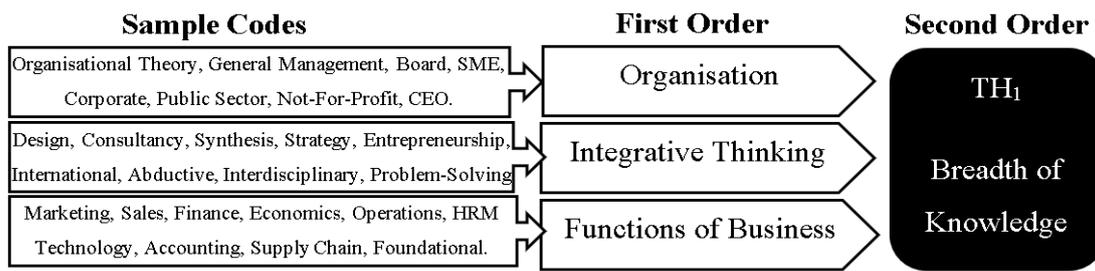
4.2 A Thematic Depiction of Perceptions of Professionalism

Three “second order” themes emerged from the data, together conveying educator and learner perceptions of professionalism and, thereby, addressing RQ1. These themes are: breadth of knowledge [TH₁], ethical disposition [TH₂] and behavioural moderation [TH₃]. As all three themes have referents in literature, they are considered in tandem with prior literature and in terms of the evidence from the interviews and focus-groups later in this paper.

4.2.1 Breadth of Knowledge [TH₁]

The first theme refers to the knowledge on which learners must draw in their roles as professional executives. Figure 3 depicts the perception of both educators and learners that breadth of knowledge, focused on an integrative view of organisations rather than narrow expertise, is at the heart of managerial professionalism. It suggests that executives require a foundation in a broad range of unfamiliar knowledge domains aligned to functional areas of business. The implication is that accomplished learners should be able to creatively assimilate information from diverse knowledge sources, including theory and professional practice, as part of their problem-solving and decision-making routines.

Figure 3: Thematic Formation of Breadth of Knowledge

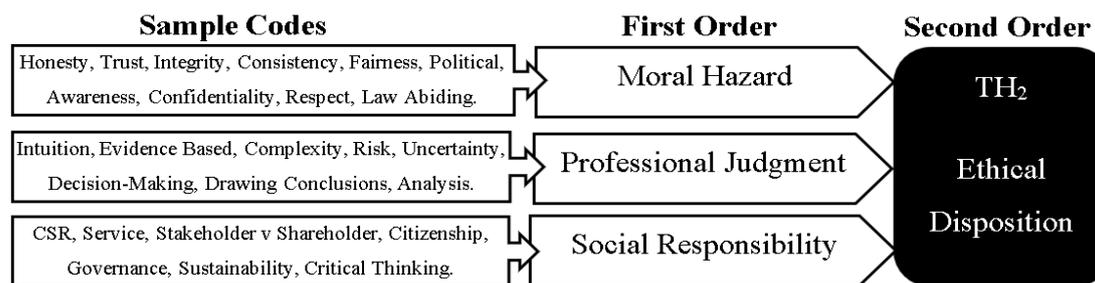


This form of integrative thinking allows them to address organisational issues in less siloed ways, consider multiple representations of problems and act as a point of synthesis.

4.2.2 Ethical Disposition [TH₂]

The second theme refers to a standard of moral judgment required to satisfy conflicting stakeholders needs. Figure 4 conveys ethical disposition to be an important educator and learner perception of managerial professionalism. Integrity, fairness, courage and consistency were used to describe traits needed to deal with an inherent moral hazard.

Figure 4: Thematic Formation of Ethical Disposition



Learners implied that managers require political awareness whereas educators tended to link ethical reasoning to exercising professional judgement. Some participants stressed social responsibility as a “counterbalance to prevailing management trends” [PD₅].

4.2.3 Behavioural Moderation [TH₃]

The third theme refers to performative aspects of learners as professional executives, such as how they undertake their work, interact with others and monitor quality.

Figure 5: Thematic Formation of Behavioural Moderation

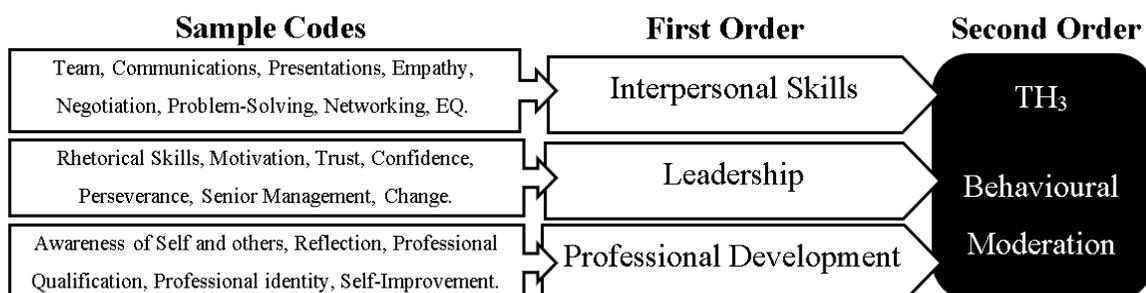


Figure 5 conveys the perceived role of behavioural moderation in managerial professionalism. Learners stressed an ability to control their behaviour when interacting with others whereas educators stressed skills for leadership.

Although there is a basis for all three themes in existing theory, Section 5 outlines considerable divergence in these themes from generally accepted concepts of professionalism.

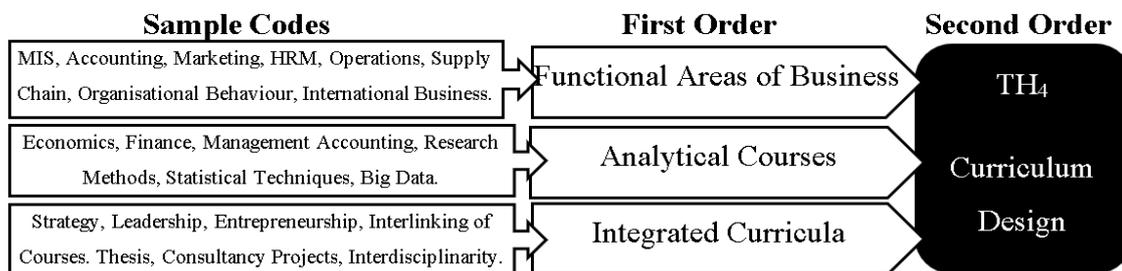
4.3 Development of Professionalism in Executive MBAs

Five “second order” themes emerged, conveying perceptions of how executive MBAs develop professionalism, thereby addressing RQ2. These are: curriculum design [TH4], andragogy [TH5], relationship learning [TH6], rigour relevance [TH7] and career development [TH8].

4.3.1 Curriculum Design [TH4]

Contradicting Abbott’s (1998) idea that professionalism requires expert knowledge, Figure 6 conveys executive MBA curriculum to be broad, focused on enhancing analytical skills and providing an integrative understanding of management practice.

Figure 6: Thematic Formation of Curriculum Design

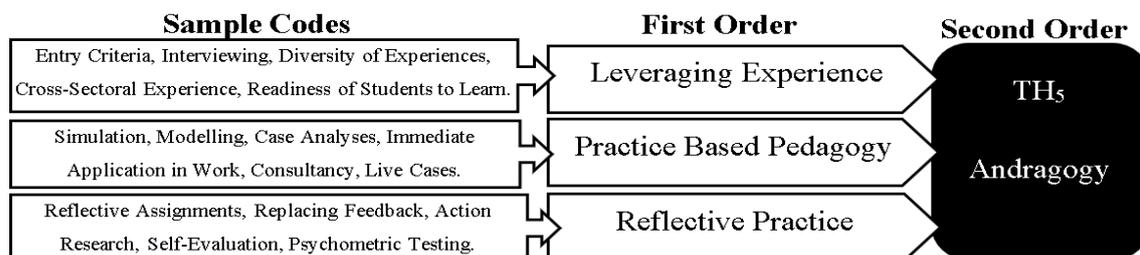


Some educators highlighted the role of AMBA (2016) in promulgating framework conditions for a standardised but professionally relevant curriculum. Yet, feedback from educators on curriculum integration implied considerable divergence across the MBAs.

4.3.2 Andragogy [TH5]

Figure 7 conveys how adult learning principles from the humanist traditions (Rogers, 1969) were evident in education processes of executive MBAs.

Figure 7: Thematic Formation of Andragogy

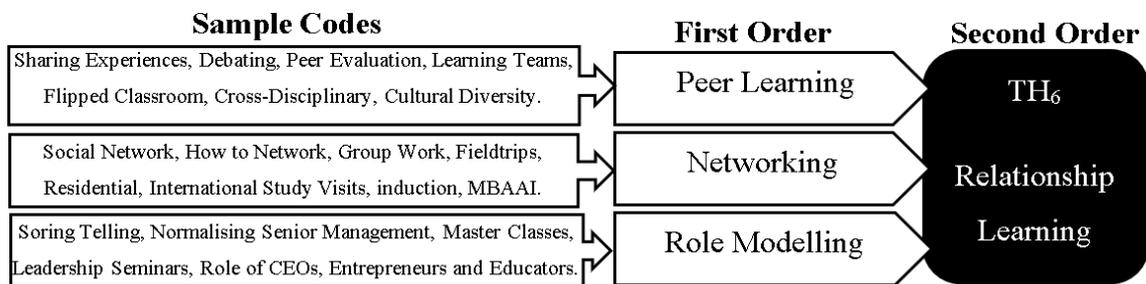


These principles leverage the experience of learners “who need to think about grown-up problems in grown-up ways” [E5]. Examples include peer learning, practice-based pedagogy through application of learning in the workplace and reflective practice.

4.3.3 Relationship Learning [TH6]

Figure 8 conveys the perceived importance of learning to manage relationships based on know-who, trust and personal judgment. Educators conveyed an image of students “working in small groups, huddled around tablets in the library”, reporting that they “mixed the groups up” [PD3] to limit similarity (Konrad et al., 2017).

Figure 8: Thematic Formation of Relationship Learning

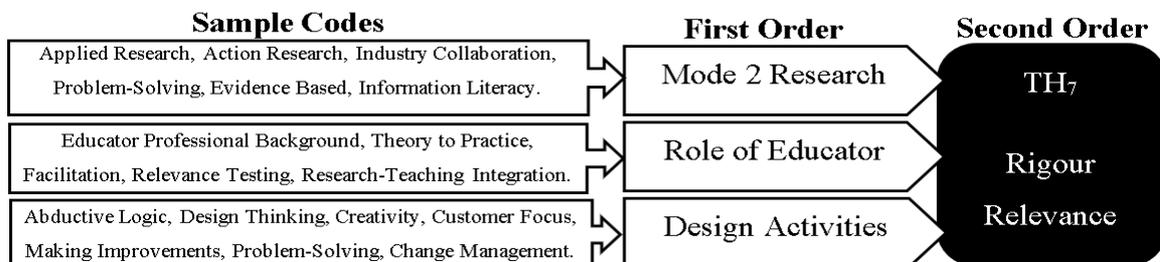


Relationship learning extends to informal opportunities (Caza and Brower, 2015) to build a professional network. Learners linked relationship learning to interpersonal skills development through coaching and reflective practice. Provision of role models was also evident, helping to “normalise the idea of senior management” [PD4].

4.3.4 Rigour Relevance [TH7]

Figure 9 conveys an important intertwining of professional relevance and academic rigour in executive MBAs. This intertwine was conveyed by educators who used analogies, such as “two rails on a railway track” [PD2], or “two lanes on the motorway” [PD1].

Figure 9: Thematic Formation of Rigour Relevance



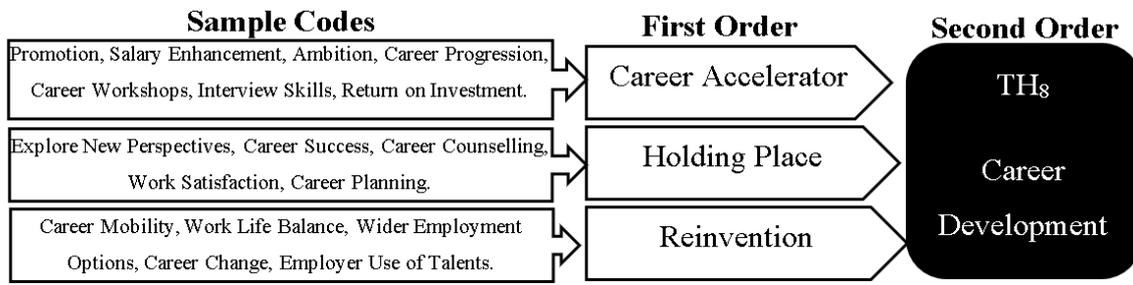
Learners cited consultancy and action research as forms of Mode 2 research, in which designing solutions to problems need an evidenced based approach. Interaction between educators and learners appears crucial to the intertwine with learner experience offering a basis to “test

theories and concepts in practice” [PD₅]. Whilst rigour-relevance [TH₇] may be viewed as an a priori theme, given its past problematising (e.g. Trieschman et al., 2000), its emergent nature in this study is considered in light of the potential impact that executive MBAs have in providing an academic framework for professional experience.

4.3.5 Career Development [TH₈]

Figure 10 depicts the formation of career development as a second order theme. Past criticisms of MBAs cite their over-emphasis on career enhancement (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). The pilot study suggested that MBA_P was promoted as a “career catalyst” [E_P]. In the wider study, educators noted that MBAs are marketed as career development programmes or as holding places for exploring professional identity.

Figure 10: Thematic Formation of Career Development



Whilst judgment of career success is subjective (Baruch, 2009), learners confirmed that it was a motivation for pursuing their MBA. This motivation reinforces a structuralist view of professionalism (Larkin, 1983) based on self-interest. Yet, learners referred to other motivations, suggesting more mature levels of professionalism, such as work-life balance, making greater contributions, using their talents and gaining confidence to do something new. Indeed, career and professional development appeared interlinked.

“The careers people and faculty member for the personal profiling and development effort work closely... co-developing that approach” [PD₃].

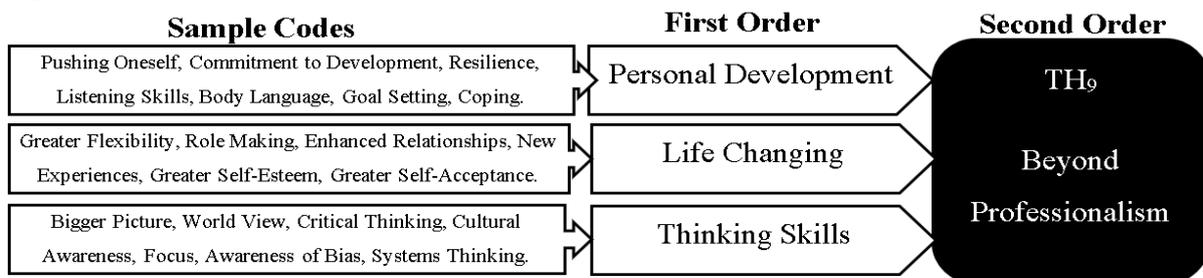
Career workshops, coaching, interview training, networking events and leadership seminars appear equally mingled within the MBAs arsenal of development activities.

These themes suggest that executive MBAs have a strong professional orientation geared towards career success. The rigour relevance theme supports a view of management as a knowledge-based profession. Relationship learning appears critical to the behavioural and ethical aspects of professionalism. The use of andragogic principles (Wallace, 1998) reflects the experience profile of learners and their relatively mature levels of professionalism.

4.4 Unexpected Findings

In seeking to understand the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs, Figure 11 conveys a more holistic development of learners beyond professionalism [TH₉]. Whilst participants acknowledged an understated significance of professionalism, they noted that the developmental aspects of executive MBAs amounted to much more (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Thematic Formation of Beyond Professionalism



One educator encapsulated the experience as: -

“I would love to take a photocopy of your entire brain now, the emotional, the spiritual, the intellectual, the entire section of your brain and show it to you in two years’ time” [PD₃].

Some learners reported being more confident, having greater self-esteem and flexibility and being more comfortable with themselves. Learners also noted development in thinking skills.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Addressing RQ1, Breadth of Knowledge [TH₁] contradicts the notion that narrow expertise underpins professionalism. Ethical disposition [TH₂] aligns with existing conceptions of professionalism but contradicts criticisms of MBAs (Pfeffer, 2005). Behavioural Moderation [TH₃] implies that the conceptual framework should embrace Clark et al.’s (2014) professionalism concepts. Addressing RQ2, the curriculum design [TH₄] facilitates breadth of knowledge but with varying levels of integration. Andragogy [TH₅] appears to play a role in developing mature levels of professionalism. There appears to be an emphasis on relationship learning [TH₆] as a means of developing professional behaviour and ethical disposition. The rigour-relevance [TH₇] intertwine supports Simon’s (1967) view of management as a creative profession rooted in scientific knowledge. Whilst an emphasis on Career Development [TH₈] accentuates a structuralist view of professionalism, more mature career-related motivations are evident. Finally, Beyond Professionalism [TH₉] implies that executive MBAs represent an inflection point beyond which professionalism is reinforced but learners transcend it. Sections 5 and 6 evidence these themes by providing a thick description of interview and focus-narratives for RQ1 and RQ2 respectively and considering them in the context of prior literature.

5. INTERVIEW AND FOCUS-GROUP NARRATIVES CONVEYING PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGERIAL PROFESSIONALISM (RQ1)

“We do not do much violence to our established ideas to suggest that the essence of professionalism is not its shared body of objective knowledge, nor its policing but rather that community’s self-conscious reflecting on the constraints against which the trained imagination is thrown” (Spender, 2007, p.40).

5.1 Introduction

Paper 1 described managerial professionalism as a synthesis of five concepts. [1] Expertise represents the body of knowledge that justifies management’s claim to societal problems that it is positioned to solve (Haskell, 2000). [2] Social agency describes managers’ perceived awareness of and contributions to societal issues (Nino, 2012). [3] Autonomy of judgment is indicated by critical thinking and problem-solving (Hall, 1968). [4] Self-concept provides a proxy for readiness to assimilate professional responsibilities (Haywood-Farmer and Stuart, 1990). [5] Self-regulation represents a form of ethical control of a profession (Zsolnai, 2009). Guided by these concepts, this section uses interview and focus-group narratives to relate Breadth of Knowledge [TH₁], Ethical Disposition [TH₂] and Behavioural Moderation [TH₃] and to anchor them conceptually. It concludes with an examination of managerial professionalism by mapping these three themes to the five concepts. Illustrative quotes are used to deepen understanding, to give voice to participants and to enhance readability.

5.2. Perceptions of Management as a Profession

This study is premised on a notion of management as a profession, a community of practitioners whose education, credentialing and ethical regulation rest on a shared body of rigorous knowledge. Yet, educators pointed out that management is not a coherent profession.

“I haven’t thought of it in that way in ... professionalism to me implies identity with and membership of a professional body of people that goes beyond your [employer]” [PD₆].

Educators cited “diversity of practice” and “gaps between theoretical knowledge and creative application” [E₅] as problematic but, overall, supported the professionalisation of management.

“I have respect for the complexity of the organisation ... so many dysfunctions and problems in politics and cultures ... and the management of that is not something you ... pick up instinctively ... I do think that management is a profession” [PD₃].

However, learners tended to view management differently, suggesting that it transcended professions and that their MBA education was preparation for leadership [TH₃].

“So, you may start in your professional life as a specialist but then you become somebody who manages processes around your role ... as you rise further you become a manager of managers. Then, ideally... you transition from ... to being a leader” [Grad3].

Learners implied that management was less a regulated, science-based profession and more of a creative profession [TH₁]. Despite this, learners stressed that they “have to write a real thesis” [Grad5] and pointed to the MBA Association as the de facto membership body. Some educators cited the role of accrediting bodies in maintaining professional relevance of MBAs.

“[Accrediting bodies] are always very alive to feedback from alumni, feedback from employers ... so, you could say it is akin to some form of professionalisation” [E3].

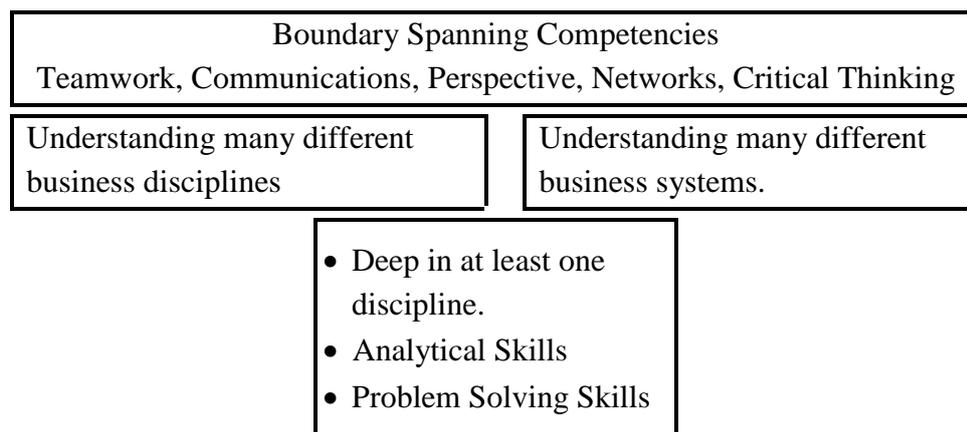
5.3 Management Expertise

Breadth of knowledge [TH₁] has long been associated with MBA curriculum (Hunt and Speck, 1986). It was clear, from the primary data, that learners: -

“acquire a very broad base of business knowledge, not necessarily experts but a feel for ... that allows them to engage outside of their professional discipline” [E2].

Yet, professionalism is associated with an expert body of knowledge. Participants sought to resolve this paradox by suggesting that managerial professionalism requires an integration of knowledge, allowing learners to “move out of their functional specialism to see the bigger picture” [PD₄]. One sub-group of learners used the analogy of a t-shaped graduate (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Concept of T-Shaped Graduate



Adapted from Donofrio et al. (2010)

Yet, the analogy of a t-shaped graduate, whilst has some basis in the literature (Donofrio et al., 2010), its perspective is rooted in narrow expertise conceived from the learner’s background profession. It implies that learners view their professional identity in terms of their background profession or that managerial professionalism relies more on a tacit set of boundary-crossing

behaviours [TH₃] facilitated by knowledge of a broad range of business disciplines [TH₁]. Inherent in these skills is “a broadening of horizons ... and understanding how others, from different backgrounds, approach similar problems” [PD₆]. The depiction of graduates of MBA_P (Paper 3) as professional managers trained to integrate four forms of capital - structural, human, relationship and process - to balance stakeholder needs, also extended to the wider study.

5.4 Social Agency

Consistent with Koljatic and Silva (2015), this study suggests that learners develop an “awareness of their potential impact on society” [PD₃]. Educators touted their role in helping learners to “navigate ethical dilemmas” [PD₄]. Most educators pointed to learning outcomes with an ethical dimension or shared experiences of learners exercising moral judgement [TH₂].

... ethics is covered in case studies as to how scenarios should be handled” [E₃].

Most learners acknowledged the importance of ethics in exercising judgement in complex situations, thereby generating sufficient trust to be an effective manager. Yet, they also acknowledged tension in their role as agents of shareholders and of a wider set of stakeholders.

“Managers have this broad remit in terms of how they interact with different stakeholders ...as a result, there is a moral hazard associated with the role” [Grad₄].

There was also consensus that managers did not have to be altruistic saints nor hold strong prosocial values. Educators suggested that a strong ethic was required in their values and behaviours to ensure that a sense of fairness tempers achievement orientation [TH₂].

5.5 Autonomy of Judgment

Educators suggested that MBAs were increasingly about educating for judgement [TH₂], i.e. resolving uncertainties and embracing ethical responsibility for actions that impact on others.

“I suppose it’s ... being able to judge the scenario in an appropriate manner” [E₂].

To support judgment in their everyday managerial roles, learners appeared primarily concerned with their MBA providing an intellectual basis for their judgments so that they could be “a little less kneejerk in [their] decision-making processes” [Grad₃].

“at the end of an MBA you may still have your hunches but now you have maybe a stronger analytical framework to help you make decisions [Grad₉].”

Some saw benefits in learning analytical techniques. Others sought heuristics to guide their decision-making. Others highlighted benefits from reflection and critical thinking. Educators noted assessments that required learners to exercise judgement in scenarios for which “there

was no right or wrong answers, for which incomplete information was provided or for which different viewpoints were to be explored” [PD₄]. Hence, there appeared to be an emphasis on exercising professional judgment in a synthesis-oriented curriculum, supported by analysis and rhetoric, to develop executives’ abilities to create socio-economic value under uncertainty.

5.6 Self-Concept

The study explored the role of self-confidence (Sturdy et al, 2006), communication (Robles, 2012) and leadership (Kotter, 1999) as indicators of superior self-concept [TH₃]. Participants expressed a belief that self-confidence was needed in executive management roles.

“It gives you a certain degree of confidence because you are more aware of what is going on. It’s hard to quantify it, but it’s an important attribute of the programme” [E₂].

Learners and educators stressed leadership as the most important attribute of executive roles.

“Without knowing what it means to be an leader ... rest is worthless” [Grad₇].

“So, if you can’t sell your ideas internally, you can’t make an argument at the board table, you can’t influence people, you can’t negotiate ...” [PD₃].

Educators suggested that leadership is the key feature that distinguishes executive MBAs from their full-time equivalents and that it distinguishes executive management from specialist professional roles. Yet, there was a paradox in this assertion in that educators cited leadership development as the aspect of executive MBAs in which professionalism was most embedded.

“Leadership slots into professionalism ... there’s a stream running throughout the MBA for these skills ... team building, coaching, leaderships of oneself ... softer skills” [PD₃].

Given that managing people is integral to management, it is unsurprising that learners the noted the importance of communication and other interpersonal skills in their roles [TH₃]. Reflections on the focus group transcripts noted a bias towards transformational leadership (Burns and By, 2012). ‘Mediocre but arrogant’ is a cliché sometimes used to criticise MBA learners for a sense of misplaced confidence (Mintzberg, 2013). Yet, whilst the focus-groups suggested that MBA learners displayed a superior sense of self-concept over others, there was no sense of arrogance. If anything, peer learning appeared to be a factor in moderating unacceptable behaviour [TH₃].

5.7 Self-Regulation

There was scant evidence to justify the idea that participants considered self-regulation to be important. One educator contrasted the regulatory role of professional engineering bodies to the limited networking role of the MBA Association.

“I mean ethics is not institutionalised after the MBA. If you’re an engineer or ... you sign codes of practices ... similarly accounting, but not for the MBA” [PD₃].

Educators suggested that university charters, student handbooks, honour codes and Chatham House rules provided some regulation during the MBA. Yet, they offered these more as an apology, rather than concrete examples of regulation of a management profession. There was also a dismissive response from educators and learners about the idea of adopting an MBA oath, learners in particular suggesting that it was more important for executives to be creative than to rigorously conform to proven procedures. Hence, the ethical component of managerial professionalism [TH₂] appears to be more about an ethic of creativity (Wang and Murnighan, 2015), which requires flexibility and openness, than an ethic of regulation (Soule, 2003).

5.8 Summary of Managerial Professionalism

Table 5 maps the three themes that depict educator and learner perceptions of managerial professionalism to the five concepts of professionalism in the conceptual framework in addition to Clark et al.’s (2014) employability concepts of professionalism.

Table 5: Mapping Concepts of Professionalism to Emerging Themes

Theme ↓	Concept →	Expertise	Social Agency	Autonomy of Judgment	Self-Concept	Self-Regulation
Breadth of Knowledge [TH ₁]		?		✓		
Ethical Disposition [TH ₂]			✓	✓		✗
Behavioural Moderation [TH ₃]					✓	

Participants identified three of the five conceptual components of professionalism to be relevant to management. [1] A superior sense of self-concept was evident in the leadership behaviours [TH₃] that executive MBAs seek to develop. [2] Social agency appears far from the subversive factor in management education once claimed (Mitroff, 2004). Yet, social agency does not appear to extend to altruism. Rather, a more pragmatic form, based on political awareness, helps to maintain trust and to balance stakeholder requirements. [3] Appearing to draw on ethical disposition [TH₂] and breadth of knowledge [TH₁] in contexts where rational decision-making is not entirely possible, autonomy judgment is also relevant (Khurana and Spender, 2013). It appears that participants perceive managers to have a political function, in which judgment requires skill in analysis, rhetoric and integrative thinking. The creative orientation of management may explain why self-regulation, prevalent in archetype professions, does not extend to management. The unresolved disconnect between breadth of knowledge and expertise is explored further in Section 7.

6. INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP NARRATIVE CONVEYING PERCEPTIONS OF HOW PROFESSIONALISM IS DEVELOPED ON EXECUTIVE MBAS (RQ2)

“Management education critics argue that MBA graduates exhibit a lack of professionalism or, more fundamentally, that management education has strayed away from its original purposes of instilling a sense of professionalism” (Waddock and Lozano, 2013, p. 268).

6.1 Introduction

Paper 1 conceptualised the executive MBA a professional education programme using Stark et al.’s (1986) framework. Whilst differences exist between MBAs and programmes to which the framework has been applied, it was adapted for the purposes of the study (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Conceptualising Executive MBAs as Professional Education Programmes

Processes	Agents	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Curriculum ▪ Pedagogy ▪ Assessment ▪ Selection & Socialisation ▪ Role Modelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educators ▪ Learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Values ▪ Behaviours ▪ Competencies

Figure 13 depicts MBAs are as a carefully devised set of education processes that, in the right contexts and with the right agents, leads to professional preparation outcomes. The section used the interview and focus-group narratives, as evidence, to convey perceptions of how executive MBAs develop professional values, behaviours and competencies (RQ2),

6.2 Professional Preparation Outcomes

Values represent underlying beliefs that influence professional behaviour. Learners pursue values by behaving in ways that express them. A key feature of professional education is certification of competence, namely the habitual and ethical use of knowledge and skills.

6.2.1 Professional Values

MBAs are criticised for their failure to develop ethical values worthy of professional conduct (Giacalone, 2004; Hühn, 2014). Using Schwartz’ (1992) four value types: self-enhancement, self-transcendence, openness to change and conservation, Arieli et al.’s (2016), suggested that self-enhancement dominates MBA learner values. Self-enhancement reflects a motivation to enhance self-interests. Self-transcendence neglects self-interest in favour of a common good. Openness to change captures stimulation and self-direction values, an indicator of motivation to pursue one’s intellectual or emotional interests. Conservation combines conformity, security

and tradition values. To make sense of values articulated by participants, initial codes with a value component were categorised using Schwartz' same four value types (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Perceived Values Developed by Executive MBA Learners

Conservation	Self-Transcendence
Sample Initial Codes Self-Control, Health, Politeness, Law, Abiding, Professional Appearance	Sample Initial Codes Fairness, Broadening Perspective, Honesty, Collaboration, Diversity, Conscientious
S = 7, R = 17	S = 22, R = 47
Self-Enhancement	Openness to Change
Sample Initial Codes Leadership, Self-Confidence, Salary Enhancement, Enjoyment, Achievement Orientation, Influence, Self-Improvement	Sample Initial Codes Coaching, Self-Acceptance, Readiness to Learn, Initiative, Relationship-Building, Career Mobility, Adaptability, Role-Making
S = 26, R = 73	S = 28, R = 81

S = Σ Sources for Each Code, R = Σ Text Segments Coded for Each Code

Whilst illustrative only, Figure 14 implies that learners prioritise openness to change over conformity and that self-enhancement does not dominate their values. Attitudes used to express values paint a mixed picture. Consistent with DeVries and Korotov (2007), educators imply that some degree of socialisation towards an enhanced professional identity occurs.

“Well, having an MBA is the identity. They drop it in conversations, you hear it in business and there are bragging rights when you have done it in certain places” [E3].

Career marketability also surfaced repeatedly in the data. *“90% plus will say they are here to advance their career” [E4]*, suggesting a value orientation towards self-enhancement. On the other hand, attitudes reflecting readiness to learn, professional development and appreciation of research evidence were evident.

“The MBA kept me honest in some ways in that the people that we’re dealing with are motivated to learn ... they’re paying money to be here ... to develop [E3].

6.2.2 Professional Behaviours

A key message from both educators and learners was that behaviours become moderated through [1] greater awareness of self and others and [2] interpersonal skills development.

“You see all these managers who are not able to really interact effectively with other people and that is something that is taken care of on the MBA” [E4].

“We gave 360° appraisals ... discussed the feedback we got with a coach” [Grad4].

Much fine-tuning of behavioural moderation appears to occur through coaching, reflective practice, intensive classroom collaboration and practice-based learning [TH5].

6.2.3 Professional Competencies

Stark et al., (1986) identified five competency types: integrative, interpersonal, adaptive, conceptual and technical. Integrative competence was particularly evident from the data.

“MBAs provide ... an integrative understanding of management ... the students learn to integrate diverse aspects of the course in a practice-based setting” [PD₆].

Interpersonal competence was also evident. Numerous examples were provided of skills development in listening, writing, oral communication, presentation and intercultural awareness. Additionally, through relationship learning [TH₆], there was also evidence of competency development in negotiation, conflict resolution and influence.

“I think what is emphasised, let’s say, from my point of view, is the social competencies, the human interaction part” [Grad₅].

It also appears that a broad-based curriculum [TH₄] supports the development of adaptive competence. To begin with, learners “who are opting into the MBA, tend to be at a certain point in their lives where they are more open to development, change and learning” [PD₅]. Additionally, educators reported that they apply a wide array of pedagogical tools. So, students learn to “adapt and apply different theories in different contexts” [PD₅]. Whilst conceptual competence is reflected in the theoretical foundations of the business disciplines, the data suggests that these disciplines are not studied at a highly theoretical level. Some learners reported being “introduced to journal papers for the first time” [Grad₁] and there was an effort to “bring everyone to a reasonable level of information literacy” [E₅]. The appearance of conceptual competence lower down the pecking order implies that executive MBAs have a greater professional orientation than a scientific one. Examples of technical competence were rarely provided, reinforcing the view of management as a creative art underpinned by tacit knowledge and skills. Professional preparation outcomes do not equate to professionalism. Hilton and Slotnick (2005) imply that prolonged periods of learning from experience and reflection are required.

6.3 The Role of Experience and Reflection in Executive MBAs

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) suggests that learners assimilate foundation knowledge in skills before gradually transitioning to practice through decreasing levels of scaffolding. Feedback from educators and learners suggest that executive MBAs are rather different. Learners typically have significant professional experience on entry.

“The aim is ... a space for students to reflect on that experience, to share and learn from each other’s’ experiences and to cement their prior knowledge” [PD₄].

This suggests that the teaching and learning processes for executive development are more andragogical than pedagogical [TH₅]. Sharing and reflection on experience seems essential to anchoring it conceptually. Reflective processes in executive MBAs appear to have “evolved hugely in the last 10 years, enabling learners to become more sophisticated epistemologically” [PD₂] in assimilating the necessary evidence to solve complex problems.

6.4 Education Processes for Developing Professionalism

Conceptualising education processes as strategies devised to achieve programme outcomes, Paper 1 cited the role of curriculum, pedagogy, selection and socialisation, assessment and role-modelling in fostering professionalism in archetype professions (e.g. Passi et al., 2010).

6.4.1 Curriculum

Section 4 highlighted that executive MBAs exhibit a notably homogenous curriculum, comprising a broad range of business disciplines [TH₄]. Although there can be differing emphases in content, these differences appear to be mere variations within a shared conceptual framework, focused on organisation. This implies that a body of knowledge for executive MBAs could support standardised exit testing of competence. Yet, breadth appears to preclude studying business disciplines at an expert level. Given the opportunities that executive MBAs appear to afford learners in integrating knowledge, perhaps their body of knowledge is more reflective of knowledge ‘for’ as opposed to knowledge ‘about’, more specifically knowledge for integration. Educators reported an evolution in curricula from functional specialisms to a curriculum that, itself, is integrated. PD₃ described how MBA₅ is restructuring its curricula along different managerial mindsets (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2003).

“We have taken the journey idea and so we’re focused on developing different mindsets throughout the year. We have moved away from the silo approach. We draw on the subjects but ... only for specific purposes” [PD₃].

E₄ shared a student handbook detailing how MBA₈ had adopted a pragmatic “integrated total management approach to the didactic anchoring of an integrated and transfer-based method of imparting expertise”. At the other extreme, some educators described MBAs that offer a curriculum of standalone courses along functional lines with end-of-semester exams as the sole form of assessment with little opportunity for interlinking of courses.

6.4.2 Pedagogy

If knowledge imparted by executive MBAs is knowledge ‘for’ then, perhaps, key to understanding the knowledge component of managerial professionalism is their teaching and learning practices. Three aspects of executive MBA teaching and learning stood out.

[1] “A broad range of tools are used to ensure that learning is not routine” [PD₅], such as case-studies, international study and live consultancy projects. The extent to which these tools were evident from the study is summarised in Appendix V (Table A9).

[2] Practice-based pedagogy appears to be pervasive, taking advantage of students’ professional activities in parallel with their studies. Yet, practice-based pedagogy does not appear to be scaffolded. Focus appears to be on “reflecting on experiences in our roles” [Grad₄] rather than formal socialisation.

“I think the MBA is really about students making meaning of their own experiences and sharing them in the classroom ... in the context of the models and concepts ...” [E₅].

This suggests that practice-based pedagogy in executive MBAs leans towards field immersion (Raelin, 2007), in which knowledge is context dependent. In contrast, professional models of education are rooted in scientific principles and ethical guidelines (Somers et al., 2014). The one exception to this surfaced in the context of learners relating “simulated practice in the classroom to their own roles” [Grad₃]. Hence, a concern is that, without formal socialisation, MBA learners are susceptible to future professional lapse.

[3] Educators reported that didactic teaching is de-emphasised in executive MBAs.

“If you have got a lecturer standing up at the front lecturing ... for three hours ... that is giving somebody knowledge that they could ... just ... read themselves” [PD₅].

A less didactic approach affords greater time to supporting the development of Abbot’s (1988) diagnosis and treatment skills to routine management problems.

“I think that comes to the fore in the dissertation project where you’re asked to work with a client firm and solve a problem for them ... as a consultant” [PD₃].

It was unclear if there was a structured transition from foundational knowledge to field immersion in line with Somers et al.’s (2014) typology of practice-based pedagogy. Educators suggested that, although the first year of study was “quite theoretical” and focuses on the individual business disciplines, the second year afforded more opportunity to integrate knowledge in practice-based settings.

6.4.3 Assessment

Unlike in medicine (Lynch et al, 2004), there was no evidence of assessment specifically for professionalism but “professionalism was embedded in practical assignments” [PD7]. Educators had expectations of high levels of pre-existing learner professionalism,

“At a certain level it’s like rewarding somebody for breathing, you take it for granted that they ... because you see them working ... they have got the basics” [PD5].

Educators suggested that qualitative feedback is provided to learners from peers, coaches and external clients with multi-source 360° team assessment of behaviour (Whitehouse et al., 2007) facilitating relationship learning [TH7]. A further context in which assessing professionalism arose was in reflection, self-evaluation and psychometric testing.

“We give them feedback on their personality and their styles, but we have grown-ups who need to take responsibility for who they are and to analyse how they work” [PD4].

“Leadership is a ... big part ... so it is not about giving feedback ... to tick a box, it is about producing something reflective ... [that learners] can work through” [PD5].

Assessment, therefore, appears to play an important role in developing professionalism even though the assessment of professionalism is not explicitly undertaken.

6.4.4 Selection and Socialisation

Apart from a requirement for prior experience [TH5], it was difficult to identify selection and socialisation processes that contributed to professionalism. The experience profile of learners leans towards them having well developed problem-solving skills, but they are also further removed from the classroom on entry. Hence, PD₆ reported that MBA₉ was considering the GMAC’s recently introduced Executive Assessment, as an alternative to the GMAT, which places an emphasis on analysis, problem-solving and critical thinking over mathematics and grammar. Yet, most educators noted that they were reliant on a screening interview to “ensure applicants matched requirements” [E4]. Educators provided examples of screening applicants who exhibited poor levels of professionalism. PD₃ noted that the selection process was part of managing the cohort of learners as a team [TH5]. Despite claims in literature that prospective learners self-select into MBAs (e.g. Krishnan, 2008), PD₅ noted that MBA₇ sought students from different backgrounds with different values, not just those with successful corporate careers. PD₅ highlighted ‘potential for development’ as an important entry criterion [TH9], to the extent that some applicants, with outstanding managerial careers, had not been admitted on the basis that the MBA offered them little scope for further development.

6.4.5 Role Modelling

The pilot study suggested that role-modelling was unimportant in executive MBA_P. A tentative proposition put forward was that learners, already in quite senior positions, derived more value from peer-learning (Mayo et al., 2012). Yet, the wider study revealed numerous examples of role-modelling.

“It’s always fun to meet someone who is at the top of their game ... to hear their stories, their challenges, how they overcame things ... you can relate to in some way” [PD₃].

It was common to hear examples of courses being taught by part-time staff who are professionally active in their own fields.

“Governance is taught by a senior barrister who ... [E₃].

In some MBAs, educators reported that learners are obliged to record a portfolio of professional development events attended. Connecting role-models with learners tends to be undertaken at programme level or course-level, whereby role-models are invited to deliver a topic related to specific learning outcomes. Role-modelling appears to be most significant in the relationship learning [TH₆] and career development [TH₈] contexts whereby “there is a high-level cadre of people that [learners are] exposed to” [E₃].

There appears, therefore, to be a range of processes to support the development of learner professionalism. Lack of formal socialisation processes raises concerns of professional lapse.

6.5 The Roles of Educators and Learners

Education processes rely on the agency of its educators and learners for successful outcomes. Some educators noted that teaching on the MBA helped their own professional currency.

“As a lecturer you get a sense where you’re at ... people want material relevant to them ... I find teaching an MBA smartens a lecturer” [PD₂].

Others noted the challenge that academic staff face when they first teach an executive MBA.

“Lecturing on MBAs isn’t for the faint-hearted. You’ve got to have people who can go in and deliver on not just the learning outcomes but ... in which that should be facilitated” [E₃].

The focus-group feedback left the researcher in little doubt that credibility issues, associated with the rigour-relevance tension, (Gulati, 2007) bubble beneath the surface. Learners appear to favour educators who can bridge the theory practice divide, adopt a facilitative approach and manage an appropriate student-teacher power balance [TH₇].

6.6 Concluding Remarks

The interview and focus-group narratives provide ample evidence to support five themes that convey how MBAs develop professionalism, namely: curriculum design [TH4], andragogy [TH5], relationship learning [TH6], rigour relevance [TH7] and career development [TH8].

The findings suggest that andragogic principles (Knowles et al., 2005) provide a foundation for developing learners with mature levels of professionalism. These principles assume that learners reflect on their experiences (Roglio, 2006) and apply knowledge in their professional roles (Roglio and Light, 2009). Relationship learning also appears to be prominent in executive MBAs, in which learners develop an understanding of the intuitive, trustful and informal nature of relationships that they need to foster. The rigour-relevance tension in management education has a long history (Meyer, 1988). Much criticism of executive MBAs derives from their frontline position, too analytical for some and too practical for others. Yet, this study suggests that educators manage this tension remarkably well. The experience profile of learners puts into focus the inability of executive managers to apply management theory deterministically in professional practice. This leads to the most problematic aspect of MBA education processes. A standardised curriculum based on a broad range of business disciplines does not equate to a systematic body of managerial knowledge. An emerging emphasis on integration, synthesis and design holds the key to disentangling that knowledge and optimising the curriculum.

The study reveals three diverging MBA models with increasing levels of professionalism. The first derives from an observation of teaching rooted in positivist traditions of economics. Teaching the business disciplines in a compartmentalised fashion weakens management's value in non-business contexts, failing to acknowledge its holistic nature. There is little focus on know-who, limited exposure to tacit knowledge and the learning context is solely the market. Most executive MBAs in the study have evolved to a second model. Whilst their curricula remain dominated by the business disciplines, interlinking of courses facilitates a more integrative perspective. Learning opportunities for integrating knowledge in practice-based settings are provided and ethics, corporate social responsibility and sustainability are embedded. Yet, in this model, professional development is conveyed as an add-on, often in the informal curriculum, and behavioural development is limited. A few MBAs are restructuring to a third model, which embraces integration and considers knowledge of the business disciplines as a means to an end. This model mirrors synthesis, imagination, judgement and rhetoric as attributes of professional practice for engaging with uncertainty and creating socio-economic value, rejecting the separation thesis (Harris and Freeman, 2008) of business ethics.

7. CONCLUSIONS

“A full solution ...hinges on the process of developing an explicit, abstract, intellectual theory of the processes of synthesis and design; a theory that can be analyzed and taught in the same way as ... chemistry, physiology, and economics ...” (Simon, 1967, p. 15).

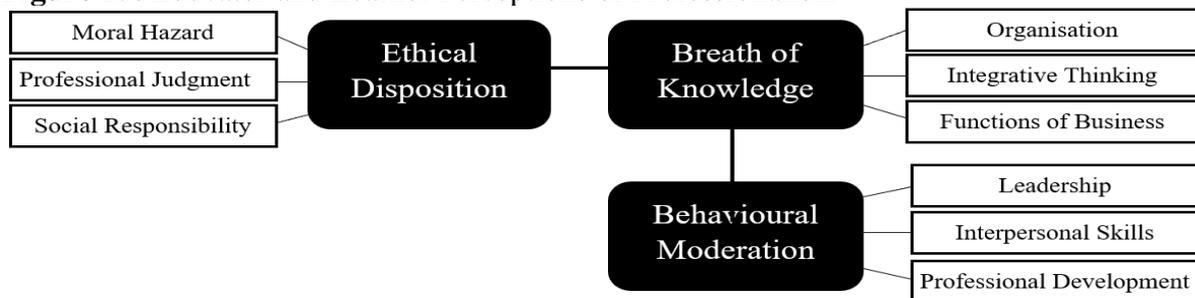
7.1 Introduction

The motivation for this study stems from critiques of MBA education. The literature review identified potential solutions to these critiques in the education processes of the archetype professions and, hence, a research opportunity to explore the possibilities for developing MBAs along professional lines. Whilst the executive MBA is similar in nomenclature, it is different in its student profile and pedagogy to the full-time MBA (Crotty and Soule, 1997). The experience profile of learners and the fact that their work and study intertwine pitches the executive MBA towards a professional model of education. If professionalism is to be found in MBAs, then it is most likely to be found in executive MBAs. Hence, the research objective established was to explore the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs.

7.2 Summary of Findings

Figure 15 shows the three themes that convey educator and learner perceptions of managerial professionalism: breadth of knowledge, ethical disposition and behavioural moderation.

Figure 15: Educator and Learner Perceptions of Professionalism



These themes are surprising in the light of past criticisms of MBA values (Arieli et al., 2016) and behaviours (Ingols and Shapiro, 2014). Yet, they align with prototype statements on managerial professionalism (e.g. Romme, 2016) and, to an extent, with calls to regulate management (e.g. Podolny, 2009; de Bruin and Dolfmsa, 2013). Educators and learners, in stressing a creative dimension to managerial professionalism, imply that an ethic for creativity rather than for regulation alone is required. In seeking to create value, the role of executives is to exploit the unknown. Such a role requires an ethic that is pragmatic, not altruistic, to maintain trust of stakeholders and is consistent with Pouryousefi’s (2013) tracing of managerial professionalism along principle-agent relationships. Whilst the study found breadth of

knowledge to be problematic, it is the skills for integrating the broad knowledge domains in problem-solving routines that underpins managerial expertise. How educators and learners perceive executive MBAs develop professionalism is illustrated in their comments.

“It would be this broad base of business functions plus ... application ... plus behavioural skills stroke professional development type stuff” [PD_P].

“... in a couple of bullets, it would be strong emphasis on peer learning, on pushing the boundaries, on professional development and reflective learning” [PD₂]

“For me, it was just that kind of explosion of diversity, the whole different world of thinking of competition, of globalisation” [Grad₄].

“I think it is a variety of things, different modules to broaden their knowledge ... balance between theory and practice and how the different modules build on each other” [E₄].

A closer look reveals that executive MBAs in the study appear to develop professionalism in reverse-order to the proto-professionalism processes of archetype professions by intellectually anchoring, providing reflective space for and sharing professional experiences of learners. Andragogy, relationship learning and an intertwine of rigour and relevance are evident. Yet, it is also clear that these MBAs extend beyond professionalism to a more holistic development (Hilgert, 1995) that spans career development, personal growth and critical thinking. In line with andragogic principles, the executive MBA's practicum does not appear to be scaffolded, except in case-studies or simulated practice, potentially accentuating risk of professional lapse.

7.3 Breadth of Knowledge versus Expertise

A problematic aspect of the findings is an apparent incompatibility between breadth of knowledge as a defining component of managerial professionalism and traditional notions of expertise, underpinned by a systematic body of knowledge, as a key aspect of professionalism. The analogy of t-shaped graduates may explain the ability of MBA graduates to transcend functional specialisms. Yet, it fails to identify the expertise needed to develop learners from diverse backgrounds into professional executives. Herbert Simon (1967) highlighted synthesis of knowledge from science and practice as a key feature for the education of professional managers. “Synthesis, not analysis” says Mintzberg “is the very essence of management” (Economist, 2009, p.1). This suggests that executive MBAs should teach a well-articulated model of how professional executives can leverage knowledge from practice and science. Executive MBAs appear to be moving in this direction with the most evolved model of MBA education incorporating integrated curriculum, professional judgement, action research, design

science, evidence-based management and rhetorical practice. Consistent with Boettinger (1975), learners, in particular, proffered professional practice of management as a skilled artform rather than merely a skilled implementation of regulated knowledge (Spender, 2007). Yet, this practice must also be rooted in ever evolving social, political, ethical and technological constraints. Hence, the role of executive MBAs in using management theory to guide managerial practice seems essential if management is to evolve as a science-based profession.

7.4 Possible Implications for Theory

The study suggests that it is reasonable to reimagine executive MBA graduates as a community of creative professionals. That is not to say that science is irrelevant to managers or that medical or engineering knowledge is entirely objective. Whereas professionalism in medicine is tilted towards regulation, managerial professionalism seems tilted towards creativity. Educating for this creativity is not a blank canvass. It requires learners to understand, apply and transcend the constraints to managerial imagination. Executive MBA learners attest to knowing these constraints as context-specific and experientially learned. This study also adds a new context for development of professionalism in scenarios where mature individuals are moving beyond proto-professionalism towards pronesis. The executive MBAs in the study point the way forward for the further development of professionalism in these contexts. Andragogy, rigour-relevance and relationship learning appear to play a key role in reverse engineering the indexicalities of practice into generalisable management theory. The study also advances our theoretical understanding of managerial professionalism itself. It validates an alignment between educator and learner perceptions of managerial professionalism with existing prototype statements (e.g. Despotidou and Prastacos, 2012; Romme, 2016), even if these perceptions are somewhat biased and stem from a predominantly positive view of executive MBAs. Understanding the knowledge, ethical and behavioural components of managerial professionalism has direct implications for teaching and learning practices in executive MBAs.

7.5 Possible Implications for Practice

A casual reading of this paper might suggest that many criticisms of MBAs do not apply to the executive versions in this study. There are plausible reasons why this may be. Mintzberg (2004) implies that it applies mainly to full-time MBAs and that executive MBAs have been tarnished unfairly by association. It may also be that educators have been adept at addressing criticisms or that the literature has failed to keep pace with education practice. Yet, if we wish for executive MBAs to contribute to the further professionalisation of management, then we may

look no further than to the current trajectory in their evolution. MBA₅ is moving to greater curricular integration by relegating the importance of traditional functional courses in favour of developing managerial mindsets. MBA₈ touted an emphasis on evidence-based management as a means of achieving synthesis. MBA_P requires students to complete a professionally relevant consulting project and an academically rigorous thesis. Hence, it is the intertwine of rigour and relevance, the use of andragogic principles and an emphasis on curricular integration that appear to be the critical processes for developing managerial professionalism. With the exception of one provider, a noted absence from MBA curricula was management history, critical, some suggest, to developing a devotion to management as a profession (Duncan, 1971).

7.6 Limitations of Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The study's main limitation is that the findings are not generalisable (in a statistical sense). Yet, the executive MBA is a relatively homogenous programme, usually taught through English using similar texts with common notions of organisations and managing (Thomas et al., 2013). The one international MBA included in the study revealed little to suggest otherwise. This homogeneity enhances the transferability of findings. However, it is unclear if the wider community of executive MBA learners and educators hold the same views towards managerial professionalism or its development. The study's small sample of participants also limits exploration of systematic differences in perceptions between learners and educators. MBA educators and learners do not hold a monopoly on perceptions of managerial professionalism. Employers, accrediting bodies and wider societal stakeholders may also add to the discussion. However, the study points to potential measures of professionalism and to its development that could be operationalised. Proxy indicators for social agency, self-concept, autonomy of judgement and even self-regulation could provide the basis for a more scalable (quantitative) study (Appendix VI). Finally, both educators and learners convey a predominantly positive disposition towards MBA education. Hence, we must consider an inherent bias in their perceptions, which may partially explain a divergence from more critical literature on MBAs.

7.7 A Three-Speed MBA Landscape?

Whilst some homogeneity exists within the MBA landscape, Section 6.6 cited the emergence of three diverging models of MBA education. With each model reflecting variance in critical parameters for developing professionalism, namely curricular integration, andragogy and the intertwine of rigour and relevance, Section 3 of this thesis submission explores how the embeddedness of professionalism in an MBA depends on the model to which it is most aligned.

APPENDIX I

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM PILOT PHASE OF THE STUDY

Table A1: Comparison of Executive MBA Providers on the island of Ireland (Extract from Paper 3)

Provider	Accreditation	PRME	Governance	Ranked	Full-Time	Status	Regulation	GMAT	Fees
Athlone Institute of Technology	0	✗	IoT	✗	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Dublin Business School	0	✗	PC	✗	Y	R	IRL	Low	Low
Dublin City University	2	✗	U	✓	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Dublin Institute of Technology	1	✓	IoT	✗	N	R	IRL	Medium	Medium
Dundalk Institute of Technology	0	✗	IoT	✗	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Griffith College	0	✗	PC	✗	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Institute of Technology Carlow	0	✗	IoT	✗	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
University of Reading	3	✗	OS	✓	Y	P	IRL / UK	Medium	Medium
National College of Ireland	0	✗	PC	✗	Y	R	IRL	None	Low
NUI Galway	1	✗	U	✗	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
Open University	3	✗	OS	✗	Y	R	IRL / UK	Medium	Medium
<i>Queens University Belfast¹</i>	0	✗	U	✓	Y	R	UK	None	Medium
Trinity College Dublin	1	✗	U	✓	Y	R	IRL	High	High
University College Cork	0	✗	U	✗	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
University College Dublin	3	✓	U	✓	Y	P	IRL	High	High
University of Limerick	1	✓	U	✗	N	R	IRL	None	Medium
University of Ulster	0	✗	U	✗	Y	R	UK	None	Medium
Waterford Institute of Technology	0	✗	IoT	✗	N	R	IRL	None	Medium

¹*Queens University Belfast was initially excluded from the list of executive MBA providers in Paper 3. However, it has subsequently been discovered that it offers an executive MBA. Table A1, therefore, compares and contrasts 18 executive MBAs across 9 parameters.*

Table A2: Sources of Secondary Data (Extract from Paper 3)

Provider	WS	BR	MB	NA	DB	VR	PR	RK
Athlone Institute of Technology	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Dublin Business School	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Dublin City University	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Dublin Institute of Technology	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Dundalk Institute of Technology	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Griffith College	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Institute of Technology Carlow	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
University of Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
National College of Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
NUI Galway	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Open University	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Trinity College Dublin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
University College Cork	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
University College Dublin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
University of Limerick	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
University of Ulster	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Waterford Institute of Technology	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

WS = Website, BR = Brochure, MB = MBA Association, NA = News Articles, DB = Discussion Boards, VR = Validation Reports, PR = Programme Review, RK = Ranking

Table A3: Content Categories of Secondary Data (Extract from Paper 3)

#	Category	S	R	#	Category	S	R
CC ₁	Management	58	105	CC ₂	Career Development	45	95
CC ₃	Leadership	47	92	CC ₄	Internationalisation	31	60
CC ₅	Experience	30	58	CC ₆	Soft-Skills	29	54
CC ₇	Rigour-Relevance	27	53	CC ₈	Practice Based Pedagogy	27	45
CC ₉	Broad Based Curriculum	27	44	CC ₁₀	Professionalism	26	44
CC ₁₁	Business and Society	24	39	CC ₁₂	External Factors	21	32

S = Number of sources from which text extracts were coded. R = Number of text extracts coded.

Table A4: Pilot Themes (Extract from Paper 3)

Theme	Working Definition
THP ₁ : Curriculum	A broad curriculum aligned to business disciplines.
THP ₂ : Andragogy	Adult learning principles, e.g. peer learning and reflection.
THP ₃ : Professional Development	A stream within MBA _P focused on professional development.
THP ₄ : Practice Based Pedagogy	Learning by doing.
THP ₅ : Rigour Relevance	Intertwining academic rigour with professional relevancy.
THP ₆ : Role of Educator	As a facilitator of professional dialogue and interaction.

APPENDIX II
INTERVIEW AND FOCUS-GROUP GUIDES

Extract of Questions from the Interview Guide

<p>Background Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your MBA • How long? • Profile • Focus of MBA • Notable Features • Your Role • Achievements 	<p>Q1: Can you provide some history on your programme? Milestones in its development?</p> <p>Q2: What about its current profile - its students, staff, graduates, employers, accreditation etc?</p> <p>Q3: What sort of focus does the MBA have? Are there notable features?</p> <p>Q5: Could you tell us about your role? What sort achievements are you proud of?</p> <p>Q6: If you look at your MBA what have been the main influences on shaping the programme? ... <i>employers, validation, school, accreditation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive Characteristics • Influencers
<p>RQ1: What are MBA graduates' and educators' perceptions of professionalism?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticisms of MBAs • Management v Other Professions • Concept of Professionalism • Using professionalism to develop students. • Professional Jurisdiction • Dimensions of Professionalism • MBA Oath • Educational Processes 	<p>Q1: There are many criticisms of MBAs. I want to get a feel for your perspective on them and how you have addressed them.</p> <p>Q2: What is your perspective on the debate on whether management is a profession?</p> <p>Q3: What do you understand this vaguer notion of professionalism to be?</p> <p>Q4: What about the notion of using professionalism to develop MBA students?</p> <p>Q5: Professionals rely on a body of knowledge to articulate a jurisdiction of problems that they are positioned to solve. What do you think constitutes a body of knowledge for MBAs?</p> <p>Q6: Can you provide examples of how ethical or altruistic values are developed on the MBA?</p> <p>Q7: Can you provide examples of how the MBA develops things like confidence, leadership and communication skills [<i>self-concept</i>]?</p> <p>Q8: To what extent is problem-solving through critical thinking or integrative thinking developed on the MBA? [<i>Judgment</i>]?</p> <p>Q9: One way that graduates could be prepared for self-regulation is through an oath or code. Comment on this idea [<i>self-regulation</i>]?</p> <p>Q10: Are there education processes in the MBA that you can pinpoint that facilitate student PD?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticism of MBAs • Professionalism • Professional Jurisdiction • Body of Knowledge • Ethical Disposition • Sense of Responsibility • Self-Concept • Self-Regulation • Autonomy • Educational Processes

<p>RQ2: What professional competencies, values and behaviours are perceived to be developed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Outcomes • How are they achieved? • Practice Based Pedagogy • Assessment • Selection • Role-Modelling 	<p>Q1: The notion of professionalism seems to be a nebulous concept. Some people describe it almost as an x-factor – a complete package of behaviours, skills and values. <i>Do you think this lack of definition makes it difficult to assess?</i></p> <p>Q2: What type of competencies do students acquire on the MBA? <i>Prompt types if required.</i></p> <p>Q3: Same question again for values: What is the typical value profile developed?</p> <p>Q4: Same question again for behaviours: What professional behaviours are developed?</p> <p>Q5: I am interested in the idea of practice-based pedagogy. Is there a structured transition from theory to more practical learning?</p> <p>Q6: In professions, such as medicine, professionalism is assessed in a work environment. Any equivalent for the MBA?</p> <p>Q7: Student tend to prioritise aspects that are assessed. Are there any examples you could give on the types of assessments used to evaluate students' professionalism?</p> <p>Q7: What do you think about the idea of qualitative assessment?</p> <p>Q8: Medical schools, in particular, pay attention to screening applicants for professionalism, how are MBA students selected? <i>Selection</i></p> <p>Q9: Do you use role-models? Some suggest that students assimilate the value and behaviours of teachers? Is this something you have given thought to? <i>Role-Modelling</i></p> <p>Q10: Decisions made by managers tend to be by reflection-in-action. How do you give students time and space to reflect?</p> <p>Q11: It's probably fair to say that the MBA is not a magic wand but if you were to try to sum-up what it is about the MBA that help students develop professionally, what is it?</p>	<p>Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical • Integrative • Adaptive • Contextual <p>Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics • Identity • Social Conscience • Marketability • Research • Professional Development <p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance • Effectiveness • Integrity • Respectfulness • Collaborative • Responsibility • Conscience
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Extract from Focus-Group Guide

Complete each of these open-ended questions (15 minutes).

1. To me, personally, professionalism means ...

2. To my lecturers, I believe that professionalism means ...

3. How important is it for executive managers to behave professionally?

4. How does the MBA help you to develop professionalism?

5. How important is professionalism vis-a-vis your own technical knowledge?

6. How was your professionalism been assessed and fed-back to you on the MBA?

7. List five actions (verbs) and descriptions (adjectives) that exemplify high professionalism.

Actions	Descriptions
.	

8. Are there any examples of actions that exemplify poor professionalism, in your opinion?

9. How well do you believe that your MBA has prepared you to commit to the MBA Oath below? <http://mbaoath.org/about/the-mba-oath/>

Break into groups of three and assign a timekeeper, note taker and presenter. A0 paper and markers will be provided. You are allowed five minutes for answering each question and five minutes for sharing your answer with the entire group.

Q1: In the context of your role as a manager, what do you understand professionalism to be?

Q2: What would you say constitutes a body of knowledge for executive MBAs?

Q3: Can you provide examples of how ethical or altruistic values are developed on the MBA?

Q4: How does the MBA develop self-confidence, communication and leadership?

Q5: To what extent is problem-solving developed on the MBA?

Q6: What aspects of your MBA have facilitated your professional development?

Q7: How has professionalism been assessed on your MBA?

Q8: What typical values, competencies and behaviours are developed by your MBA?

Q9: Is there a structured transition from theory to more applied learning in the MBA?

Q10: Did you get to listen to, meet or encounter any role-models during your MBA studies?

Q11: Have you had opportunities to reflect on your professional development?

Q12: To sum up, what it is about the MBA that help students develop professionally?

Table A5: Example of “First Impression” Themes Based on Reflection of Field Notes from Interview 3

Theme	Working Description	Reflection on Potential Contribution to RQs
Broad-Based Knowledge	Broad-based curriculum aligned to standardised functional business courses is focus of first year. Taught at a conceptual, operational and foundational level. Integration and application occur in the second year in Strategy, Consultancy and Thesis.	The idea of broadening knowledge diverges from the traditional notion of professionalism, which focus on narrow expertise, and incremental exposure to practice.
Professional Experience	A diversity of prior experience seems essential to developing a common managerial language that is cross-sectoral. Focus is on cementing experience through peer-learning, teamwork, simulation and anchoring experience in theoretical concepts.	It suggests a radically different concept to professionalism in the Stark et al. (1986) model, in which students typically have very limited experience. Peer learning rather than direct instruction seems critical.
Rigour Relevance	Bridging theory-practice and addressing the rigour-relevance gap surfaces in this interview. Emphasis on anchoring prior experience in academic theory and building academic skills, e.g. information literacy, analysis, applied research and design.	Seems to be professional development in reverse, whereby students get to cement their experience and understand the theoretical underpinnings to it. Bridging the rigour relevance gap provides a scientific basis to management.
Reflective Practice	Reflective practice was a dominant theme in the interview. It surfaced as an “individual” assessment in many courses, noticeably in the management consultancy project.	The idea of reflective practice in professional development is rooted in Schön’s (1983) connecting of rational-analytic and self-reflective approaches.
Behavioural Moderation	Behavioural development is also a standout theme. “I suppose the human contact, you’re always going to be dealing with people, so behavioural, soft skills or interpersonal skills.” [E ₂].	This is consistent with the notion that professionalism is subjectively constructed (Hodges et al., 2011) through interpersonal and social interaction, particularly for managers.

APPENDIX III

CODING OF INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTS

Figure A1: Relative Occurrence of Key Words in Interview Transcripts

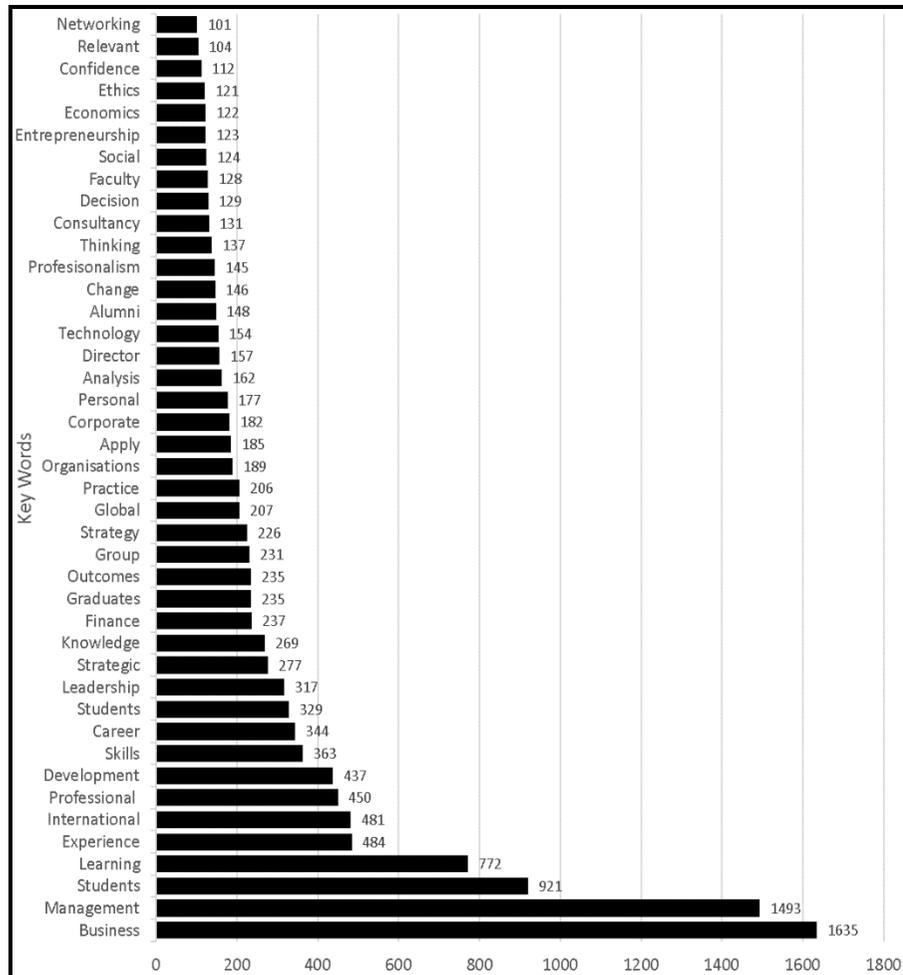


Figure A2: Relative Occurrence of Key Words in Focus Group Transcripts

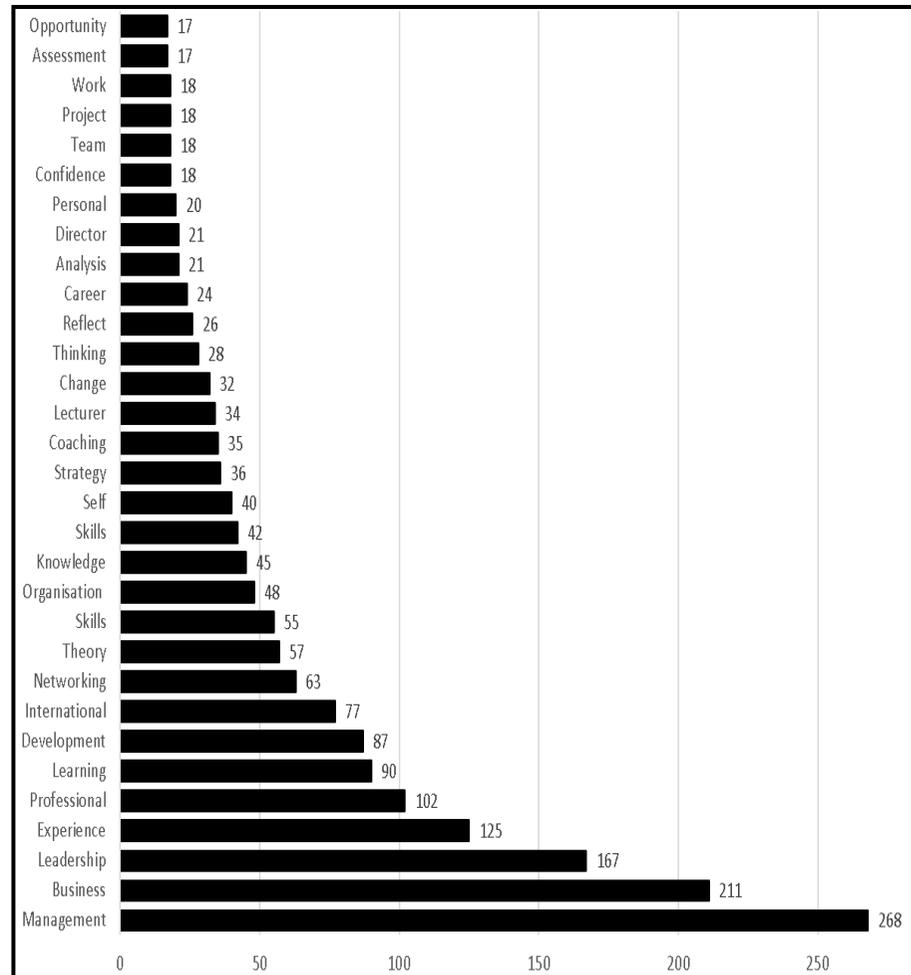


Figure A3: Word Tree for 'Professionalism' in Transcripts of Interviews and Focus Groups

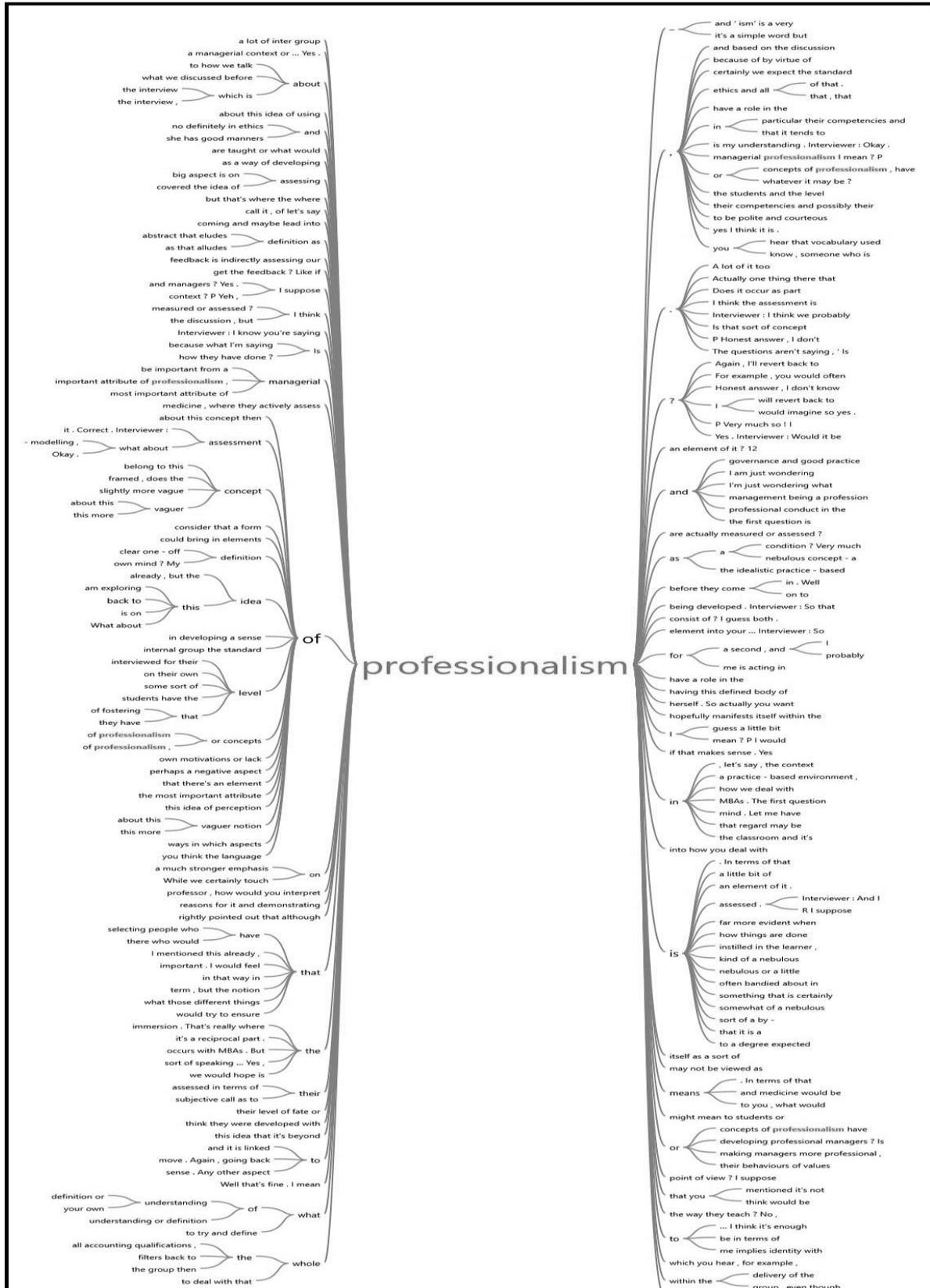


Table A6: Initial Coding of Interview Transcripts in NVivo 11

Over 200 initial codes were generated in the first-pass analysis of the entire data set. Table A6 lists the top 100 codes for illustrative purposes.

Name	S	R	Sample Text Extract
Broadening of Knowledge	13	90	“They are acquiring a very broad base of business knowledge, not necessarily experts but they have a feel for different areas that allows them to engage in areas outside of their traditional professional discipline.”
Rigour- Relevance	13	81	“Student advancement of theory and of practice is very important to us. So, it’s not enough that they go away, they apply, and they practice. They have to show us how they have taken it to a different level.”
Ethical Character	13	66	“If I read that correctly, what you’re saying is managers have this broad remit, both in terms of knowledge but maybe those who they interact with, so they need a strong ethical disposition?”
Leveraging Experience	13	64	“I mean ethics runs pretty much as a horizontal thread, but it will be thicker for certain modules, and I think where you’re dealing with human resources, strategic HR...”
Reflective Practice	12	50	“So that reflective practice what you’re saying is the key to being able to take a peer through a window into how they think they have changed in terms of their behaviour performance”.
Behavioural Development	13	48	“The level of behaviour varies within industries. While we focus on trying to improve people’s skills set, we also expect a standard of professional behaviour”.
Role of Accreditation	12	47	“I think ... one could argue that accreditation leads to homogeneity, but accreditation bodies will always look for a certain degree of homogeneity because that’s what makes them [professionally] relevant.”
Teamwork / Groupwork	13	45	“There’s usually 5% given for group work reflecting where you give some comments on how you feel your own approach to the group has changed or developed and your teamwork skills”.
Change or Transformation	6	44	“It starts off with the person that you see coming through the door needs to be a very different person that you see exiting So, it’s an individual issue, you work with the individual over the two years ...”
Critical Thinking	11	35	“You could almost draw a triangle – critical thinking, reflection and analysis”.
Analytical Courses	13	34	“It’s because we have accounting finance, research methods, economics and even within the strategic planning there’s a significant element of analysis”.
Functional Areas of Business	12	33	“The various aspects that I have mentioned already ... marketing, finance, strategy, supply chain ... those kinds of things. I suppose, in a certain respect, we define that body of knowledge through the modules”.
Integrative Thinking	11	33	“We have moved away from the silo approach and actually it’s about developing different mindsets. You draw on the subjects, but they’re only used to develop a broader purpose”.

Name	S	R	Sample Text Extract
Practice-Based Pedagogy	11	32	“I suppose go back to the consultancy project again, they are really integrating their knowledge accumulated over the duration of the course in a practice-setting. It’s real, it’s important ...”
Interpersonal Skills	10	32	“I suppose, technically they are all really soft-skills, aren’t they? I mean managers inevitably have human contact: they are always going to be dealing with people ...”
Leadership Development	10	30	“... leadership possibly slots into the professional thing ... there’s a programme running throughout the MBA that trains people in these skills ... team building, coaching, leaderships of oneself, softer skills”.
Networking	10	30	“Networking, very much so, yes. And being at MBA events, to join that elite circle is very important”.
Role of Educators	5	29	“Lecturing on MBAs isn’t for the faint-hearted. You’ve got to have people who can go in and deliver on not just the learning outcomes but on ... the way in which it should be facilitated”.
Guest Speakers	12	27	“So, I teach technology management ... so for instance, the CTO and CEO who were in last week told the story of a technology firm ... they started 10 years ago, how they grew it, how they survived the downturn”.
Assessing Professionalism	10	27	“We have developed a lot more in the last 10 years around that reflective learning approach. Ten years ago, we introduced professional development exercises and in the last four years we have graded these.”
Role-Modelling	10	27	“It starts with the induction ... before the semester starts there is a professional top manager or top taught leader invited to do a speech, and the same ... at the end again at the celebration and in between.”
Personal Development	6	26	“I did an MBA in 1999, part-time, I was working in Holland ... and what I got out of the MBA was a whole different mindset in terms of how you think about business and ... your own self development.”
Professional Development Stream	6	26	“So, you’re saying there is a professional development stream and it commences with psychometric testing during induction and then follows through with one-to-one coaching throughout.”
Interviewing for Entry	10	24	“I would consider the interview a strong part of expectation setting ... we don’t want is people coming in and after a month saying, ‘this is not what I expected.’”
Career Progression	10	22	“in the past they might be ... at the outset saying, ‘I won’t get that promotion unless ... So, they’re coming almost with an expectation that this will help them.”
Peer Learning	9	22	“It would be huge for us. I would say to an MBA, if peer learning isn’t a huge part of your MBA learning experience you haven’t got full value for investment.”
Lack of Self-Regulation	12	21	“Not that I’m aware of. The only thing that I could think of that would probably have specific norms in it might be the governance and ethics.”

Name	S	R	Sample Text Extract
Technical Competencies	9	21	“They must have it at a high level. They don’t need it at the operational level. They won’t be putting together the balance sheet or the profit and loss, but they need to know how to read it.”
Problem-Solving	8	20	“There’s a real focus on problem solving using real life scenarios.”
Conceptual Competence	7	20	“So, they’re getting the theoretical underpinning to what they’re probably doing anyway.”
Psychometric Testing	7	20	“We assign each individual student an industry mentor ... so at the start of the year they do some MBTI and they work through it with the consultants specialising in what they want to get out of the year.”
Social Responsibility	6	20	“It certainly would be a key driver ... even before we ever put a name on PRME, we were actively involved and looking at balancing that score card because we could see things heading in the wrong direction”.
Management as a Profession – Against	5	20	“Yes, without a doubt, and they also say that their values, their understanding of subjects and how they interlink and their responsibility to themselves and the world around them matures significantly.”
Organisation	7	19	I suppose subjects like organisation behaviour ... are more qualitative where basically you could bring in elements of professionalism into how you deal with organisational behaviour, how you deal with people”.
Consultancy	6	19	“As well, 90% of people would choose a consultancy project for their summer dissertations, so they would be working with a client and that’s quite an intense interaction”.
Analysis	5	19	“A lot of students have been out of education for years and find the analytical side of things though.”
Management as a Profession – For	7	18	“I have a great respect for the idea of the organisation and the complexity of the organisation. Organisations are groups of people coming together to work in a coherent way to achieve a goal, and they have so many dysfunctions and problems ... and the management of that is not something you’re going to pick up instinctively. So as a distinct skill, I’m afraid I do think that management is a profession”.
Developing Confidence	12	17	“Ultimately when they do, for example, the consultancy project, they have to deliver. So, there is an element of self-confidence there in ... the ability of themselves to deliver.
Case-Studies	8	17	“In the strategy module ... there is a live case study, so we’ll have a client that’s going through a strategic reorganisation and they’ll come in and set out the problem at the start of the course, and then in groups students work through it and then they do a board level presentation back to the client at the end.”
Interlinking of Courses	8	17	“Through the ITM approach ... they have to think about not just the specific module, let’s say leadership, but what does that mean to marketing, to finance, to human resources ...”
Curricular Standardisation	5	17	“So, it has evolved quite considerably is what you’re saying from a standardised curriculum to much more, as you mentioned, critical thinking and integrated thinking.”

Name	S	R	Sample Text Extract
Professional Judgment	5	16	“Go back to the consultancy project. That’s probably the best manifestation of autonomy of judgement. They are dealing with significant business problems and they have autonomy as a group.”
Evidence Based	7	15	“... the evidence-based thinking and analysis piece has probably gone up a notch or two.”
Mode 2 Research	7	15	“So, the final project is action research, very much in the mode of designing a solution to a problem. This is usually collaborative in that it is done for a client company and often entails three of four students working from different professional backgrounds on the same problem.”
Entrepreneurship	5	15	“We have had a few students who... have set up their own businesses as a result of it, and by acquiring the skill set from the programme that gave them confidence to take the jump to set up the business.”
Career Counselling	8	14	“They send me their CV ... their career ideas and self-evaluation about strengths and weaknesses ... and then the results from the personality test ... flows into discussing where they can advance their careers”.
CSR	6	14	“As part of the PRME agenda, we offer students courses in ... corporate social responsibility ...”
Quality Assurance	6	14	“We ask the students to complete feedback forms after they complete each of the courses, and within that form you would have tutor performance, administration, facilities, stuff like that.”
Diversity of Experiences	6	13	“We deliberately recruit so we have diversity in the classroom. So, we have a lot of people from the not-for-profit sector, from public sector, from small companies, from start-ups, from family businesses.”
Coaching and Mentoring	5	12	“So, that then is followed up by one-to-one coaching and that touches on all aspects of the personality including what you mentioned around communication.”
Immediate Application	3	12	“So, I ask them to give me examples of work case studies maybe from, from their own background, from their own job, their own company, and also the role plays would be typically real-life examples”.
Range of Pedagogies	3	12	“Over that two-year programme we have a wide range of pedagogical tools we can use for practice and for theory and we exhaust that in almost every way we possibly can. So, we have an entire toolbox.”
Presentation Skills	5	11	“But in our case now, we actually get an EastEnders actor over from the UK to do our presentation skills because he does presentation training now because there’s so much in acting”.
Vagueness of Professionalism	5	11	“For me it’s a bit of a catch-all term. I would be more inclined to use it on programmes that work towards functional specialism than generalist specialism.”
Board	3	11	“We’re improving them what we might call a 50% base level where now they can partake in boardroom level discussions in that space without feeling intimidated.”

Name	S	R	Sample Text Extract
Professional Body	3	11	“I think there’s lots of vehicles – CIMA is one vehicle if one wanted to take it in that direction, the Institute of Directors Exams is another ... I just don’t know how much professionalisation we can all bear.”
Organisational Theory	6	10	“I think it is particularly relevant to modules like Organisational Theory, HRM”
Career Change	5	10	“They might be looking for a jump, but they’re often trying to reinvent themselves altogether”.
Alumni Events	6	9	“On our MBA council, we have two alumni ... an MBA graduate who has got a senior role in the Central Bank, to XXX who had a very senior role in CRH for instance ... who organise events”.
Research Methods	6	9	“So right now, in first year, they are doing research method to get them thinking. They technically won’t really use that until second year when they do the thesis”.
Decision Making	6	9	“Because this carries with it both rights and responsibilities we commit to actively involving our students in ... initiatives to promote their engagement and participation in societal decision-making processes.”
Interdisciplinary	6	9	“Having students from multiple backgrounds, different industries, different professions working together on a common set of problems to me common ideas about professionalism”
Political Awareness	6	9	“There is a political side to the management, particularly in large organisations but at the same time you become less tolerant of political games.”
Awareness of Self	5	9	“One of the first things they do is a Myers-Briggs evaluation, so they find out about themselves first”.
Readiness of Students to Learn	5	9	So, you’re saying there that ... the cohort who are selecting, if you want to call it that, or opting into the MBA, tend to be at a certain point in their lives where they are more open to development and change”.
Action Research	4	9	“The culmination of that is our action research, the research project. We get them to plan out a change of programme in their organisation in semester two and in semester three they apply it.”
Corporate Governance	4	9	“The Governance module ... heavy on ethics. Although it runs as a horizontal thread, it is thicker in certain modules, particularly those involving people”.
Integrity	4	9	“We adopt Chatham House Rules on the programme and other than that it’s their own moral integrity which we echo throughout the programme – they know that”.
International Students	4	9	“We’ve had a few examples of people on the international MBA going back. I think it was to Thailand or Indonesia, with a business plan that was formed with a local student, so a trading relationship set up.”
Moral Hazard	4	9	“Because the role entails dealing with some many people, different stakeholders there’s an inherent moral hazard that requires a certain level of professionalism or ethic to balance stakeholder requirements.”

Name	S	R	Sample Text Extract
Professional Qualification Simulations	4	9	“Now, if I think about the closest comparison it’s CIMA actually and it does that quite rigorously.”
International Study Visits	4	9	“There is one programme where it’s like a game/a simulation where they really work on ...”
Leadership Seminar Series	3	9	“Certainly, the Boston trip takes them out of their comfort zone. There are extra benefits in that just taking them away from the noise of their own domestic environment and taking them abroad ... for a week.”
Modelling	3	9	“Yes, it’s huge. So, we have what’s called Distinguished Leadership Speaker Series, so we bring in fairly established senior people.”
Relationship Learning	3	9	We actually get the student to delve into their thinking processes ... to make explicit the causal modelling.”
Reverse Development	3	9	“Some of those I met on the MBA continue to be close friends.”
Role MBA Association	3	9	“We suggested that the MBA is the other way around in that they have a lot of experience coming in.”
Story Telling	3	9	“For instance, the MBA Association has served us well ... one thing they are good at is this annual strategy competition, and I suppose we would consider that just an endorsement of our own class that we won it.”
Career Mobility	3	9	“They really appreciate that too, hearing about the stories, the experiences in areas that I am teaching”.
Sustainability	5	8	“I think I am freer now in terms of my job ... if I had to change job or even career in the morning, I would be a lot less stressed about it”.
Communications	3	8	“AMBA wants a meaningful engagement with business ethics and sustainability in its MBAs.”
HRM	4	7	“Presentations are a major part of the course ... but there are others... reporting writing, role-play.”
Evolution of the MBA	3	7	“In this first semester, the human resource management and in the second semester there is a programme called ‘soft skills and leadership qualities.’”
Fairness	4	6	“...we have changed for the new programme ... we don’t have subjects anymore called marketing or... we have taken the journey idea and so we’re focused on developing different mind-sets.”
Economics	4	6	“I think fairness and equality are hot button topics that we really need to get their heads around”.
Entry Criteria	3	6	“... economics is taught with rethinking capitalism, so we start to say what other models are out there for business and organisations and how could that tie into the traditional subject of economics?”
Exams	3	6	“Applicants must have at least 5 years professional experience.”
Field Trips	3	6	“In general, I think there is a shift away from exams towards more relevant ways of assessing”.
	3	6	“In an ideal world... I think [MBA ₁₂] bring people away to the West in the first week of induction ...”.

Name	S	R	Sample Text Extract
Marketing	3	6	“The way we teach our MBA is skills specific, so we teach people to be very skilled in board level strategy, to be able to read financial accounts, to be able to understand marketing ...”
Problem Based Learning	3	6	“We engage in something called project-based learning and then problem-based learning, a variation on the theme with the same type of companies, so we have worked with ...”
Rhetorical Skills	3	6	“We have an elective on negotiation and influencing skills ... and then there’s a lot of open debate where students get to express their views”.
Self-Improvement	3	6	“It’s really about being the best you possibly can be ... broadening your outlook, new experiences ...”
Making Improvements	1	6	“Most of the projects have a design focus ... to take existing situations and make them better, to make improvement, and develop solutions to problems”.
Adaptive Competencies	4	5	“Certain frameworks are appropriate in certain times, so you must adapt and draw on a broad skill-set.”
CEOs	4	5	“So, maybe like a high-profile CEO or a successful business person will be invited but it depends”.
Confidentiality	4	5	“In this module, we try to instil a commitment to confidentiality usually on the grounds that people will be slow to inform them about sensitive matters if they cannot be trusted keep them confidential”.
Design Activities	4	5	“So, one example I always give ... is one hotel that was on its knees and the MBA students went in designed a number of major interventions ... and now, apparently, that hotel is thriving.”
Linking Theory and Practice	4	5	“But also, that they would get to apply the theory in practice. You have learned theory over the last two or three semesters ... you have learned all this theory ... here now you go and apply.”
Motivation	4	5	“There is a big emphasis on exploring how leaders can motivate and inspire those around them”.
Perseverance	4	5	“The MBA is very intensive ... it takes a great deal of perseverance and hard work to make it through.”
Self-Evaluation	4	5	I think by virtue of doing the MBTI students continue to self-monitor during the programme”
Applied Research	3	5	So, while they are consultancy projects, they must also have an academic underpinning to them.”
Cross-Sector	3	5	“I had grown up in a single sector that happened to have its own vocabulary, that had its own industry norms, and now I’m in a room with 32 other people who use completely different thought processes”.
Debating	4	4	“... we got to debate case-studies a lot ... hearing very different perspectives from each other. I think you begin to realise your own biases and see situations for new angles”.

S = Number of Sources, R = Number of References

Table A7: List of ‘Second Order’ Themes and Working Definitions

Number	Working Title	Working Definition	
TH₁	Breadth of Knowledge	A broad knowledge of the different business disciplines, not necessarily at an expert level, assimilated and integrated by executive managers in their managing of organisations.	Managerial Professionalism
TH₂	Ethical Disposition	A propensity towards a high standard of moral judgement that generates trust between executive managers and their organisation’s stakeholders and that is attuned to the social implications of managerial work.	
TH₃	Behavioural Moderation	Control of outwardly visible behaviour inherent in the performative aspects of executive management roles, such as an orientation towards further professional development, interpersonal skills and leadership qualities.	
TH₄	Curriculum Design	Arrangements of curriculum that support the development of managerial professionalism, such as inclusion of a broad range of functional business courses, analytical courses and opportunities for synthesis.	Development of Managerial Professionalism
TH₅	Andragogy	Principles of teaching and learning of adults, such as peer learning, immediate application of learning in the workplace and reflective practice.	
TH₆	Relationship Learning	Learning to manage relationships, based on trust, know-who and personal judgement, that are critical to executive management, including learning from role-models, networking and peer learning.	
TH₇	Rigour Relevance	The intertwine of professional relevancy and intellectual rigour in executive MBAs that contributes to the reduction in the rigour relevance gap in management research, teaching and practice.	
TH₈	Career Development	Aspects of executive MBA programmes that specifically focus on having learners take stock of and enhance their careers in line with their goals.	
TH₉	Beyond Professionalism	A more complete or holistic development of executive MBA learners that does not necessarily fall under the domain of professionalism, e.g. emotional, spiritual, intellectual etc.	

APPENDIX IV
QUALITATIVE RIGOUR IN THE STUDY

Figure A4: Steps Taken to Maintain Qualitative Rigour

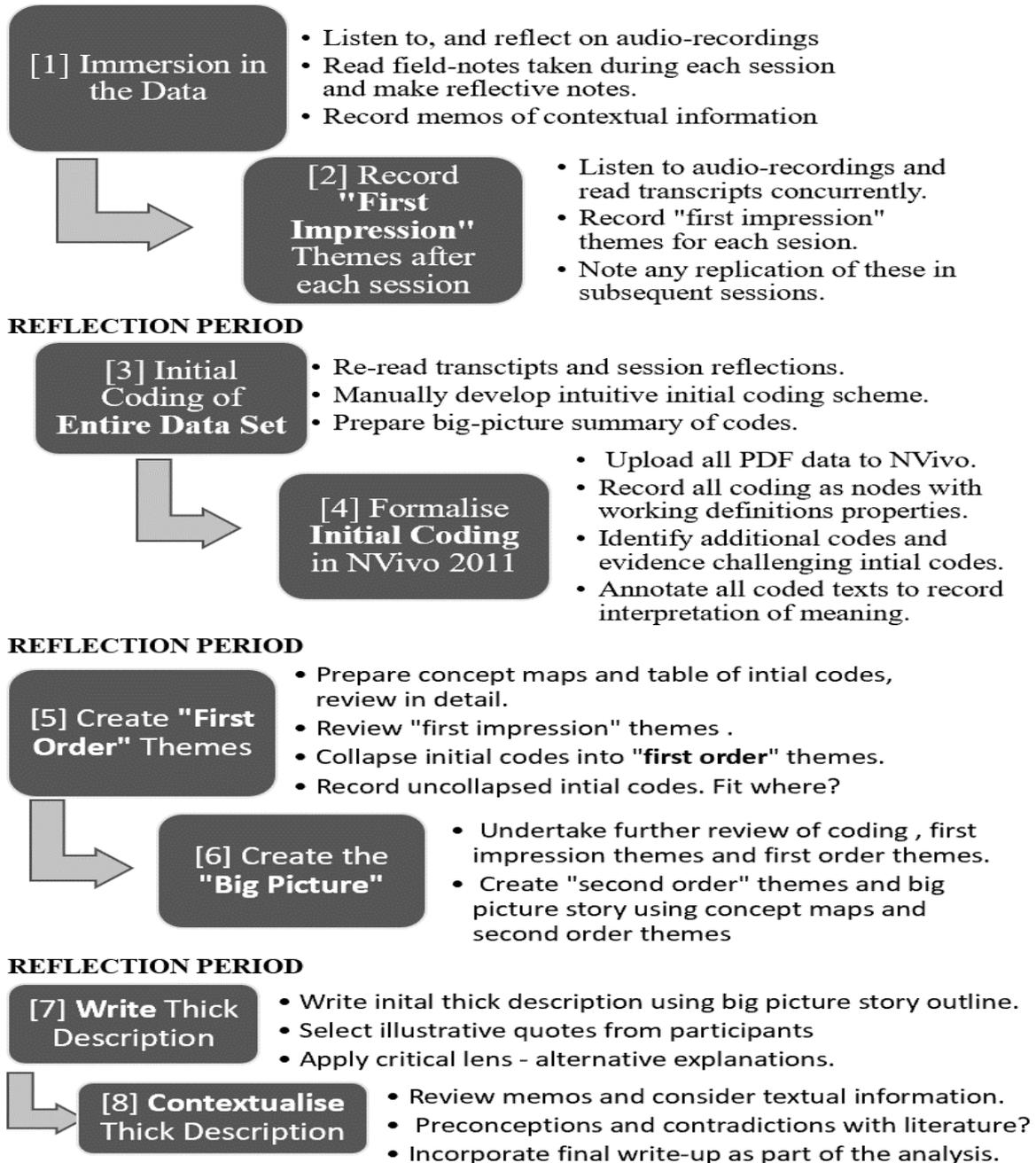


Figure A5: Example of Annotation Used to Record Interpretation of Coding

<p>“Something else that you mentioned is that the majority of faculty teaching on the MBA would have significant industry experience combined with their teaching”.</p> <p>Annotation: I am coding this text as RIGOUR-RELEVANCE as it demonstrates that the educators have both industrial and teaching experience.</p>	<p>Rigour- Relevance</p>
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Table A8: Matrix of “First Impression” Themes Summarised from Reflections of Fields Notes – Indications of Saturation

“First Impression” Themes ↓	⇒ Interviews	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	I ₄	I ₅	I ₆	I ₇	I ₈	I ₉	I ₁₀	I ₁₁	I ₁₂	Perceived Strength
Broadening of Knowledge and Perspectives		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>						Very Strong
Prior Professional Experience of Learners		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>						Very Strong
Rigour-Relevance		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>						Very Strong
Reflective Practice		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>						Very Strong
Andragogy – Principles of Adult Learning		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>				Strong
Behavioural Moderation – Soft Skills, Awareness, Coaching		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>				Strong
Role of Educator in Developing Professionalism		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓			Moderate
Professionalism Plus - Developing Students More Holistically				✓	✓					✓	✓		✓	Moderate
Openness of Students to Development				✓					✓			✓		Explore Further
Highly Integrated Curriculum – Courses Interlinked					✓						✓		✓	Explore Further
Role of Accreditation in Developing Professionalism						✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		Moderate
Sustainability			✓			✓	✓				✓		✓	Moderate
Role of a Professional Body in Developing Professionalism			✓	✓			✓				✓		✓	Moderate
Career Development		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>						Very Strong
Ethical Reasoning		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>				Very Strong
Live Cases for Developing Problem-Solving Skills		✓		✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	Strong
Providing an Academic Framework for Experience		✓				✓					✓		✓	Moderate
Relationship Learning		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>				Very Strong
Professional Development Stream		✓	✓				✓	✓		✓			✓	Moderate
Role of Business in Society			✓		✓		✓				✓	✓		Moderate
Leadership Development Stream		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓				✓		Moderate
Mode 2 Research		✓	✓			✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	Strong
Emergence of New Courses -				✓							✓			Explore Further
International / Global Perspective		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	<i>Possible Saturation</i>				Strong

APPENDIX V

COMPENDIUM OF PEDAGOGY TOOLS LINKED TO PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OUTCOMES

Table A9: Reported Pedagogies in Different MBAs

#	Pedagogical Approach	MBA ₁	MBA ₂	MBA ₃	MBA ₄	MBA ₅	MBA ₆	MBA ₇	MBA ₈	MBA ₉	MBA ₁₀	MBA ₁₁	Sample Outcome
1	Induction Week	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					Foundation Knowledge
2	International Study Visits			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cultural Diversity
3	Simulations and Roleplay	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Diagnosis and Treatment Skills
4	Case Study Learning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Analysis, Judgement, Rhetoric
5	Company Based Projects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Autonomy of Judgment
6	Networking Events	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Relationship Learning
7	Career Workshops	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Defined Set of Goals
8	Service Learning				✓	✓		✓					Social Agency
9	PD Workshops	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Interpersonal Skills
10	Executive Coaching			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Self-Awareness
11	Company Visits			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Cross-Disciplinary Understanding
12	Learning in Teams	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Collaboration Skills
12	Panel Discussion	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Understanding Diverse Perspectives
13	Masterclass Series			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Motivation towards Executive Career
14	Presentations and Pitches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Public Speaking Ability
15	Enterprise Development			✓		✓		✓					Creativity and Innovation
16	Reflective Logs	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Reflexivity, Criticality
17	Psychometric Tests	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Self-Awareness
18	Shadowing							✓					Normalising Leadership
19	Stakeholder Learning			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Ethical Reasoning Skills
20	Drama		✓		✓	✓		✓					Emotional Intelligence
21	Storytelling	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Selling / Winning Support
22	Evidence Based Practice					✓				✓			Synthesis of Evidence

**Note, absence of a ✓ does not imply absence of a pedagogy from a programme. Presence of ✓ is based solely on the interview and focus-group data.*

APPENDIX VI: PROPOSED SURVEY OF MBA LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS

Please rate the importance of each of the characteristics outlined below to your perceived professionalism in executive management.

		Little or No Importance	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Critically Important
Autonomy of Judgment	Critical Thinking					
	Analytical Problem-Solving					
	General Management Knowledge					
	Knowledge of Specialist Management Field					
	Preparedness for Managerial Role					
Expertise	Desire to Become an Authority in a Specialist Management Field.					
	Desire to Obtain Recognition from Colleagues as an Expert in a Management Field					
Self-Concept	Desire for Greater Management Responsibility					
	Self-Confidence					
	Leadership Potential					
	Public-Speaking Ability					
	Understanding of Others					
Social Agency	Becoming a Community Leader					
	Participating in Community					
	Influencing Social Values					

		Little or No Importance	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Critically Important
	Promoting workplace diversity.					
	Maintaining Currency in Political and Social Affairs					
	Helping Others in Difficulty					
Employability Skills	Appearance – attire, grooming, posture, etiquette					
	Sense of Responsibility – reliability, commitment, punctuality					
	Effectiveness – motivation, efficiency, proactivity, emphasis on quality					
	Conscientiousness – inquisitive, insightful, reflective, perceptive etc.					
	Collaborative Ability – participatory, cooperative, communicative, helpful.					
	Respectfulness – courteous, polite, mature, pleasant, genuine.					
	Integrity – honesty, trustworthiness, loyalty, lawfulness, dedication.					

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Section 3: Discussion & Conclusions

“... the strength of MBA programs lies exactly in their context of opportunities to support experiences in which MBA students can combine knowledge, capabilities and competences to deal with their daily challenges at work” (Vazquez and Ruas, 2012, p. 323).

1. INTRODUCTION

“In fact, management appears to be one of the last refuges of gifted amateurs”

(Schlegelmilch and Thomas, 2011, p. 475).

1.1. Introduction

There are many ways in which Schlegelmilch’s reference to “gifted amateurs” above can be considered. One response is to argue to professionalise management to a masterful practice. Yet, in implying that amateurism is a less than satisfactory term for managerial practice, this response seeks to fix what professionalism is, subverting, as Fish and deCossart (2006) suggest, the very notion of professionalism as a fluid concept. Another response, a recurring claim in the literature review, is that management is likely to be never professionalised in the same way as medicine or law (e.g. Reed and Anthony, 1992). Yet, neither response precludes professionalism from being subjectively constructed for the education of practising managers.

1.2 Outline of This Section

In this section, I discuss the findings from the study, documented in the cumulative paper series (Section 2). This section begins with a summary of the study, including its background, the methodology deployed, and key insights unearthed by findings from the exploratory research. It then provides a discussion of those findings in the context of the study’s pre-field conceptual framework and broader literature on professionalism and management education. Specifically, it describes how executive MBA learners and educators perceive professionalism in the context in which it is relevant to executive managers and how this professionalism is developed in executive MBAs. Next, I construct a post-fieldwork conceptual framework and use it to discuss the study’s contribution: [i] to our understanding of professionalism in executive management, a quasi-professional field tilted towards creativity, [ii] to our understanding of executive MBA programmes themselves and [iii] to management education practice, in particular, to the education processes that support professionalism in executive MBA programmes.

The study’s contributions are tempered by discussing its limitations, derived primarily from its exploratory nature, from the interpretative lens of the researcher and from positive bias towards MBA education of the study’s participants. Finally, I make key recommendations for extending the research and exploring other avenues of enquiry. I conclude by summarising the key thesis constructed from the various sources of intertwined evidence. In reflecting on the research objective, I highlight that embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs appears to be a function of three types of MBA to which a programme aligns most.

2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

“They called for professionalism to be problematized and critiqued so that current concepts ... are challenged, reaffirmed, modified and adapted to new contexts.” (Trede, 2012, p. 164).

2.1 Background to the Study

This study is set against a backdrop of criticisms of MBA programmes (e.g. Datar et al., 2010), on the one hand, and their global appeal to prospective students and their employers, on the other (Page et al., 2004). Some scholars blame business schools and their flagship management education programmes, i.e. MBAs, for elevating narrow self-interest above community and corporate citizenship (e.g. Swanson and Frederick, 2003). With a divide between industry and academia on the preparedness of MBA graduates for managerial roles, a central aspect of scholarship on management education is focused on strengthening links between learning and practice. There are growing critiques of MBA values (e.g. Gruber and Schlegelmilch, 2013), pedagogies (e.g. Raelin, 2009) and relevance (e.g. Rubin and Dierdorff, 2011). With the technical competencies of MBA graduates increasingly becoming a hygiene factor (Schlegelmilch and Thomas, 2011), addressing these critiques appears all-the-more urgent.

A review of four strands of literature, namely the sociology of the professions, the historical development of managerial practice, the contemporary debate on management as a profession and exemplar education processes that develop professionalism in the archetype professions, demonstrated that professionalism (Larson, 1979), a metaphor for occupational improvement (Evetts, 2014), offers a potential avenue to address these criticisms. After all, professional education tends to leverage professionalism to prepare students for entry into their respective professions by providing them with skills to become competent practitioners (Franco, 2011), by developing their abilities to resolve ethical issues that they have to confront during their managerial careers (Boylan and O’Donahue, 2003), and by teaching a defined body of actionable and systematic knowledge (Baer, 1986). Yet, the transferability of professionalism concepts to the field of management is not trivial. It is highly speculative as to what extent management can be professionalised (Osigweh, 1986). In comparison with professions, such as medicine or law, the absence of educational credentialing and of a regulatory professional body limit the acceptance of management as a profession (Keiser, 2004). Yet, an official aim often put forward of MBA programmes is to educate the next generation of leaders. Executive MBAs, in particular, purport to contribute to the professional development of experienced managers. This study seeks to elevate our understanding of management education by the

exploring contributions of executive MBA programmes to the professionalism of their learners. The literature review suggests that, in contrast to professionalism in the education of archetype professions, such as medicine or law, professionalism in management education is underexplored. Hence, against this backdrop, an exploratory study of the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs is presented, underpinned by two research questions.

RQ1: What are executive MBA educators' and learners' perceptions of professionalism?

RQ2: What professional competencies, values and behaviours do educators and learners perceive to be developed in an executive MBA programme?

Underpinning the first question (RQ1) is an acknowledgment that professionalism is a fluid concept that is interpreted differently across and within professions in supporting decision-making and judgement-based practice. Underpinning the second question (RQ2) is an acknowledgment that there are competency, value and behavioural aspects to professionalism.

2.2 Summary of the Study's Research Design

Given the fluidity and context-dependent nature of professionalism as well as the limited research on managerial professionalism, the study leans towards a constructivist-interpretive approach in which educator and learner interpretations of professionalism and how it is developed in an executive MBA programme are explored. The study offers a fresh perspective on the emerging topic of professionalism in MBA education by focusing on educator and learner perceptions of it, rather than on fixed or predefined outcomes (e.g. Costigan and Brink, 2015). Hence, a qualitative research design (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) was identified as the most appropriate approach to capturing and analysing the data. Voice was given to educators through a series of semi-structured interviews. In recognising that the voice of learners is often underrepresented in debates on management education (Hay, 2006), their perspectives were captured through focus-groups, where executive MBA graduates articulated their shared views and experiences. Considerable effort was invested in exploring the context for the study. Executive MBA programmes on the island of Ireland provide an interesting context for several reasons. They offer a mix of provider types, including universities, institutes of technology and private business schools. Accreditation varies from none, in over 50% of cases, to triple accreditation of the elite providers. Annual tuition fees range from circa. €12,000 and just over €30,000. Most providers appear to have not pursued the GMAT entry-test, with applicants instead being required to go through an interview process, from which decisions are made about their suitability. To explore how educators convey professionalism in these programmes to

prospective learners, a content analysis (Krippendorff and Bock, 2009) of secondary data from sources, such as provider websites and programme brochures, was undertaken.

To assess the feasibility of the study and to test the validity of the proposed data collection and analysis methods, a pilot study was conducted by interviewing two educators from one executive MBA programme. A thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006) of the two interview transcripts identified pilot themes that offered approximate answers to the two research questions. These pilot themes were compared with the content categories identified from the content analysis of the secondary data and mapped to the study’s pre-field conceptual framework, providing tentative signals as to what might emerge as the research was extended. In the full study, educators were represented by either programme directors or by lecturers responsible for courses linked to the professional development of learners. Learners were represented by two groups of executive MBA graduates (see Section 3.2 in Paper 4). Table 1 presents a summary of the participants in the full study.

Table 1: Summary of Participants in the Full Study

Executive MBA Learners	Executive MBA Educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Graduated between 2011 and 2016 ▪ Covering 9 Executive MBAs ▪ 7 Male, 4 Female ▪ Average of 10 Years of Experience ▪ Data collection through Focus-Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6 Programme Directors, 6 Lecturers ▪ Covering 10 Executive MBAs ▪ 6 Male, 6 Female ▪ Includes participants from the pilot study. ▪ Data Collection through Interviews

In comparison with younger learners in full-time MBA programmes, executive MBA learners typically carry significant professional experience into their studies and, as Petriglieri et al. (2011) suggests, are often in career transition and exhibit intertwined dimensions to their personal and professional lives. Paper 4 outlines the data analysis approach taken in the full study. Reflections on field-notes taken during each interview were used to identify “first impression” themes in the immediate aftermath of each interview. A matrix of first impression themes and the interviews in which they occurred was constructed to identify repeating patterns and potential saturation (see Appendix IV, Table A8 in Paper 4). Informed by the “first impression” themes, a thematic analysis of the data captured from these interviews and focus groups was undertaken to discern patterns within the collected data, as a whole, and to identify the key themes voiced by participants with respect to the two research questions. These themes were mapped to the pre-fieldwork conceptual framework and considered in the context of the literature on professionalism, on executive MBAs and on management education.

2.3 Summary of Findings

The field research undertaken for this study cannot be considered in isolation of important findings uncovered over the entire research journey, documented by the cumulative paper series (CPS). Hence, the findings are summarised from three stages of research: the literature review (see Paper 1), the content analysis of secondary data on executive MBAs and the pilot study of professionalism in one executive MBA (Paper 3) and the field research (Paper 4).

2.3.1 Findings from the Literature Review

The literature review identified education processes in MBAs that steer business schools towards a professional mission, such as linking theory and practice, developing practice-based pedagogy and articulating ethical standards for graduates. Yet, it also found that, in the absence of an integrating framework, MBA educators operate with little guidance for supporting the professional development of learners (e.g. Trank and Rynes, 2003). The research agenda for professionalism in management education was found to be underdeveloped, due to the contested nature of management as a profession (e.g. Iñiguez, 2010). Notwithstanding, a growing number of scholars, such as Rousseau (2012), Rubin and Dierdorff (2013) and Barends (2015) advocate for this research agenda. As Raelin (1997) implied, professionalism can contribute to the strategic leadership of society's important organisations. Given the role of MBAs in developing business leaders, a gap in the literature was identified with respect to understanding what professionalism means in a managerial context and how executive MBA programmes develop it. Notwithstanding, the literature review identified scholars (e.g. Hall, 1968; Despotidou and Prastacos, 2012; Pouryousefi, 2013; Nino, 2012; Romme, 2016) who offer suggestions for what managerial professionalism might mean. An analysis of their work revealed that it could be considered as a latent attribute of five developmental factors (Table 2), although later analysis showed some factors to be more relevant than others.

Table 2: Factors of Managerial Professionalism identified in the Literature Review

Factor	Working Definition
Self-Regulation	<i>A regulatory model that devolves control over a profession's practice to a representative body of its members.</i>
Autonomy	<i>Independent decision-making and judgments based on expertise.</i>
Social Agency	<i>An individual's perceptions of, and contributions to societal issues.</i>
Body of Knowledge	<i>Core knowledge and critical skills needed to work in a profession.</i>
Self-Concept	<i>How individuals see themselves in terms of their readiness to execute the duties and responsibilities of a professional role.</i>

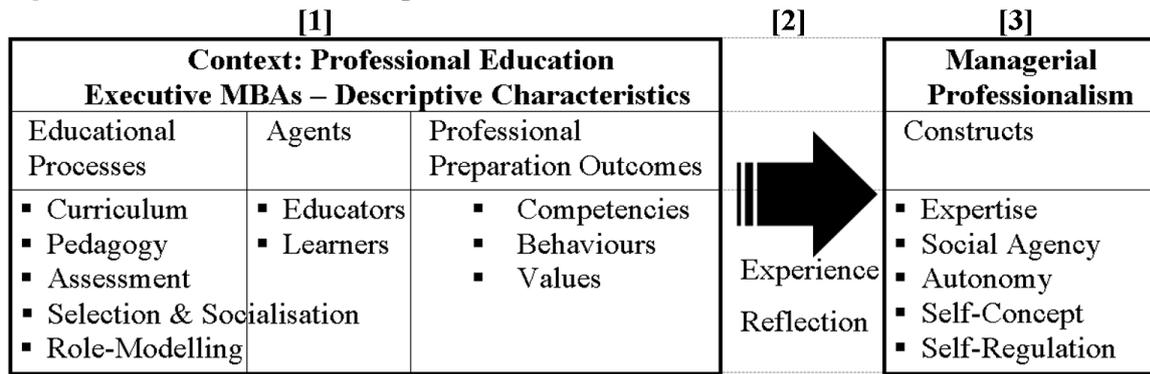
Whilst these factors help us to understand professionalism, they shed little light on the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBA programmes. To address this issue, the literature review highlighted two aspects of Stark et al.'s (1986) framework for conceptualising higher education programmes that help educators prepare their learners for entry into a profession, namely processes and outcomes. However, executive MBA programmes exude some notable deviations from Stark et al.'s (1986) framework. As post-experience programmes, they typically attract learners who may already be members of a profession and have accumulated significant professional experience. Notwithstanding, for the purposes of conceptualising executive MBA programmes, the literature review identified five education processes, namely selection and socialisation, curriculum, pedagogy, role-modelling and assessment, that contribute to professional preparation outcomes. In essence, a key outcome of the literature review was an initial conceptualisation of executive MBAs as education programmes that prepare students for entry into a management profession (Table 3).

Table 3: Conceptualising Executive MBAs as Professional Education Programmes

Agents	Education Processes	Professional Preparation Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educators ▪ Learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Curriculum ▪ Pedagogy ▪ Selection & Socialisation ▪ Role-Modelling ▪ Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Competencies ▪ Behaviours ▪ Values

The noted deviation from Stark et al.'s (1986) framework implies that the interrelated roles of experience and reflection in developing professionalism needs to be considered. A review of the literature on the development of medical professionalism suggested that it is developed over a prolonged period of active learning from experience and reflection. Hilton and Slotnick (2005) coined this period as one of “proto-professionalism” in which processes of attainment and attrition influence how professionalism unfolds (originally presented in Paper 2). Hence, the findings from the literature review provide a basis of a comprehensive pre-field conceptual framework for exploring the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBA programmes. Figure 1 presents the pre-field conceptual framework as a synthesis of [1] Stark et al.'s (1986) framework [2] Hilton and Slotnick's (2005) proto-professionalism and [3] the conceptualisation of managerial professionalism as a latent attribute of developmental factors, such as expertise, social agency, autonomy, self-concept and self-regulation (Nino, 2012).

Figure 1: The Pre-Field Conceptual Framework



This conceptual framework, whilst it provides a useful guideline for enquiry, is malleable in that it is merely an approximate abstraction for exploring the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs. There is an acknowledgment in the cumulative paper series that other parameters, such as influencers on the educational processes, are relevant to the study.

2.3.2 Summary of Findings from Secondary Data Analysis and Pilot Study

Context plays a key role in qualitative research. In exploring the context for this study, a map of the executive MBA landscape was constructed in Paper 3, comparing and contrasting seventeen executive programmes using nine parameters discernible from publicly available data. Table 4 conveys a synopsis of the executive MBA landscape on the island of Ireland.

Table 4: Synopsis of Executive MBA Landscape on the Island of Ireland

#	Description	Summary of Findings
1	Accreditations from AACSB, AMBA or EQUIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No Accreditations, 53% of Providers ▪ Triple Accreditation, 18% of Providers
2	PRME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 Providers
3	Rankings Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 7 Providers
4	Governance and Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institute of Technology, 29%; Universities, 41% ▪ Overseas Providers, 12%; Private Colleges, 18%
5	Delivery Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Executive and Full-Time MBAs, 7 Providers ▪ Executive MBAs Only, 10 Providers
6	Geographical Jurisdiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UK Only, 1 Provider ▪ UK and Republic of Ireland, 2 MBAs ▪ Republic of Ireland, 14 MBAs
7	GMAT Entry Requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No Requirement, 11 MBAs; GMAT Score \leq 400, 1 MBA; GMAT Score >400 and <550, 3 MBAs; GMAT Score ≥ 500, 2 MBAs
8	Tuition Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fees $<$ €12,000, 2 MBAs; Fees \geq €12,000 and \leq €30,000, 13 MBAs; Fees $>$ €30,000, 2 MBAs
9	Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prestigious, 2 MBAs; Reputation-Seeker, 15 MBAs

A content analysis of secondary data on these executive MBAs identified eleven categories that reflect how educators convey the embeddedness of professionalism in these programmes to prospective learners. Table 5 summarises these categories with brief working descriptions.

Table 5: Summary of Content Categories from Secondary Data Analysis

Content Category	Working Description
CC ₁ Management	<i>MBAs depicted as management qualifications.</i>
CC ₂ Career	<i>MBAs depicted as career enhancers or accelerators.</i>
CC ₃ Leadership	<i>MBAs depicted as developing future leaders.</i>
CC ₄ Internationalisation	<i>Strong emphasis placed on international business.</i>
CC ₅ Experience	<i>Significant professional experience of students.</i>
CC ₆ Soft-Skills	<i>Strong emphasis placed on soft-skills development.</i>
CC ₇ Rigour-Relevance	<i>Strong emphasis on linking theory and practice.</i>
CC ₈ Practice-Based Pedagogy	<i>Experiential learning from professional practice.</i>
CC ₉ Broad-Based Curriculum	<i>Curriculum covers a wide range of business disciplines.</i>
CC ₁₀ Professionalism	<i>A focus within MBAs on professional development.</i>
CC ₁₁ Business & Society	<i>Emphasis on role of the manager in society.</i>

A pilot study of professionalism in one executive MBA programme generated qualitative data from two educator interviews, from which a thematic analysis identified six pilot themes. Table 6 provides a summary of these pilot themes along with brief working descriptions.

Table 6: Summary of Pilot Themes

Pilot Theme	Working Description
THP ₁ Curriculum	<i>Broad curriculum covering range of business disciplines.</i>
THP ₂ Andragogy	<i>Adult learning principles.</i>
THP ₃ Professional Development	<i>A focus within MBAs on professional development.</i>
THP ₄ Practice Based Pedagogy	<i>Experiential learning from professional practice.</i>
THP ₅ Rigour-Relevance	<i>Strong emphasis integrating theory and practice.</i>
THP ₆ Role of Educator	<i>Facilitative delivery supported by credible track-record.</i>

The strong overlap between pilot themes and the content categories emerging from the secondary data, added credibility to the findings of the pilot study, hinting at their possible transferability to other executive MBA programmes and, therefore, provided a reasonable basis for extending the study. As thematic formation is iterative, the data generated from the pilot study was included in the entire dataset for analysis in the extended study.

2.3.3 Thematic Findings from Extended Study

As discussed in Paper 4, an analysis of the data from the extended study yielded three themes that describe how participants, both educators and learners, perceive professionalism in the context of executive management. Addressing RQ1, these themes were: breadth of knowledge [TH₁]; ethical disposition [TH₂] and behavioural moderation [TH₃]. TH₁ refers to a broad knowledge of the business disciplines, which learners must synthesise and creatively use in designing solutions to complex problems in their roles as professional executives. TH₂ refers to a standard of morality in exercising professional judgment, in navigating moral hazards and in exercising their social responsibilities. TH₃ refers to an ability of executives to control their behaviour in interacting with others, in exercising leadership and in developing themselves professionally. An analysis of the data also yielded five themes that describe the mechanisms and contexts for reinforcing managerial professionalism in executive MBA programmes. Addressing RQ2, these themes were: curriculum design [TH₄], andragogy [TH₅], relationship learning [TH₆], rigour-relevance [TH₇] and career development [TH₈]. TH₄ refers to a belief that the executive MBA curriculum tends to be broad, focused on providing an integrative understanding of managerial practice. TH₅ refers to the use of adult learning principles in reinforcing professionalism in mature learners. TH₆ refers to the importance placed on learning to develop and manage stakeholder relationships based on know-who, trust and personal judgment. TH₇ refers to the entanglement of rigour and relevance in executive MBA processes in order to develop professionalism in reverse-order to proto-professionalism processes in professional preparation programmes. TH₈ refers to the role of executive MBA programmes in accelerating career progression or in acting as a holding place for learners to reflect on their career direction. A surprising theme that emerged from the data reflects a more comprehensive set of developmental aspects to executive MBA programmes beyond merely developing professionalism. TH₉ suggests that there is a series of benefits, other than professional ones, to pursuing an executive MBA, such as personal growth and the development of thinking skills.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

The findings from the study suggest that participants interpret managerial professionalism to be an amalgam of breadth of knowledge, ethical disposition and behavioural moderation. A comparison of these findings with Evetts' (2014) depiction of doctors or lawyers as professionals whose reputations derive from their ethical use of their expertise in the service of others, would suggest that participant learners are attune to the common characteristics of professionals. However, there are some clear anomalies between participants' perceptions of

professionalism in a management context and the more commonly accepted understanding of professionalism in the archetype professions, such as law or medicine.

First, acquiring a breadth of knowledge of business disciplines seems at odds with expertise based on a systematic body of knowledge. A defined body of knowledge, which is systematic, accessible and actionable, has traditionally been associated with professionalism. Second, the ethical disposition of managers appears to reflect a pragmatism required to navigate the politics of their roles (Nalbandian, 2001), such as conflicting stakeholder requirements, moral hazard and their wider social responsibilities. In contrast, medical ethics appear to have a far stronger altruistic and regulatory orientation. Third, a mapping of content categories (see Figure 7 in Paper 3) and of themes (see Table 5 in Paper 4) to the conceptual framework suggests that self-regulation is not part of managerial professionalism. In its absence, participants imply that control of one's behaviour is paramount to managerial professionalism. We cannot have confidence in executive managers, as we might have in doctors, by enforcing regulation, save for their own individual sense of professionalism based on a questionable expertise, on a less altruistic but more pragmatic ethical disposition and on moderated behaviour. This may explain why gaining this confidence is so much more challenging to managers but when it is gained, then skilled managers can respond efficiently to information asymmetries (Pouryousefi, 2013).

The findings also enhance our understanding of the embeddedness of professionalism within executive MBA programmes. TH₄ suggests that the broad-based curriculum of executive MBAs is required to develop a breadth of knowledge. Yet, also ingrained in TH₄ is an integration of that knowledge in managerial practice. It suggests that the real expertise of executive managers is not an overview knowledge of business disciplines but in synthesising that knowledge to design solutions to complex problems and in rhetorical skill required to implement these solutions. TH₅ points to the appropriateness of the adult education principles used in executive MBAs, such as reflective practice and relating classroom learning to managerial practice, in reinforcing professionalism. TH₆ highlights the role of executive MBA programmes in developing relational competencies, which, in turn, support all three thematic components of managerial professionalism. TH₇ signifies the challenges that executive MBAs face in facilitating learning of intellectually appealing and professionally relevant knowledge. TH₈ suggests that executive MBAs bundle a range of career supports to assist their learners with their professional development. Finally, TH₉ Beyond Professionalism suggests that executive MBAs develop their learners in a much more holistic manner than would otherwise be the case if these programmes focused exclusively on professional development.

3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

“Many full-time MBA programs limit their effectiveness by clinging to functionalism. Executive programs ... emphasize the synergistic use of core competencies and delivery systems ... that enables one to truly master business administration” (Latham et al., 2004, p 3).

3.1 Introduction

To a large extent, a discussion of the findings in the context of the pre-field conceptual framework and the relevant literature has already been elaborated in Paper 4. This is, in part, due to the qualitative nature of the study. Qualitative findings are often best presented in context. As such, the findings, outlined in Paper 4, are discussed as part of a “thick” description of the data (Ryle, 2009). This is reflected in examiner feedback on Paper 4, which implies that:-

“Findings are clearly evaluated. The analysis makes sense given the context of the study ...there is a good level of discussion of the data from the interviews and focus groups ...the outcomes are clearly discussed and ... the relevant literature is cited where appropriate.”

“Discussion is clearly linked to the research problem and individual research questions.”

Given that qualitative research tends to yield detailed findings, it can be difficult to decipher important signals amongst such detail. So, rather than discuss the findings in detail again, this section focuses on the key insights from the study that address the research questions.

It begins with the participants’ viewpoints on management as a profession or, more specifically, to what extent they believe we should continue to describe executive management using the theoretical trappings of the archetype professions. In addressing RQ1, an analysis of participant perceptions of what constitutes managerial professionalism follows, vis-à-vis professionalism in other disciplines and vis-à-vis the key conceptual elements of managerialism professionalism identified in the literature. In addressing RQ2, the discussion then progresses to examining how executive MBA programmes contribute to developing professionalism in their learners and what this says about executive MBA programmes, themselves, as vehicles for managerial learning and development. Finally, the discussion develops into one in which the evolving nature of executive MBA programmes is articulated as a three-tier trajectory that reflects their gradually improving effectiveness to develop and reinforce the professionalism of executive managers. Those MBAs in the most advanced tier appear to have a greater embeddedness of professionalism than MBAs rooted in the bottom tier.

3.2 Perceptions of Management as a Profession

The backdrop to this study is one in which there has been enduring debate on management as a profession from its early days as a craft (e.g. Follet, 1927) to more contemporary notions as a scientific practice (e.g. Schein, 2003). Given the central role of work organisations in our society and to our material well-being, this debate has real and impactful implications. Participants made persuasive but also contradictory arguments for and against the idea of management as a profession. Learners cited examples of decision-making supported by general principles or theories, which they learned as part of their MBA studies. Yet, all participants more or less agreed that the managerial knowledge base is wide rather than deep, which begs the question: what expertise do managers have?

A repeated theme, particularly from learner participants, was the practical challenge of dealing with conflicting organisational stakeholder requirements, as opposed to those of a single client. There was also almost universal recognition among participants of the lack of self-regulation as the single biggest difference with the archetype professions. Despite attempts to promulgate ethics codes (e.g. Khurana and Nohria, 2008; Anderson and Escher, 2010), this difference is acknowledged extensively in the literature (Spender, 2007; Barker, 2010, Pfeffer, 2011) to the extent that some scholars argue that management runs contrary to the notion of professionalism, given that managers prioritise hierarchical authority over collegiality and self-imposed sanction (McGivern et al., 2015). Learner participants, themselves, tended to emphasise hierarchy as something for which their MBA studies were preparing them (i.e. to develop leadership skills), a more aspirational and, perhaps, more enticing concept beyond the strait-jacketed professional. Yet, there is a paradox to this finding in that leadership development was a key aspect of executive MBA programmes, in which participants perceived professionalism was embedded, as evident from the theme of behavioural moderation.

At the same time, educator participants tended to highlight the critical importance of executives to managing organisational complexity. The skills to manage this complexity, they believe, are simply not “something you could pick up instinctively” and “can be learned” to the extent that “there should be a noticeable difference between a manager who is professionally trained and one who is not” (see Section 5.2 in Paper 4). They argued, like Romme (2016), that it would be irresponsible not to support the development of professionalism in management, as ascribed by Drucker (1985), through educational credentialing, such as executive MBAs. Yet, educators, more often than not, will lean towards nurture in the nature versus nurture debate. A more nuanced issue is the extent to which managerial skills are tacit, context-dependent and

learned experientially (Gheradi, 2000; Raelin, 2007; Buch and Jensen, 2018) or suited to 'professional' model of learning, which emphasises socialisation, formation of professional identity and ethical guidance (Warhurst, 2011). Executive MBAs, it would appear, tend to use the complimentary nature of both approaches. With repeated references from participants to design as an antidotal pedagogy to the classroom learning of compartmentalised knowledge (March, 1996), there seems to be some attempt by executive MBA programmes to overcome a perceived absence of an integrated empirical foundation for management. In this way, we see that management learning and practice, just as professionals develop and practice their professionalism (Scanlon, 2011), does not conform perfectly to scientific standards.

So, what can we conclude from this discussion? The key message is that participants do not perceive management to be a closed collegial, self-regulating and expert archetype profession like Exworthy and Halfrod's (1999) perceptions of medicine or law. Rather, participants perceive management to exhibit some characteristics associated with professions. MBA learners, in particular, perceived managers to be professionals, by background, but engaged in managing professional work and they viewed their MBA studies as a way to move out of their functional specialism. Perhaps, Noordegraaf's (2015, p. 87) reference to hybrid professionals, influenced by aspects of professionalism (e.g. expertise and autonomy) and managerialism (e.g. hierarchical control and budgetary restriction), is an appropriate description of participant view of management. In this context, we might concur with Brooks (1999) that management is perceived to be an occupation in which professionalism is a significant performative factor.

3.3 Perceptions of Managerial Professionalism (RQ1)

Professionalism was depicted initially in Paper 1 to be a latent attribute of five developmental factors: expertise, social agency, autonomy of judgment, self-concept and self-regulation (see Section 1.2 in Paper 1). Yet, participants in this study suggested that managerial professionalism was a synthesis of [TH₁] breadth of knowledge, [TH₂] ethical disposition and [TH₃] behavioural moderation. So, how can we reconcile these the two narratives?

Breadth of knowledge [TH₁], as opposed to narrow expertise, was the first thematic description of participant perceptions of managerial professionalism. There has been an enduring debate on the nature of management knowledge, often depicted as a 'fragmented adhocacy' (Whitley, 1988) and irrelevant to managerial practice (Pettrigrew, 1997). Recent scholarship suggests that there is ample knowledge for management with its own conventions (Kelemen and Bansal, 2002), perhaps too much (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006), but it is insufficiently systematised for,

and accessible to practitioners (Barends, 2015). This is reflected in learner feedback, which suggested that their MBA studies represented their first interaction with academic journals. Yet, participants also referred to opportunities to integrate creatively theoretical knowledge from those journals in practice-based settings. So, rather than managerial professionalism depending on a regulated application of a systematic body of knowledge that could act as a common frame of reference, it appears to lean towards creativity. That is not to say that managerial practice is not guided by the rigorous scientific knowledge, merely that this knowledge is not necessarily applied rigorously. In fact, some MBA programmes appear to have made significant progress in actioning a rules-based view of knowledge (Sfard, 1999), through evidence-based approaches, whilst, concurrently, facilitating the capture, interpretation and creative application of tacit knowledge (Edwards, 2010) to situations through design-based learning. In this context, executive MBA programmes appear to be evolving towards Simon's (1967, p. 13) vision of being "organized so that practical management problems are rubbed against theory". Therefore, the expertise to which participants allude is not breadth of knowledge, per se, although it is an enabling factor, but to synthesis and design, i.e. a combined application of the disciplines to create something new or to change a situation from "what is" to what "ought to be" (Simon, 1996, p. 5).

Such creativity suggests that management can be considered to be, in part at least, an artform (Atkinson, 2007; Meisek and Barry, 2014), "the antithesis of the use of a rigorous body of knowledge" (Spender, 2007, p.34), which is rarely practiced under conditions of certainty or perfect information. In such circumstances, we must recognise that management practice goes beyond objective reasoning (Mintzberg, 2017), requiring imagination to confront political, social, economic and technical constraints in which organisations function. We may think of managers as creative professionals (Spender, 2007) who offer their creative judgments "that their reasoning supports but does not dominate" (Spender, 2015, p. 57) in shaping their organisations' responses to the uncertainties (Knight, 1921) and bounded rationalities (Foss, 2002), the core thesis of Simon's (1967) paper. We may also think of the knowledge component of managerial professionalism as one that is not predominantly rules-based, as it tends to be in the archetype professions (Hammersley, 2001), but is also tacit and acquired from prior experience (Sfard, 1999). In such circumstances, managerial practice may be considered, not as a rigorous application of theory, but as reflective (Roglio and Light, 2009) and situationally interpretive (Edwards, 2010). Both rules-based and practice-based views of knowledge are clearly present in participant perceptions of managerial professionalism.

The notion that executive management leans towards creativity has implications for the second thematic description of participants' perceptions of managerial professionalism, i.e. ethical disposition [TH₂]. Whereas archetype professions lean towards regulation, protecting their clients from wayward practitioners, managements' tilt towards creativity confronts the ethical boundaries of its practice, often ambiguous and elastic. The inherent tension that arises between creative practice and convention tends to lead to a popular but unsubstantiated belief that creativity runs contrary to ethics (Wang and Murnighan, 2015). There are even suggested links between creative personalities and unethical behaviour (Gino and Ariely, 2012.) Yet, learner participants in this study cited plenty of examples of ethically creative practice in honing their managerial skills. In a professional context, ethics cede individual self-interest to societal norms (Shaw, 2013). Whilst creativity can be beneficial to society, it can equally be harmful. Likewise, the outcomes of managerial creativity may be beneficial to some stakeholders but harmful to others. In dealing with such a moral hazard, participants in the study not only highlighted the political nature of the managerial role but also its wider social responsibilities. In this context, managers are not vying for altruistic sainthood, merely validating the ethical outcomes of their creative endeavours. This pragmatic form of ethics is consistent with Pouryousefi's (2013) account of managerial practice in creating trust with stakeholders and with the social validation of their creative products (Simonton, 1999).

In summary, therefore, in acknowledging the creative role of executive managers, the ethical dimension to managerial professionalism appears to be pragmatic, characterised less by regulation and altruism and more by political navigation of conflicting stakeholder requirements and social validation of managerial creativity. From an ethical perspective, we must, therefore, acknowledge a normative role that executive managers play, as explained by corporate social responsibility, stakeholder theory and social contracts theory, in pursuing a good beyond mere profit-making (Donaldson, 2000). Yet, the extent to which managerial professionalism displays a common sense of purpose with a commitment to a higher aim is contested in the literature (Pollard, 1965; Abbott, 1988; Despotidou and Prastacos, 2012; Romme, 2016) and the findings from this study shed little light on this line of enquiry other than to suggest that there is an absence of a formalised or organised self-regulation.

The absence of self-regulation from participant perceptions of professionalism, at least at an inter-organisational level, is verified, to a large extent, by the literature. Yet, the emergence of behavioural moderation [TH₃] in this study and its absence from the literature is less obvious. In this context, Evetts' (2014, p. 41) metaphor for professionalism as "inner-directed control"

seems relevant to the self-motivation of managers. Behavioural moderation appears to replace the more formalised concept of self-regulation made explicit in the form of an oath or code of conduct for the archetype professions. Behavioural moderation refers to managers' abilities to control their own behaviour. Participant learners reported that their MBA studies helped them to portray a favourable self-concept by developing a capacity to be more self-aware and aware of others. Participants' emphasis on behavioural moderation suggests that Clark et al.'s (2014) behavioural components of professionalism (e.g. presentability, interactivity and productivity), which enhance graduate employability, are still relevant to more experienced learners in dealing with their workplace challenges (Ashkansy and Daus, 2002). As such, pedagogies for practising professional behaviour through selected education processes and contexts still play a key role in executive MBAs, even if they are focused on maintaining certain aspects of professionalism, rather than developing them from scratch. To summarise, a second iteration of the mapping of participants' perceptions of managerial professionalism to developmental factors of professionalism (see Table 5 in Paper 4 for first iteration) is provided in Table 7.

Table 7: Mapping Participants' Perceptions to Factors of Professionalism

Theme	Concept	Expertise	Social Agency	Autonomy of Judgement	Self-Concept	Self-Regulation	Employability
Synthesis and Design		✓		✓			
Ethical Disposition			✓	✓		✗	
Behavioural Moderation					✓		✓

The expertise of executive managers becomes one of synthesis of rules-based and practice-based knowledge in designing creative solutions to ill-defined and complex problems. Social agency manifests itself in the ethical disposition of managers, which dictates the extent to which managers consider the social implications of their creativity, although the extent to which this social agency is reflected in a common sense of purpose or higher aim is unclear. Autonomy of judgement derives from the breadth of knowledge that managers acquire, the abductive logic that they require to resolve uncertainties in synthesis and design activities and from embracing ethical responsibility for their actions that impact on others. The portrayal of positive self-concept is evident in the moderated behaviour of managers and the relationship between professionalism and employability is evident in the interactivity, presentability and productivity as three modes of behaviour valued by employers. Given the creative role of executive managers, we can, most likely, discount self-regulation, in the form of an enforceable oath or code of conduct, as an unlikely factor of managerial professionalism.

3.4 Perceptions of Developing Managerial Professionalism in Executive MBAs (RQ2)

Whilst the pre-field conceptual framework, as depicted by Figure 1, provides a useful framework for undertaking this study, as a representative model, it is misleading. From the insights of participants, executive MBAs appear to develop professionalism in reverse-order to the proto-professionalism processes associated with educating archetype professionals. Even the verb ‘develop’ is better substituted by ‘reinforce’ or, in some cases, ‘maintain’, given that learners are often experienced professionals on entry, sometimes in career transition and maintain a delicate work-life balance (Dalton, 2018). Learners also seek to link their classroom learning to their managerial practice (Antonacopoulou, 2008). Some scholars (e.g. Andersson, 2010) aim to reconceptualise managerial practice in processual terms (i.e. relating to others) and management learning as ‘becoming’ (e.g. Sturdy et al., 2006), a form of socialisation, to reflect the practice-based view of managerial knowledge. Hence, the idea that executive MBAs deploy linear learning processes leading to predetermined outcomes is an oversimplification.

The findings suggest that executive MBAs facilitate the sharing of learner experiences, provide a reflective space to learn from those experiences and intellectually anchor them in theories that can be applied in multiple contexts. This reaffirms Hay and Hodgkinson (2008) suggestion that learners relate their practice to theory reflexively. Of the five themes that discuss the mechanisms for supporting professionalism, three stand out. First, andragogical principles [TH₅], such as reflective practice (Roglio and Light, 2009), application of learning in the workplace (Prince et al., 2015) and peer-learning (Boud et al., 2014), reinforce professionalism among mature learners. Second, given the expertise that managers have in synthesis and design, transcending functional boundaries, it is unsurprising that the curriculum covers a broad range of disciplines (Hunt and Speck, 1986). Yet, providing executives with a breadth of knowledge to converse outside their own professions is not enough. Participants claim that there is an emphasis on relationship learning [TH₆], through peers, networks and role-models. Hence, the development of synthesis and design expertise is supported by a broad-based curriculum and relationship learning. This is in keeping with the relationality of management (Warhurst, 2011) and the role of informal learning (Suchman et al., 2004) in developing professionalism. Third, the rigour-relevance theme [TH₇] implies that executive MBAs are central to the challenge of ensuring that “hard-nosed executives should care about management theory” (Christensen and Raynor, 2003, p. 66) and vice versa. There are tentative signs from the study that executive MBA programmes are contributing to the professionalisation of management through evidence-based approaches (Erez and Grant, 2014), design science (VanAken and Romme,

2009), relevance testing new theories (Alajoutsijärvi, 2008) and curricular integration (True et al, 2000). The emergence of career development [TH₈] is also unsurprising. There is, after all, abundant scholarship on the role of MBAs in supporting career development. Whilst a cursory glance at this theme might suggest that learners display a structuralist view of professionalism (Johnson, 1972), feedback from participants is not so clear cut, referring to many career-related motivations other than promotion or salary enhancement. Likewise, a curriculum design [TH₄] that supports the integration of a broad range of business knowledge domains is unsurprising, given prior studies on this theme (e.g. Latham et al., 2004; Navarro, 2008).

3.5 Outcomes of Executive MBA Programmes

The pre-field conceptual framework implies that executive MBAs lead to professional preparation outcomes. The term ‘professional preparation’, borrowed from Stark et al. (1986) is, again, misleading. First, management learning appears to be more complex than designing education processes to achieve predefined outcomes and, second, executive MBA learners are typically not at an entry-level either to their own background profession or to management. Yet, key outcomes in terms of values, behaviours and competencies were identified by participants (see Section 6.2 in Paper 4). Contrary to Hühn (2014) or Arieli et al. (2016), self-enhancement does not dominate the value-set of learner participants. If anything, openness to change appears to be more prominent and aligns with Lan et al.’s (2010) findings from their analysis of MBA value types. Whilst there was no clear picture of professional behaviours developed by learner participants, it was clear from the study that interpersonal skills and self-awareness were key aspects to nurturing desired behaviours. Integrative competence followed closely by interpersonal competence emerged as the dominant competencies with both conceptual and technical competencies well down the pecking order. Again, this is keeping with the notion of executive MBA graduates as high-value managers that can act as a point of synthesis (Dunne and Martin, 2006) in the generation of shared meaning and praxis amongst many stakeholders and the gradual obsolescence of the MBA’s technical competences.

3.6 Beyond Professionalism in Executive MBA Programmes

Sometimes, it is easier to infer what something is by describing what it is not. Whilst the focus of this study was on the embeddedness of professionalism in executive MBAs, the study also sheds some light on what these programmes offer outside the professionalism domain. One possible interpretation of the findings is to conclude that executive MBA programmes promote professionalism to varying degrees, more so than their full-time equivalent. Yet, it also appears

that professionalism is a constraint to developing their learners. Professional learning can only go so deep and the participants of this study suggest that learners enter their studies with high levels of professionalism. As one educator points out “at a certain level it’s like rewarding somebody for breathing, you take it for granted”. As learners transcend into new knowledge domains, they appear to break the glass ceiling, moving beyond the constraints of the conventional professionalism metaphor. Learners suggest that the focus then becomes leadership. Educators do not dismiss the professionalism metaphor entirely, suggesting that the roles of managers are too complex to be left to amateurs. Perhaps then, in the context of executives managing professional work, often outside their expertise, executive management may be viewed as something beyond a profession. Consistent with examples in the literature (e.g. Hilgert, 1995; Hay, 2006; Han and Liang, 2015), learners reported that their MBA studies provided a holistic development, ranging from the development of critical thinking to self-esteem. In this context, executive MBAs appear to be unfairly associated with some of the criticisms of full-time MBAs. Given that learners have accumulated professional experience on entry and work in parallel with their studies, the executive MBA appears to provide avenues for reinforcing professionalism that are, perhaps, not open to full-time MBA learners.

3.7 Concluding Remarks

With an underlying motivation to address criticisms of MBAs, the literature review identified potential solutions in the education of archetype professions. The review cited a gap in the literature with respect to professionalism in executive MBAs. The executive MBA educators and learners in this study perceive managerial professionalism to be an amalgam of: -

- an expertise based on synthesising a broad range of business disciplines;
- an ethical disposition that is pragmatic in gaining the trust of competing stakeholders;
- an ability to moderate one’s own behaviour in relating to others.

This description has some cross-over with the more general concepts of professionalism, although there are subtleties to the managerial context. Based on past criticisms of MBAs, the description is somewhat surprising, although reasonably well aligned with existing prototype statements on managerial professionalism (e.g. Romme et al., 2015). The study’s participants imply that executive MBAs reinforce professionalism, through andragogy, relationship learning and intertwined academic rigour and professional relevance, in reverse-order to the proto-professionalism processes of the archetype professions. This is achieved by intellectually anchoring, providing reflective space for and sharing learner experiences. Yet, participants imply that executive MBAs provide a more holistic development beyond professionalism.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

“In tackling the domain of professionalism, it was obvious ... that no one unified consensus would be possible, nor desirable, given the diversity of ways in which [it] is understood”
(Hodges et al., 2011, p. 17).

4.1 Introduction

There is a growing body of research on what professionalism means in individual occupations. Medical professionalism focuses on behavioural training for physicians, such as bedside manner, altruism and compassion for patients (Hammer, 2000). Legal professionalism focuses on the “dignity and honor” of lawyers (Rhode, 1998, p. 283) and appropriate behaviours for interacting with clients (Maynard, 1999). Management scholars have also focused on an occupational form of professionalism, referring to cadres of likeminded experts in diverse business fields, a little like modern-days guilds (Hall, 1968). Abbott’s (1988) work on distilling different theories and empirical evidence on the professions offers an overarching theory of professionalism based on [1] jurisdiction, i.e. an exclusive practice domain that helps to forge professional identity, [2] the nature of professional work, which uses diagnosis, treatment and inference to address challenges within the practice domain and [3] the body of knowledge that underpins a profession’s practice. Somers et al. (2014) use Abbott’s theory of professionalism to address the problematic relationship between management education and practice and hint at a potential professional jurisdiction and expert knowledge for management, framed in terms of the integration of four forms of capital – structural, relational, process and human. Indeed, in recognising the limitations of evidence-based approaches to guiding managerial work, Somers et al. (2014) provide a way forward for adapting aspects of professional education, such as practice-based pedagogy in management education (see Section 4.5.1 in Paper 3).

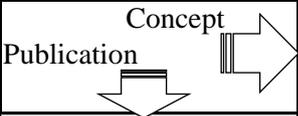
This section discusses how the findings from this study, in particular executive MBA educator and learner perceptions of professionalism, elaborate on Somers et al.’s (2014) work, thereby enhancing our understanding of professionalism in a managerial context. It begins by analysing how the three aspects to managerial professionalism, as perceived by participants, fits with the wider umbrella concept. A discussion follows on the relevance of professionalism to occupational forms that are not professionalised in same vein as the archetype professions. Unlike Hilton and Slotnick’s (2005) focus on proto-professionalism, this section then explores how managerial professionalism unfolds in learners with relatively mature levels of professionalism and relates this unfolding to the education processes and contexts of executive

MBA programmes. Finally, this section suggests how we can use professionalism to elevate our understanding of executive MBAs, not as programmes for professional entry, but as ultimate professional programmes. The implication of this finding is that, in comparison to full-time MBA learners who typically develop their professionalism through transitioning their learning from foundation knowledge to initial practice-based experiences, as suggested by Somers et al. (2014), executive MBA learners develop beyond their functional specialisms into executive managers that can provide the creativity and rhetoric to lead their respective organisations.

4.2 Our Understanding of Managerial Professionalism

In analysing the philosophical underpinnings of managerial professionalism, Despotidou and Prastacos (2012) proposed a framework based on (a) a systematic body of knowledge, (b) a commitment to a greater good and (c) ethical character. It is not beyond the imagination to consider its alignment to the three dimensions to managerial professionalism identified in this study. First, instead of a systematic body of knowledge, this study implies that management expertise derives from integrating knowledge from a wide range of business disciplines. Second, instead of a commitment to a greater good, this study implies that managerial professionalism derives from social agency, i.e. fulfilling responsibilities to a wider stakeholder base and to society. This is evident in the ongoing work on corporate social performance, stakeholder theory and social contracts theory of the past few decades. Third, ethical character maps to ethical disposition, although this study elaborates on a particular type of ethic, based on creativity and pragmatism. Table 8 extends the initial comparison of frameworks for professionalism (see Figure 6 in Paper 1) to include those identified in this study. Table 8 does not identify the extent to which each of the concepts above were explored or are actually present in managerial professionalism, merely that they were considered for analysis.

Table 8: A Comparison of Professionalism Concepts

<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> Concept Publication	Body of Knowledge	Social Agency	Self-Regulation	Autonomy of Judgment	Self-Concept	Sense of Purpose
This Study (2018)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Romme (2016)	✓	✓		✓		✓
Nino (2012)	✓	✓			✓	
Despotidou (2012)	✓	✓		✓		✓
Haywood-Farmer	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Hall (1968)		✓	✓			

With respect to the body of knowledge, the findings from this study align with Romme's (2016, p. 5) analysis that management knowledge is neither systematic nor accessible to managers, failing to provide a common frame for managerial practice. Social agency is considered in all publications. The findings from this study imply that educators and learners are aware of their responsibilities to a diverse range of stakeholders and, indeed, to society. Yet, the social agency of executive managers appears not to be driven by altruistic notions nor by a commitment to a common sense of purpose. Rather, it is pragmatic and politically judged. Whilst Hall's (1968) professionalism scale includes self-regulation for analysis, it is ignored by others and considered by participants not to be a major factor of managerial professionalism. Participants alluded to regulations of their background professions or to industry-specific regulations but not set of regulations for management. Autonomy of judgment is considered in most of the studies. This study finds autonomy of judgment to be a key factor and that executive MBAs tend to develop this autonomy through design-based learning.

The study found that learners demonstrate a Kantian-style philosophy (Kant, 1785) based on strong ethical reasoning and sound judgement to problem-solving routines in context. There is an implication in their views of managerial professionalism that self-direction is needed for managers to be effective in their roles. Of course, executive managers are never fully free from the control of others. Even CEO's are limited in their autonomy given that they report to a board and meet conflicting demands from stakeholders (Harrell and Alpert, 1979). Given the persistent surfacing of themes, sub-themes and codes, such as self-confidence, leadership, communications skills, self-awareness, in this study, it is reasonable to conclude that executive MBA educators consider self-concept to be a factor of professionalism, which is in keeping with studies of professionalism in other occupations (e.g. Arthur, 1995). Whilst Despotidou and Prastacos' (2012) include a common sense of purpose, its relevance to management is questionable. As Pollard (1975, pp. 88) suggests, there is "nothing to link the groups of management across the boundaries of their industries" and, more recently, Romme (2016) implies that managers have little shared sense of purpose given their diversity of practice and fragmented knowledge-base. For this reason, it was not actively explored in this study. Yet, Wahurst's (2011, p. 262) reassessment of MBAs from a relational perspective suggests that these programmes play a role in developing a shared sense of purpose through learners 'jointly shaping the constructions of each other', which was borne out in the findings of this study.

Hence, this study contributes to our understanding of managerial professionalism by unearthing executive MBA educator and learner perceptions of it and linking those perceptions to known

factors of professionalism. Figure 2 highlights these linkages in the form a matrix that maps the themes and sub-themes (see Figure 15 in Paper 4) to the factors of professionalism in the pre-field conceptual framework, along with other factors considered in this research journey. The linkages identified in Figure 2 summarise where there appears to be some alignment between the factors of professionalism and participants' perceptions. For example, self-concept appears in the leadership and professional development sub-themes.

Figure 2: Participant Perceptions Mapped to Factors of Professionalism

			Factors of Professionalism					
			Body of Knowledge	Social Agency	Self-Regulation	Autonomy of Judgment	Self-Concept	Sense of Purpose
Participant Perceptions of Managerial Professionalism	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-Theme</i>						
	Breadth of Knowledge	Organisation	●					
		Integrative Thinking	○				○	
		Functions of Business	●					
	Ethical Disposition	Moral Hazard		●				
		Professional Judgment				●		
		Social Responsibility		●			○	
	Behavioural Moderation	Leadership			○		●	●
		Interpersonal Skills			○			●
		Professional Development			○	●	●	●

- strong relationship observed in the study
- weak relationship observed in the study

An examination of these linkages reveals that managerial professionalism has its own unique idiosyncrasies, differentiating it from other occupational forms of professionalism, in particular those of the archetype professions. There is some discrepancy between expertise derived from a systematic body of knowledge of an archetype professional and expertise derived from the breadth of knowledge of a manager. The organised self-regulation of archetype professionals is replaced by individual behavioural moderation of managers. There is some hint as to how a common sense of purpose or commitment to a greater good is manifested in managerial professionalism through integrative thinking and social responsibility. Yet, it is still unclear from the study to what extent this is the case. Lastly, we see how professionalism behaviours valued by employers are honed by executive managers through behavioural moderation. We see, therefore, that managerial professionalism has its own conceptual underpinnings.

The scattering of linkages between themes and factors of professionalism, as indicated by the black dots in Figure 2, suggests the professionalism holds significant currency in the education of executive managers, despite the orthodox view that management is not and, perhaps, never can be professionalised in the same vein as the archetype professions. In this way, we see that professionalism transcends professions themselves, even to occupations, such as management, that are perceived by some (e.g. Malin, 2000) to be counter-ideological to supporting some core aspects of professionalism in the workplace.

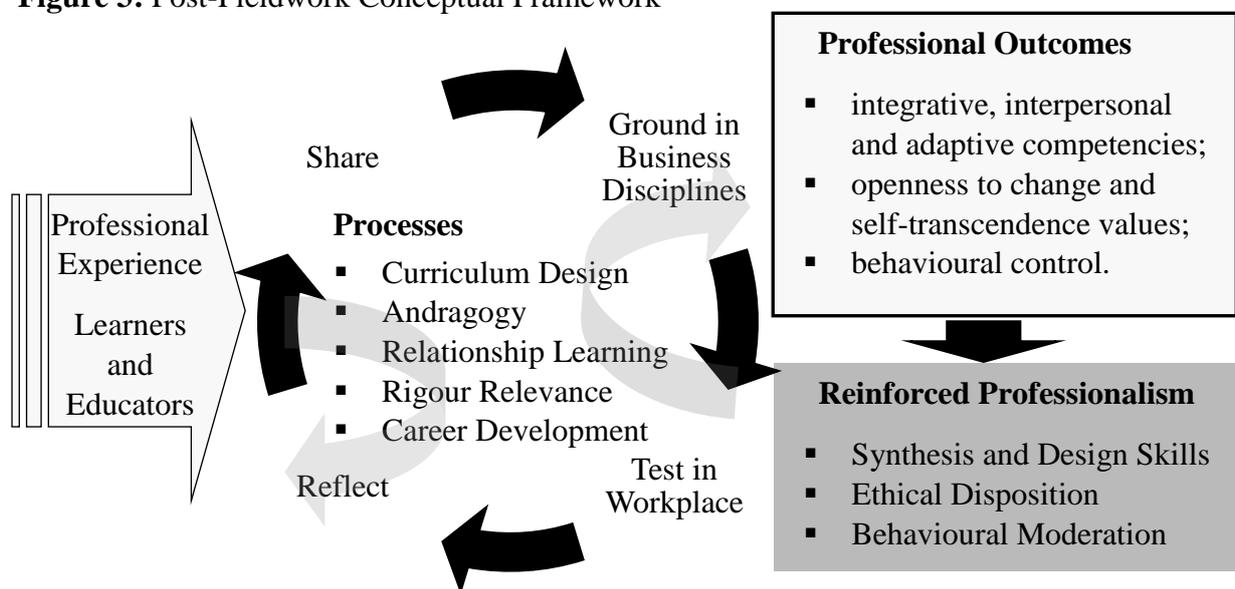
4.3 Our Understanding of the Development of Professionalism in Executive MBAs

Stark et al.'s (1986) framework remains the blueprint for education programmes seeking professional recognition. It fits well with undergraduate programmes where learners are at the early stages of their proto-professionalism development. Through education processes, learners achieve professional preparation outcomes and are progressed through increasing levels of professional practice supported by decreasing levels of scaffolding. This is the essence of the professional model put forward by Somers et al. (2014) in which foundational knowledge is linked to practice-based experiences, albeit with some modifications for management. Whilst this may apply to full-time MBAs, given their young cohorts of learners, the executive MBA poses a different challenge given that learners bring with them substantial experience and that the problems they face are noticeably more complex and ill-defined than those faced by young graduates stepping into their professions for the first time. It appears that executive MBA learners need significant support for developing their inference skills, not their diagnosis or treatment skills. If we are to accept that management knowledge and learning is characterised by integrative thinking, relationality, use of inference and a blend of rules-based and practice-based knowledge, then the challenge for executive MBA programmes is not about adapting pre-conceived models of professional education, e.g. those based on Stark et al.'s (1986) framework, but to devise an alternative model of professional education that best serves its main purpose, namely to develop a professional cadre of executive managers.

So, how might we begin to construct such a model that could accommodate substantial experience as an antecedent to reinforced professionalism? Such a model must recognise the dual nature of management knowledge, some of it which is rules-based and transferred from theory to practice, and some of it which is practice-based, the learning of which is transformative (Kosnik et al., 2013) and derived from participation in social practice. The model must also take account of the reflective practice of executives (Roglio and Light, 2009) in learning how to act appropriately in specific contexts and in also recognising that many

problems disguised by context and can be solved with the help of theory. The model must also take account of the professional maturity of learners. Just as ‘proto-professionalism’ is influenced by opposing processes of attainment and attrition, so too can ‘ultra-professionalism’ be influenced by these forces. With this mind, executive MBA programmes aim to reinforce professionalism by minimising attrition and maximising attainment. However, in the context of developing executive managers, this attainment does not mean delving deeper into one’s background profession, rather going broader, transcending functional boundaries. As learners prepare for leadership, their perceptions of professionalism reflect this transcendence in the breadth of knowledge they must learn and in the breadth of professional contacts (stakeholders) with whom they must engage. Given the notion that professionalism is reinforced and the reflective nature of executive learning, a more appropriate model of learning for executive MBAs is cyclic (e.g. Kolb, 1984). Yet, concurrently, the rules-based component of managerial knowledge implies a more linear relationship between education processes and outcomes. If we accept the themes developed in this study that describe how professionalism unfolds in executive MBAs, then we can reconfigure the pre-field conceptual framework to better reflect this unfolding. Figure 3 presents a post-fieldwork conceptual framework that aims to better reflect the reinforcement of professionalism in executive MBA learners.

Figure 3: Post-Fieldwork Conceptual Framework



The post-fieldwork conceptual framework (Figure 3) implies that executive MBA learners bring significant professional experience on entry. Educators, themselves, are typically highly experienced in managerial practice or researching that practice. Selection processes would also typically screen candidates for high levels of professionalism. This pre-existing experience is shared, grounded, tested in practice-based settings and reflected upon through education

processes congruent with professional development, i.e. curriculum design, andragogy, relationship learning, the intertwine of rigour and relevance and career development. To varying degrees, executive MBA programmes provide a broad curriculum covering the business disciplines and opportunities to synthesise and integrate the knowledge from that curriculum in a diverse range of practice-based settings. These lead to enhanced integrative, interpersonal and adaptive competencies, values of openness to change and self-transcendence and behavioural control, thereby reinforcing learner professionalism. Therefore, as an alternative to the professional preparation model (e.g. Stark et al., 1986), this post-fieldwork conceptual framework offers a reasonable basis for informing executive MBA educators on the embeddedness of professionalism within their programmes. Whilst it helps to explain how learners transcend to managing professional work outside their professional backgrounds, it does not deal with other outcomes that contribute the more holistic learner development. There is the possibility, of course, that badly designed executive MBA programmes may have the opposite effect to that intended. Poor learner selection, didactic teaching, limited synthesis and relationship learning and an over-emphasis on theory may erode professionalism.

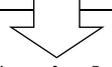
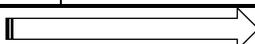
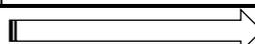
4.4 Our Understanding of Management Education

So, how does this study inform our understanding of executive MBA education? A view that developing organisational competence offers a basis for strategic advantage (Sanchez and Heene, 2004) may explain the executive MBA's popularity with aspiring executives and their employers. It may also explain scholarly focus on the ability to develop competencies relevant to managerial practice (e.g. Rubin and Dierdorff, 2009). Whilst the complexity of management learning might suggest that linking education processes to predefined learning is an oversimplification, if we acknowledge that an emerging emphasis on integration, synthesis and design is the key to the expertise of executive managers, then the study's participants paint a picture of executive MBAs, which contradicts Spender's (2014) claims of homogeneity.

The concluding remarks of Paper 4 noted three categorisations of executive MBA programmes, [1] a category representing a small number of executive MBAs with little or no professionalism embedded, [2] a category representing the vast majority of executive MBAs with one with some professionalism embedded but mainly in the form of a professional development stream, and [3] a category representing a small number of executive MBAs that have been radically revamped to assimilate best-practices for developing professionalism. These categorisations derive from participants comments about their own MBA programmes and are supported, where possible by information in the public domain about these programmes (see Paper 3).

Figure 4 first describes, in abstract terms, these three models by reference to some of the key education processes that support professionalism, such as curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment and feedback, role-modelling and selection. It then describes these three models by reference to the embeddedness of professionalism, in terms of breadth of knowledge, ethical disposition and behavioural moderation. This embeddedness ultimately depends on the model to which an executive MBA programme is most aligned. Hence, Figure 4 provides a useful way to think about the different types of executive MBA programmes on offer by way of the degree to which managerial professionalism is embedded within.

Figure 4: Three Models of Executive MBA Education

Process	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
 Curriculum Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional Focus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interlinking of courses. Opportunities to integrate knowledge in practice settings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesis-oriented curriculum reflects managerial practice.
Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly didactic delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of pedagogical tools for adaptive competence. Some andragogical principles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Andragogy used to develop mature levels of professionalism.
Assessment & Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardised course-based assessment by examination only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative feedback evident in coaching. 360° appraisals in teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of professionalism implicit.
Role-Modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited evidence of relationship learning. Occasional guests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer learning dominant. Role-modelling primarily left to informal curricula. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role models normalise idea of senior management.
Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum entry criteria only and opaque selection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection based on professional experience and potential for development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection based on establishing a balanced team of learners.
Examples	MBA ₂	MBA _{1P} , MBA ₃ , MBA ₄ , MBA ₆ , MBA ₉ , MBA ₁₀ , MBA ₁₂	MBA ₅ , MBA ₇ , MBA ₁₁
 Embeddedness of Professionalism 			
Breadth of Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compartmentalised knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of synthesis skills through consultancy, action research and design activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong evidence of rhetorical skills and evidence-based judgment. Strategic intuition.
Ethical Disposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purely market context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethics primarily taught through lens of CSR, Law and Corporate Governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contexts other than market explored. Separation thesis rejected.
Behavioural Moderation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little support for soft-skills or career development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sprinkling of behavioural support and EQ. Professional development as add-on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship learning in formal curricula. Integrated professional development.

Model 1 represents executive MBAs in which there is little evidence of professionalism. It represents a curriculum that is functional in focus. With little thought given to the synergies of its constituent courses, it transmits compartmentalised and rules-based knowledge based on the business disciplines. Programme delivery tends to be didactic, offering little room for reflective practice, relationship learning or design activities. Assessment of learning tends to focus on controlled course-based examinations and there tends to be a lack of clarity over entry-criteria and selection. This model offers limited support for soft-skills or career development. Whilst this is the model that is most closely associated with the criticism of full-time MBAs (Navarro, 2008), the vast majority of executive MBA providers appear to have moved on from this type of offering, recognising its failures to prepare learners as professional executives.

Model 2 represents executive MBAs in which courses are interlinked with opportunities to integrate knowledge in practice-based settings, such as consultancy projects and action-research. Peer learning is evident, although relationship learning tends to rely on the informal curriculum to provide networking events, industrial visits and so on. Assessment tends to extend beyond examination of knowledge to groupwork, qualitative feedback, psychometric testing and 360° appraisals. Professional experience is the main criteria for entry. Experiential activities that support design thinking, consultancy and mode 2 research (Gibbons et al., 1994) contribute to development of synthesis skills. Whilst ethics is embedded, it is taught through the lens of corporate social responsibility, business law, regulation and corporate governance, reflecting Hühn's (2014) concerns about MBA epistemological and pedagogical underpinnings that promote an analytical and rational view of the world. With a sprinkling of behavioural support, professional development is bolted onto the structure of the programme. Indeed, MBAs that align closely with this model typically have a dedicated professional development stream detached from a curriculum design that teaches the fundamentals of business. Most of the providers in this study appear to offer executive MBAs that align closely with this model.

Model 3 represents an advanced model, a Kuhnian shift of sorts, in which the curriculum is aimed at cultivating design thinking, judgment, creativity and rhetoric to better simulate managerial practice. Providers aligned to this model offer courses in the business disciplines but only as a means to an end. Andragogical principles dominate approaches to teaching and learning. Contexts for management other than the market are inherent in the education processes, providing a balanced view of stakeholder requirements and societal responsibilities and rejecting any notion of a separate morality for business. There are efforts to formalise relationship learning within the curriculum and professional development is integrated into the

programme to ensure a professionally relevant and intellectually stimulating education. The intertwine between rigour and relevance reflects a value of deep-rooted ontological and epistemological pluralism within executive MBA programmes, as indicated in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Rigour and Relevance on Executive MBA Programmes

Characteristic	Rigour	Intertwine	Relevance
Audience	Academic Colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evidenced-Based Practice. ▪ Design Science. ▪ Relevance Testing. ▪ Action Research 	Practicing Managers
In Search of	Understanding (Truth)		Utility (Does it work?)
Nature	Rules-Based Knowledge		Practice-Based Knowledge
Reference	Rooted in Literature		Managerial Challenges
Methodology	Scientific Methods		Unconcerned with Science
Community of Practice	Discipline Specific Accountable to Science		Interdisciplinary Socially Accountable
Reasoning	Robust Logic, Theory, Unbiased Data.		New Insight. Conclusion more important than process.
Epistemology	Usually Positivist		Usually Pragmatic

Only a small number of programmes included in this study have been revamped or are revamping their offerings in line with this model with the lead appearing to be being taken by providers elsewhere, such as Säid Business School (Kimbell, 2011) and Yale (Wallace, 2010).

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Scholars critical of the idea of management as a profession point out that there is no licensing or educational credentialing needed to become a manager. Yet, Keiser (2004) predicts that we are increasingly unlikely to see executive managers without formal management qualifications. This is reflected in employer demand for executive MBA graduates. So, regardless of our views on management as a profession, managerial professionalism and executive MBAs appear inextricably linked. This study contributes to our understanding of managerial professionalism by diagnosing executive MBA educator and learner perceptions of it as an amalgam of synthesis and design, ethical disposition and behavioural moderation and linking them to known developmental factors. In doing so, it shows that professionalism is highly relevant to executive management, an occupation which some argue is only partially professionalised. This study contributes to our understanding of executive MBAs, too, as ultima-professional programmes that reinforce some aspects of professionalism whilst developing others, helping learners grow beyond their specialisms into executive managers that can provide the creativity and rhetoric to lead organisations. Yet, not all executive MBAs are the same. In identifying three models of MBA education, we see differing degrees of embeddedness of professionalism.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

“Any influence that limits hearing, interpreting, and reporting data may be a source of bias”

(Drisko, 1997, p. 193).

5.1 Introduction

It is important to acknowledge that the study has some limitations. These derive principally from the qualitative nature of the research, the findings from which are not generalisable in a statistical sense. As is the case with much qualitative research, interpretation is subject to the lens of the researcher and the perspectives of the study’s participants. The small number of participants negates any potential for systematic comparison between the two participants groups. As a snapshot in time, the study has temporal limitations. Likewise, the conceptual framework is limited to two participant groups. Trust was scoped out of this study, along with other important parameters, such as professional identity. Yet, the issue of trust surfaces frequently in the responses of participants. An analysis of the methodological limitations is first elaborated in relation to the qualitative nature of the research. A discussion follows on the boundary constraints, largely dictated by the conceptual framework, and the time constraints of the study. This discussion of the study’s limitations concludes with the study’s strengths, which offer a basis for future research recommendations in the final part of this section.

5.2 Methodological Limitations

Although the homogeneity of MBA education may support generalisability, it remains inconclusive as to whether the findings transfer to a wider set of participants and to executive MBA programmes outside those included in the study. Yet, it is important to recognise that the credibility of the study derives more from the insider perspectives of its participants. It is left to the readers of this thesis to effectively consider the degree to which the study’s findings inform their own contexts (O’Brien et al., 2014). It must also be remembered that the ill-defined nature of professionalism favours an approach in which narratives are elicited in order to acquire a detailed understanding of educator and learner responses. In dealing with the quality and rigour of the qualitative research undertaken, several steps are outlined to ensure that the study meets Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data (see Section 6.4 in Paper 2). Data analysis procedures are aligned to those of Bazeley and Jackson (2013) in which a constant comparison analysis requires the data is to be inductively coded into themes in a three-step process. Hence, a systematic approach to capturing, analysing and linking data is followed in the research.

The risk of bias is a factor in any qualitative study. Here, two sources of bias are considered: [1] the participants who elicit their views and [2] the researcher who interprets them. The positive disposition of the participants towards executive MBA education is pervasive in their responses, which may suggest that they articulate relatively uncritical views on the issues explored with them. This may have disproportionately resulted in certain views being conveyed during data collection that affect the findings. Nevertheless, in acknowledging the positive disposition of participants towards MBA education, it highlights a highly polarised debate on the nature of management education. Selection bias is also inherent in the research design as learners were selected either on the basis of the researchers' contacts or of recommendations by educators. As an MBA graduate and business school educator, the researcher, too, interprets the findings from a certain standpoint. In essence, the interpretive challenge of this study is found, not in taking what was said by participants on face value, but in considering their perceptions in the context of the literature and the researcher's own experiences. Notwithstanding these issues, this study demonstrates a high level of integrity, which is pertinent to the reflexive and subjective nature of the research.

5.3 Boundary Constraints of the Study

The conceptual framework limits the primary agents to educators and learners. Yet, we know that there are others who exert influence. These include sponsoring employers, accreditation bodies, institutional agents and even the general public. Furthermore, educator perspectives are limited to either those of programme directors or of lecturers responsible for courses linked to the professional development of learners. Learner perspectives are limited to those of graduates. However, perhaps the most significant conceptual limitation of the study was the exclusion of trust as a key aspect to profession. Although trust surfaces in participant responses and in the literature (e.g. Pouryousefi, 2013), it is excluded on the basis that the study focuses one side of the social contract between professionals and society (see Section 6.4). As the study progressed, it also became apparent that professional identity formation processes were not reflected in the evolving conceptual framework. These processes are evident in the executive MBA literature (e.g. Warhurst, 2011), which suggests that there is much more going on during MBA education than the simple translation of formal education processes to predefined outcomes. In recognition of the processual and relational aspects to management education (Hay, 2014), the formation of professional identity in executive MBA learners, in parallel to the unfolding of their professionalism, is recommended as an area for future research. Further research in this area could contribute to better understanding management's jurisdiction.

5.4 Temporal Limitations

This study captures data at a snapshot in time. Studying the role of trust in professionalism would have required a longitudinal analysis to evaluate the impact of professional preparation outcomes on the social contract. Likewise, a longitudinal study based on ethnographic methods could enhance our understanding of the development of professionalism. As desirable as a longitudinal study is, the DBA data collection and analysis processes are limited to a 12 to 18-month window, which precludes any meaningful attempt at it. Views of professionalism are shifting (Evetts, 2009) and this is evident in the different generational attitudes to professionalism (Smith, 2005). Yet, both learners and educators in this study are of a certain age profile and, perhaps, possess certain levels of maturity in their professionalism. We do not hear from younger voices. In this context, age profile is considered to be a limiting factor.

5.5 Strengths of the Study

The strength of this exploratory study rests in its provision of rich qualitative data and the development a conceptual framework for understanding professionalism in MBA programmes. There was always going to be a limited basis on which to undertake valid and scalable quantitative research until such time as an overview understanding of professionalism in management education was diagnosed first. In developing that understanding, this study provides a foundation for a more a systematic quantitative study later. The rich qualitative data, generated from interviews and focus-groups, details many aspects to professionalism and its development. Even if professionalism remains nebulous, the study captures, through robust data collection and analysis, a rich understanding, in context, of what professionalism means to two key agents of executive MBA education. Hence, it offers a basis for explicitly recognising professionalism within the education processes and outcomes of executive MBAs. Whilst the study does not provide any statistically proven relationship between participant perceptions of managerial professionalism and known developmental factors, it offers a fresh perspective on professionalism, normally associated with archetype professions, in an occupation that seems far from professionalised in the traditional sense.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

Taking into account the limitations and strengths of the study, the final part of this section outlines suggestions for a pipeline of future studies. In particular, it focuses on advancing a research agenda for examining how professionalism could be used in executive MBAs and management education to better prepare learners for the complexities of managerial practice.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

“Business schools were thus intended not just to prepare students for careers in management, but also to serve ... to transform management from an incipient occupation in search of legitimacy to a bona-fide profession” (Khurana, 2007, p. 7).

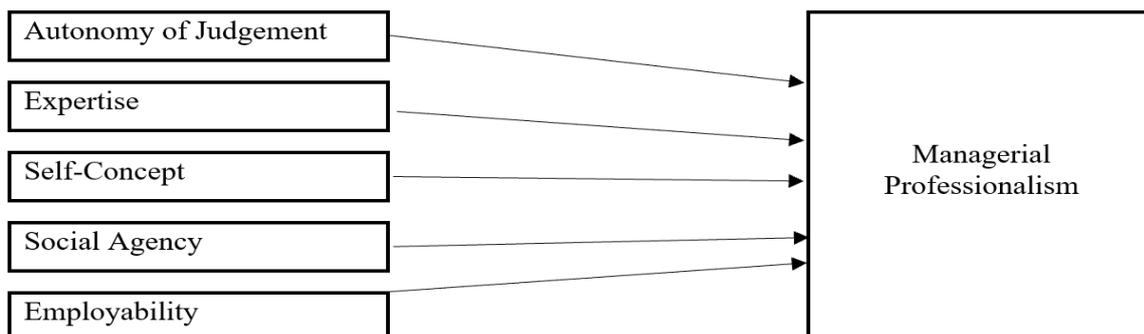
6.1 Introduction

Rubin and Dierdorff (2013) suggests that the quest for professionalism in management education has been largely derailed by pursuit of self-interest, brought into sharp focus by corporate and financial scandals as a distortion of professional ideals. In this context, there is a challenge for management education scholars to tackle the thorny issues surrounding professionalism in management. A proposed research agenda follows in three parts. First, the opportunity to scale this research, as a quantitative study, is explored. Second, it is proposed to explore the two potential conceptual elements of managerial professionalism excluded in this study, i.e. trust (e.g. Bijlmsna et al., 2003; Evetts, 2006) and professional identity (e.g. Watson, 2008) Thirdly, in recognising views of management as something other than a profession, a proposal to explore alternative metaphors is made. Each of these are deal with subsequently.

6.2 Scaling the Research

Whilst the study’s limitations prevent conclusive transferability of its findings, the study provides a basis for a more systematic analysis of the developmental factors of professionalism, incorporating a larger number of participants across many more executive MBAs programmes. Indeed, Nino’s (2012) study of precursors to professionalism in undergraduate business students attempts this by attributing quantitative measures to each of the factors. In the same way, a survey instrument could be designed to examine the relationship between the developmental factors identified in the conceptual framework of this study to the managerial professionalism concept in a much greater number of executive MBA programmes (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Conceptual Framework for Proposed Quantitative Study



Considerable work would be required to define appropriate proxies or measures for the five developmental factors, although this study represents a starting point for articulating what these would likely be. If valid, then differences between learners and educator responses could be measured as could differences in professionalism across programmes.

6.3 Unexplored Aspects of Professionalism

A limitation was noted with respect to the exclusion of trust and professional identity. In the context of professionalism, trust is mentioned in the literature (e.g. Marshal, 1939; Beaton, 2010) and by participants in this study (See Paper 4). It is also mentioned in the context of management (Pouryousefi, 2013) to the extent that a lack of professionalism can lead to distrust of managers (Romme, 2016). For professionals, the public trust them to use their expertise ethically and, in return, professionals trust the public to provide them with autonomy and status. If, on the basis of Pouryousefi's (2013, p. 4) assertion, that managers are professionals because they "appeal to trust-creating and trust-preserving" mechanisms, then the role of trust in managerial professionalism merits investigation. Such investigation has the potential to resolve the shareholder versus stakeholder debate and to moderate unrealistic claims to altruistic notions in managerial professionalism. More importantly, it offers the potential to promote more flexible notions of professionalism to which managers could subscribe. Likewise, formation of professional identity is linked to professionalism, given that identity relies on a common body of knowledge, values and practices to support jurisdictional claims (Somers et al., 2014). The study of 'becoming' a manager (Reedy, 2009) as a legitimate management learning process (Sturdy et al., 2006) is an important avenue for enquiry in executive MBAs.

6.4 Other Metaphors for Management

Some question the relevance of professionalism to management (e.g. Mintzberg, 2004). In particular, there are repetitive references to the flawed nature of management education for its emphasis on scientific approaches. If there is anything that the achievements of executive managers teach us, it is that Aristotelian science cannot not replace the power of human agency to alter situations. The notion that management is a science-based profession along the lines of Simon's (1967) ideals may also be limited. So, if management is not a profession nor a science, then what is it? Perhaps, it is as an art (Spender, 2007) or a practice (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2004). Perhaps a more pluralistic basis for management ontology and epistemology is required. Whatever it is, and clarity is needed, there is a pressing need for further critical scholarship on the mission of business schools and the roles they play in developing managers.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

“If the Executive MBA should equip managers to act wisely and humbly in organisational settings, it must start by helping them understand themselves” (Dalton, 2018, p. 407).

This section of the thesis provided a discussion of the study’s findings in the context of the conceptual framework and wider extant literature on professionalism and management education. Beginning with Schlegelmilch and Thomas’ (2011) reference to managers as gifted amateurs, we were reminded of the study’s background, in which there is a rejuvenated research agenda to better understand how to develop professionalism in management.

A summary of the study’s findings suggests that executive MBA educators and learners perceive professionalism (in a management context) to be an amalgam of [1] synthesis skills, [2] ethical disposition and [3] behavioural moderation. Synthesis skills refer to managers’ abilities to align their own experiential know-how with a breadth of academic business disciplines in designing solutions to complex business problems. Ethical disposition refers to an ability to weigh-up the moral impacts of their creative decisions and judgments. Behavioural moderation refers to managers’ abilities to control their behaviour. The study affirms the relevance of professionalism in an occupation that is partially professionalised but points to some conceptual elements being more important than others. In particular, self-regulation and common sense of purpose appear to be of little relevance to managerial professionalism.

Given the prior experience of their learners, a key finding was that executive MBAs appear to develop professionalism in reverse-order to proto-professionalism processes associated with educating of young professionals. In this context, their education processes are less to do with developing professionalism and more with reinforcing it and/or helping learners to break out of the constraints of their own profession. Five education processes appear to be significant: [1] curriculum design, [2] andragogy, [3] relationship learning, [4] the intertwine of academic rigour with professional relevance and [5] career development. However, another key finding suggests that executive MBAs are not solely focused on professionalism. In fact, it is suggested that there is a range of other benefits to learners that contribute to a more holistic development. Such benefits point to a limitation of the study in that an emergent stream of management education literature looks beyond the translation of education processes into predefined outcomes. There appears to be considerable informal learning in executive MBAs that contribute to learners’ processual and relational skills that, perhaps, warrants further study.

The study's contribution to theory and practice were then outlined. Given its qualitative nature, the study did not articulate any new theory. Rather it provided a fresh perspective on professionalism in a context in which its relevance is highly contested, namely management. It also provided a fresh perspective on how this professionalism plays out in learners at the mature end of the proto-professional spectrum. It was found that professionalism may be either eroded or reinforced, but a more likely scenario is one in which learners transcend the boundaries of their own profession, enabling them to lead and manage professional work. Contribution to practice was articulated in identifying the key education processes that support managerial professionalism, thereby providing practical guidance to management educators seeking to optimise their educational provision for professional outcomes. This guidance cuts across three models of provision, one that is self-obsolescing, one that appears to represent the mainstream executive MBA provision and one, which represents a radical shift in executive MBA education processes to accommodate a greater embeddedness of managerial professionalism.

In outlining the study's limitations, it was acknowledged that these limitations derive primarily from the exploratory nature of the study and the qualitative methods deployed. However, this acknowledgment was not an apology, given that the approach taken was the most appropriate to the context of the study and its research questions. Instead, these limitations have been managed appropriately in the context of constructivist-interpretive philosophy of the research undertaken. There was also due acknowledgment of the study's boundary constraints. In particular, the absence of trust, deliberately excluded, and professional identity formation, the absence of which became apparent as the study progressed, were noted as opportunities for further study. Additionally, the time constraints of the DBA mitigated against undertaking a longitudinal study, perhaps a more comprehensive way to explore the development of professionalism. Three streams for further research were then recommended. The first recommendation focuses on building on this study by seeking to quantify the relevance of the developmental factors identified in this study, such as social agency, expertise, self-concept, autonomy of judgement and employability to the professionalism concept. The second recommendation aims to address the boundary constraints of this study, by proposing an examination of trust and professional identity formation. The third recommendation focuses on exploring alternative views to the controversial view of management as a profession. To conclude, this study has contributed to our understanding of managerial professionalism and how executive MBA programmes reinforce it in their learners and identifies practical steps that educators can take to optimise their educational provision in this regard.

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Section 4: Reflections on the DBA

“Reflection is the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 7).

1. INTRODUCTION

“Sometimes, I feel my brain is overloaded with information – too many ideas, too many opinions and it is almost impossible to make sense of it all. I think it is time to take a break from the reading on all this noise” [03.011.16].

This final section of the thesis submission provides a reflection of reflection-in-action (Schön, 2017) during my DBA studies. As part of the DBA, I was required to maintain a reflective log over the duration of the programme. The log was partly used to record notes, observations and thoughts that would feed directly into this study but also to monitor my own progress (Amabile and Kramer, 2011). In essence, it highlights key achievements and tipping points in my own learning during the DBA. A range of tools and techniques were used, including: storytelling (Morgan and Dennehy, 1997), concept mapping (Novak, 2010), reflecting on critical incidents (Tripp, 1995) and informal recording of notes. As I look back at my notes, they include personal anecdotes, records of events, reflections on academic literature, exploratory thoughts, summary tables, bullet-point summaries of articles, questioning of assumptions, mere opinions and, even feelings of frustration, surprise and happiness.

The purpose of this section is to capture my learning journey, from the initial excitement of commencing the DBA to a sense of relief and of achievement in completing this thesis. This learning has not occurred in isolation of personal or professional life, full of commitments and responsibilities to family, friends, employers and community and intertwined with career transition and emotional challenges. Rather than chronicle my experience, I have articulated it as set of themes. The intent behind this approach is to demonstrate self-reflexivity (Lee, 2089) and critical reflection (Mezirow, 1990). Over my DBA studies, I periodically recorded notes, reflections and observations, presented here in *italics*. As I would have ordinarily not been in the habit of recording these, they, in all likelihood could, be vastly improved. Yet, despite their inadequacies, they have helped to charter my learning as a set of six themes: -

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| [1] becoming an avid reader; | [4] balancing reflection with action; |
| [2] following the research trail; | [5] the big idea versus contribution to knowledge; |
| [3] learning as a discomfort; | [6] the value of research and scholarship; |

Supported by my own records, this section provides a considered discussion of each of these themes in turn. I also offer an explanation for my underlying thoughts as to why I feel that each theme constitutes an important recommendation or nugget of wisdom to any prospective DBA student or someone considering embarking on a career in research.

2. BECOMING AN AVID READER

“Much of the research is a laborious matter of sitting down, reading and taking notes. But, now and again, I find some inspiration – I take the notebook and jot down new ideas, some futile but some may take the research a long way...” [01.03.15].

Perhaps, one of the single biggest developmental benefits from the workshop series over the first two years of the DBA programme came from reading and reflecting on the prescribed academic literature, either as mandatory or recommended reading. David Gray’s (2007) article on reflective tools, the very first prescribed reading as part of the Professional Development workshop in October 2014, is particularly pertinent in this regard. It outlines the application of several useful tools to facilitate reflection. Targeted at management scholars, educators and practitioners, the article demonstrated how *“reflection and action are two sides of the same coin”* and highlighted the fact that reflection involves both *“cognition and feelings”*.

I distinctly recall the facilitator of the workshop using the term ‘busy fools’ to describe managers who are over-focused on action and under-focused on reflection. His comments resonated strongly with me after reading Gray’s (2007) article. Thus, began a journey over which I accrued significant learning from reflecting on the prescribed readings over the first two years. There was no magic formula to this learning and I frequently had to read articles over and over again to internalise the key messages. Nor, was there any established procedural basis for reflection. However, reflections frequently mirrored two steps. The first step typically involved summarising each article, an example of which is provided in Table 1.

Producing these summaries required very little reflexivity but it had a very important function, which was to internalise new pockets of often disconnected knowledge (Murphy and Wright, 1984) by synopsising key points made by the authors. However, in some cases, the knowledge was internalised by offering an opinion on a key aspect of the paper based on prior experience.

“In some ways Boureois’ outline of middle-range theorising is very similar to theory construction in the physical sciences. The problem for social sciences is that they appear to be too immature and disjointed for grand theorizing to succeed as the field is yet to settle on commonly agreed constructs” [22.05.15].

In other cases, I integrated the knowledge from articles into a much larger bank of knowledge (Anderson 1987), linking them either by alignment or contradiction. This allowed me to position articles relative to each other within a much larger research space.

“This article seems to contradict the Gosling and Mintzberg article. Gosling and Mintzberg argue that experience can only materialise after events are reflected upon, implying that experience must be a function of reflection (a key component of learning). Yet, Gray argues that experience does not necessary lead to learning” [05.11.14].

Table 1: Example of a Summarised Article

Christensen, M.C. and Raynor, M.E. (2003), Why Hard-Nosed Executives Should Care About Management Theory, Harvard Business Review [15.05.15]

- *It is difficult for managers to shift through volumes of conflicting theories in search of solutions. A theory can help one company but be fatal for another.*
- *The paper explores how managers can become “consumers” of managerial theory to select practices that will help their business.*
- *For me, to suggest that theory is often impractical is perhaps misplaced. Theories are merely statements that seek to predict which actions will lead to what results and why. Researchers develop theory by refining hypotheses to predict with increasing accuracy how a phenomenon should work in a widening range of circumstances.*
- *The article describe how theories are developed in three steps: [1] observe and describe a phenomenon [2] classify aspects of the phenomenon into categories and [3] formulate a hypothesis of what caused the phenomenon and why*
- *The authors warn against arguing for revolutionary change, putting forward correlation statements masquerading as causation or taking research findings as the final word. Decentralization in Lucent was a fashion-follower. The remedy they chose actually does work but in a different context.*
- *Bad theory can result from impatiently observing a few successful companies and concluding enough to postulate a theory.*
- *Improvements to theory are usually iterative. Researchers use their theory to predict future in various categories. If the theory is successful in its prediction, then they can use it with increasing confidence. When researchers observe something that their theories fail to predict, they can then cycle back and add or remove categories.*
- *In the early stages of theory building, people identify the most visual attributes of a phenomenon that appear to be correlated. But correlation does not mean causation.*

A second step in the reflective process typically involved summarising all articles after each workshop in tabular format, stipulating the authors, year of publication, key methods used in the research, the findings and conclusions (Table 2).

Table 2: Tabular Summary of Prescribed Readings from Workshop 2

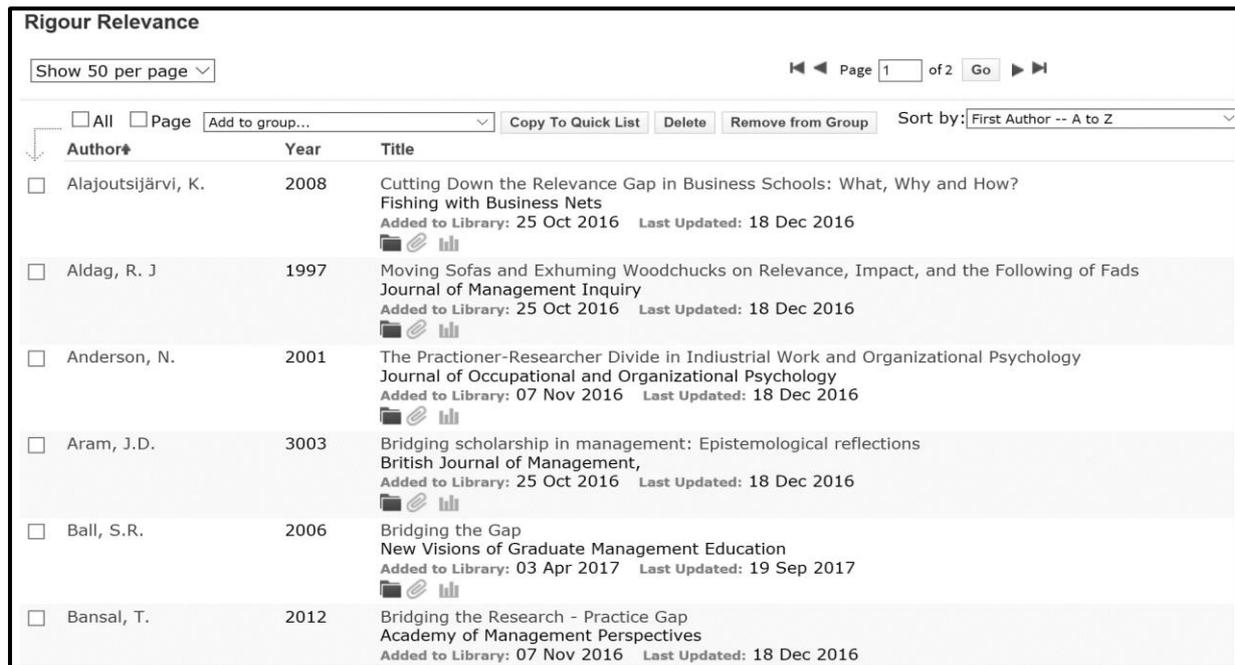
<i>Year</i>	<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Summary of Article</i>
1979	Bourgeois	AMR	Conceptual	List of steps for theory building.
1989	Bacharach	AMR	Conceptual	Outlines criteria for theory evaluation.
1989	Chimezie Osigweh	AMR	Conceptual	Discusses concept travel/ stretch and negotiation approach to concept formation.
1989	Poole VanDeVen	AMR		Identifies strategies to help researchers leverage paradox to advance theory.
1989	Whetten	AMR	Conceptual	Covers the what, how, who, when and where of theory building.
1994	Drucker	HBR	Discussion	Criteria for theory of a business, based on competency, environment and mission.
2001	Husserl	Routledge	Book	Logical Investigations details a philosophical basis from mathematics to logic.
2003	Christensen Raynor	HBR	Discussion	Executives should discern applicability of theories to their problem-solving.
2011	Grant Pollock	AMJ	Discussion	Offers advice for submissions to AMJ based on product, process and pitfalls.
2012	Ragins	AMR	Discussion	Shares insights and reflections about the craft of clear writing.

Whilst this may seem trivial, I believe this practice assisted my learning in several ways. In reflecting on each article, I was able to construct a helicopter perspective on key findings from established authors on a topic during the literature review. Becoming familiar with who said what became a critical step in gaining expert knowledge of a major topic area.

“Beginning to at least make sense now of the journals and publications on MBA education. Tabularising critical parameters – author, year, title, method and findings – has helped to put some structure to my analysis.” [03.05.17].

The technique also proved useful to me for organising my references on the cloud using Endnote. In addition to standard parameters that comprise a bibliographical reference, I was able attach a brief summary of each article. Therefore, even if I could not recall the exact circumstances of comments that I had attributed to particular publications, the records that I created facilitated their retrieval. See Figure 1 for an example.

Figure 1: Sample Archive of References using Endnote



The one skill I did not master during the early phases of my literature review was being able to use the tools that Endnote offers to analyse the references that I had stored on its database.

“If I had the opportunity to undertake the literature review again, I would use the functionality that EndNote offers to provide a more systematic analysis” [15.7.17].

In any literature review, there exists a point where enough literature has been studied to “do a synthesis, a bringing together of key themes from the extant literature which culminates in a set of refined research objectives and a conceptual framework” (WIT, 2017, p. 44). Yet, I found that this point is not fixed. Having completed Paper 1, I realised that further study of the literature was required to conceptualise the development of professionalism.

“I need to study the Hilton and Slotnick (2005) paper as a basis for conceptualising the development of professionalism from reflection and experience. This [paper] has significant implications for my conceptual framework” [14.9.17].

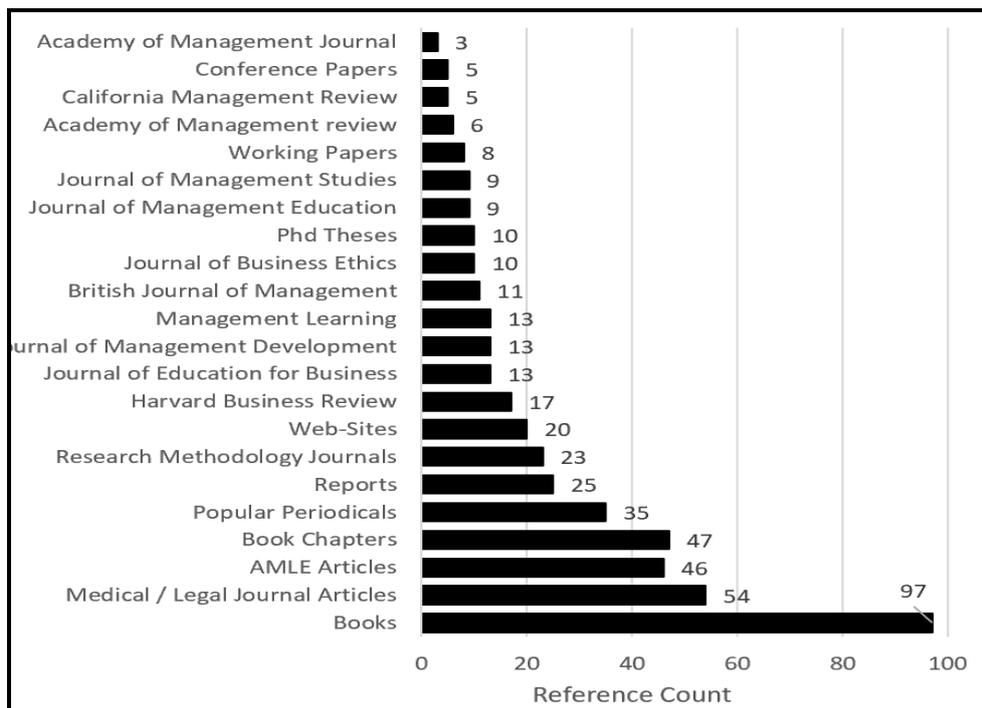
Although the focus of Paper 2 was supposed to be on methodology, I unexpectedly found myself having to read an additional strand of literature on psychosocial and moral development as a basis for developing professionalism (e.g. Pinching, 1999; 1998; Rest and Narvaez, 1994; King and Kitchener, 1994). Likewise, when writing Paper 3, I recognised a separate strand of literature specifically on executive MBA programmes that needed to be studied. Two developments in my abilities became more apparent as I became more and more familiar with the literature. Firstly, I found myself being able to recall, almost instinctively, seminal articles

that either corroborated or refuted my own findings or viewpoints. Secondly, I was able to identify the main research journals associated with particular topics that cut across my research.

“Nearly all the relevant articles seem to be in AMLE, Management Learning or Harvard Business Review” [14.3.17].

A summary of the readings used to support my thesis submission in Figure 2 show that, whilst my reflection on relevant articles was not entirely accurate at that time, it, at least, signalled that I was becoming much more aware of sources of relevant information.

Figure 2: Summary Statistics on References Supporting my Thesis



So, what does this short reflection convey about my reading experiences? First, a large volume of reading is necessary to acquire the necessary expert knowledge. Second, considerable reflective effort is invested in making meaning from those readings. Perhaps, the most challenging part of all is providing a synthesis of the literature. Little tricks, such as summarising the key points of various articles, producing summary tables of streams of literature and recording reflective comments on the literature, can help significantly to clarify thought processes and to make logical linkages. Whilst in retrospect, I could have been much more systematic with my literature review, such an endeavour presupposes that intimate knowledge of existing literature prior to undertaking the review and possessing the technical skills for a systematic analysis. Notwithstanding, becoming an avid reader and, indeed, a reflective reader was key to developing the necessary skills for the academic writing of a thesis.

3. FOLLOWING THE RESEARCH TRAIL

“I feel like I am going around in circles ... there’s no breakthrough and there is no logical flow to the research. It’s just one person’s opinion versus another” [06.02.17].

I found the toughest part of the DBA the transition from the coursework to undertaking the literature review and writing the conceptual paper (i.e. Paper 1). Although I had narrowed my research topic to management education and, in particular, the criticisms of it, I began to become hung-up on what became a cacophony of ideas. In not making any leaps forward, despite investing countless hours reading articles over and over, I arrived at a point where I felt I was stuck, so much so that I considered making a fresh start on a different strand of research.

“I have [read] as many articles as I can find ... they are highly philosophical and neither empirical nor theoretical. I’m just all out of ideas.” [09.09.17]

However, a critical incident, a tipping point of sorts, came in the form of some advice from one of my supervisors to follow the research trail. My supervisor suggested that I concentrate on articles in which I was most interested, to look at who had cited these articles and then to read their articles. In this way, I could maintain a summary spreadsheet of all of my readings. In following through on this advice, I constructed a spreadsheet that included five fields: [1] a reference for each article, [4] its topic, [2] its research objectives or research questions, [3] its methods, [4] its key findings and [5] citing authors. Where an article did not fit strictly with this format (e.g. an opinion piece or a presidential address) the salient details were still recorded. Table 3 shows a sample extract from one of the spreadsheets that I constructed.

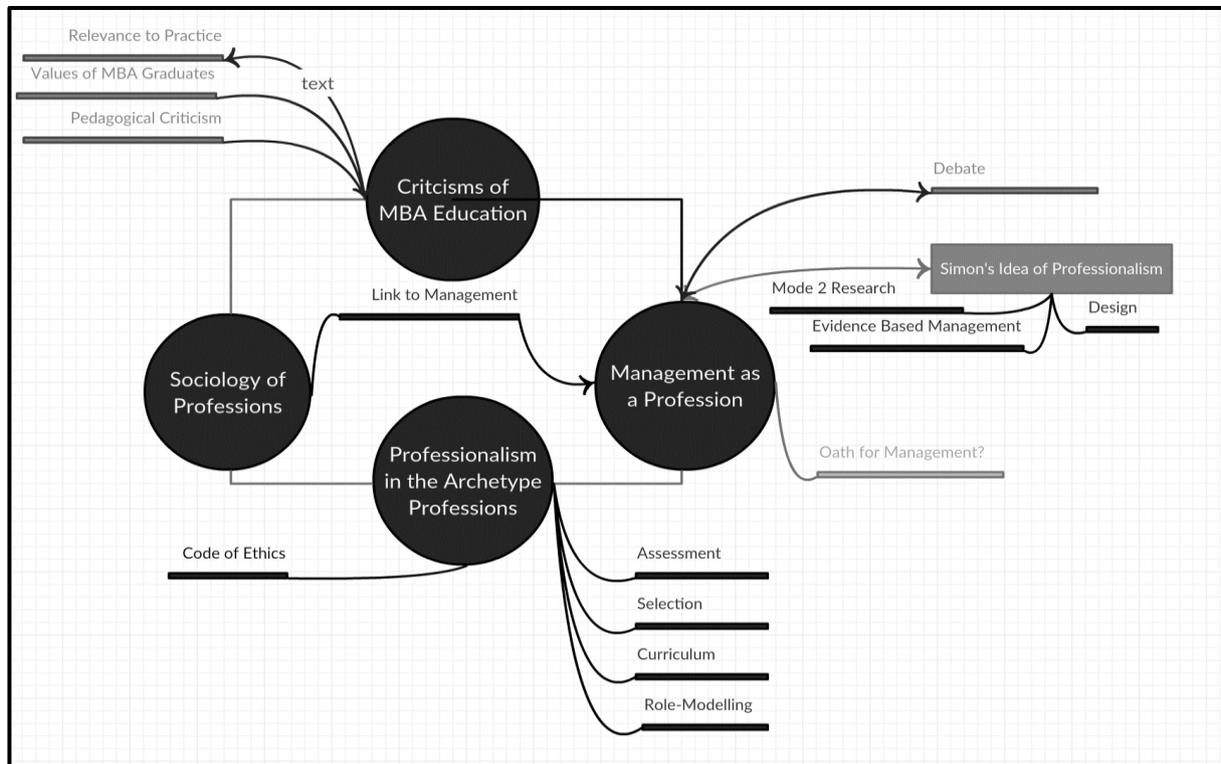
Table 3: Sample Tracking of Articles

Reference	RQ or Proposition	Methods	Key Findings	Citing Authors
Thorpe, R., Eden, C., Bessant, J. and Ellwood, P. (2011). Rigour, relevance and reward: introducing the knowledge translation value-chain. <i>BJM</i> , 22(3), 420-431.	What skills might researchers require to engage across the knowledge translation value chain? H: Relevance emerges over a long period of time and is socially constructed by users.	Conceptual Paper Value Chain comprises five stages: [1] theory development, [2] theory to practice, [3] engagement of users, [4] widespread dissemination, [5] usable outputs.	133 papers dedicated to rigour relevance topic. Emphasis on creating relevant knowledge through individual management researchers engaging with users in various ways. Evolution from Mode 1 to Mode 2 is also discussed.	Willmott, H. (2012) Sulej, J. (2015) Saunders et al. (2011)

Although this may, in retrospect, have seemed like an obvious thing to do, it helped greatly in organising my reflections on the literature that I needed to study. Moreover, by adding an extra field to the spreadsheet, I was then able to categorise the articles into different research streams and to identify relationships between streams. Figure 3 depicts a mind-map, which I created in

supporting my literature review, outlining categories or sub-categories of research. Whilst this map never made it into the conceptual paper, it reflected my thinking at the time.

Figure 3: Mind Map of Different Research Streams



There were several eureka moments in synthesising these research streams. Rubin and Dierdorff’s (2013) article on building a better MBA suggested the idea of exploring the prospect of reconfiguring MBAs as professional qualifications.

“I really like this idea! What would professionalism mean in a management context? It’s probably fair to say that many people would consider the MBA to be liberal-arts education rather than a professional one” [14.7.17].

Likewise, Somers et al.’s (2014) article linking professionalism to managerial work and learning provided some credibility to enquiry into professionalising the MBA and it was easy to spot the contrast in the number of articles on medical professionalism and on management professionalism. So, what learnings did I take from this experience?

First, it is very easy to become lost in the literature. It is important to have some mechanism to track readings and clarify thinking. My supervisor’s suggestion to follow the citations of papers proved particularly useful in categorising research streams and building a comprehensive overview of the literature. Online tools, such as Google Scholar or Web of Science, can be used for this purpose (Mingers and Lipitakis, 2010).

4. LEARNING AS DISCOMFORT

“I can see why Ibrahim (2011) equates the doctorate to a transformation of learning. If there is as much anxiety and discomfort as Ibrahim suggests then it is going to be a long an arduous journey” [11.11.14].

Ibrahim’s (2011) article on demystifying the doctoral journey was one of the first articles I read as part of my DBA studies. It has proved somewhat prophetic! As a transformational journey, the DBA has generated personal anxiety over a range of issues, such as: selecting a research topic, working alone, lack of social integration, coping with the rigorous scrutiny of your work and finishing on time. If my own experiences are normal, then there will inevitably be major hurdles to overcome for all DBA students, which can slow progress along the journey.

“I am now so far behind that I will probably miss the deadline for the submission of the very first paper ... not sure what I am going to do now.” [01.03.17].

For me, the first major hurdle was crafting the conceptual paper. My struggle to meet a deadline created enormous anxiety. Will this work be accepted as being up to standard? Will I complete on time? I was faced with two choices: [1] I could have buried my head in the sand, learning nothing, or [2] I could confront the challenge. Ultimately, it is was some coercive words from family members that got me over the line, the point being that learning appears to be a balance between, anxiety, on one hand, and coercion, on the other. As Schein (2002) suggests, learning takes time and appears to occur when coercion overcomes learning anxiety. Table 4 contrasts two sets of extracts that illustrates this point.

Table 4: Extracts from Reflective Log Illustrating Anxiety and Coercion

<u>Anxiety</u>	<u>Coercion</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I spent hours with a dictionary reading through these few papers ... just trying to figure out what they mean” [12.04.15].</i> ▪ <i>‘I’m still no wiser ... I feel so far behind the other students on the course ... just no idea where to start.</i> ▪ <i>“Some good feedback from my supervisors this week but a mountain of edits to complete”. [27.02.17].</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“Today, I made a decision to return to Ireland to focus on my doctorate ... not going to let this pass me by” [01.04.16].</i> ▪ <i>“If I miss this deadline, it will feel that the first three years of the DBA will have been for zero ...” [18.09.17].</i> ▪ <i>“Spending time in West Cork away from everyone for next three weeks ... got to get this done” [01.06.18].</i>

A key point in these examples is that anxiety, whilst perfectly normal, can become overwhelming, and thereby negatively affect learning. After finally completing my conceptual paper, I can recall comparing my struggles to a secondary school experience many years ago.

“I was getting As and Bs in all my other subjects but struggling badly with Mechanical Drawing. My drawings were messy, error strewn, and I never seem to complete my class assignments on time. It wasn’t until my father noted his displeasure at my grades that I decided to do something about [it]. As painful as the message was, I doubled-down, spending hours at home perfecting my drawing skills and figuring out what I was doing wrong. I went on to get an A in my exams. This last year [of the DBA] seems very much like déjà-vû. It was as if I had developed a psychological impediment to getting past the first paper. Is getting stuck just a necessary part of learning?” [01.01.17].

In talking with other doctoral students, I believe that my experience of discomfort from learning is not untypical. There will be experiences of vulnerability, harsh criticism of your work, social isolation and even feeling of failure. My advice, therefore, to any prospective doctoral student would be to brace for some degree of normalisation of these experiences and to embrace learning as discomfort. As Brown (2016, p. 5) indicates, “the brain wants a pattern to keep us safe, and it wants a story to make sense of what’s happening, even if that story is a ... shitty first draft”. However, eventually we arrive at the real story.

It is important, therefore, to put in place the necessary coping mechanisms, such as exercise, mental breaks, time for family and friends, supports from your supervisors, so emotional challenges are not absorbed alone (Ali et al. 2007). It is also important to try to limit stress to learning only, so focus and attention is induced on the relevant subject matter (Joëls et al., 2006). I finish this short reflective piece on learning discomfort with an extract from my reflective logs, shortly after having Paper 1 accepted.

“Yesterday was probably the happiest day I have had during my DBA studies for quite some time ... the cloud hanging over me for the last year seems to be finally lifting. I will sleep soundly and with renewed energy know that I am good enough to get this done.” [04.07.17].

So, as much as learning discomfort may feel overbearing at times, there is always light at the end of the tunnel. Success in transforming from unconsciously incompetent to consciously competent (Beeler, 1999) seems largely predicated on trusting the DBA processes, as arduous and as humbling as these processes may seem.

5. BALANCING REFLECTION AND ACTION

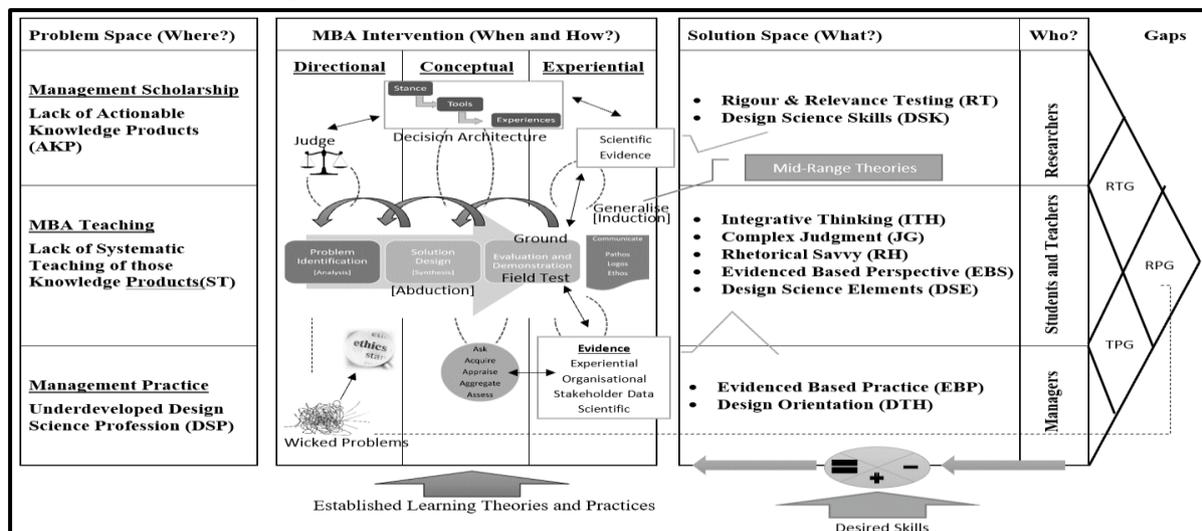
“There comes a point where I have to stop thinking about what I am going to write and just get on with it!” [01.05.17].

Maintaining a balance of reflection and action has been a constant theme in this thesis (e.g. Roglio and Light, 2009), in the wider literature on management learning (e.g. Gray, 2007) and, indeed on learning in general (e.g. Dewey, 1993). It applies equally to the DBA. A particular challenge for me arose after what seemed like a minor point from one of the examiners after presenting the conceptual paper. The point made was that professionalism is developed rather than acquired. I had to think about this as I was unsure whether or not to agree with him.

“It’s clear that having reflected on the issue [whether professionalism is acquired or developed] that there is a substantial body of literature to suggest active psychological and moral development of professionalism. Hilton and Slotnick’s proto-professionalism model fits the bill well I like the fact [that the model reflects] the possibility of professionalism being eroded” [15.08.17].

Had I dismissed the examiner’s suggestion, I most likely would have ignored an entire stream of research and relied on an inadequate conceptual framework. Sometimes, it pays to reflect carefully, even going back to the drawing board if necessary. Yet, whilst managers are sometimes stereotyped for their overemphasis on action (Johns, 2000), there is, perhaps, the risk for researchers to over-reflect, leading to anxiety and inaction (Vince, 1996). Looking back at my early attempts at my conceptual framework (e.g. Figure 4), they were over-complicated. These attempts tried to reflect far too much, which resulted in it explaining very little.

Figure 4: First Attempt at Conceptual Framework



6. THE BIG IDEA VERSUS CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

“My initial reaction to the suggestion to focus [my research] on MBAs was how dull can you get, after working at a strategic level for several years. Yet, the more I think about it... it seems like my best bet at contribution to knowledge, however small that is” [15.02.17].

If there is one nugget of advice that I could pass on to prospective DBA students, then it would be not to look for the big killer idea but rather to focus on something achievable that could make an incremental contribution to knowledge. I probably learned this rather belatedly. By nature, I am a divergent thinker. I tend to look at the big picture and, occasionally, I am accused of being a dreamer. In retrospect, I spent far too long looking at the ‘big picture’ of the research landscape on business schools and management education. Reflecting on the very first draft of my conceptual paper, much of the supporting literature (e.g. Cheit, 1985; Noori and Anderson, 2013; Juusola, 2015) mirrored the strategic nature of my role at the time but it offered little practical insight into proposing a suitable piece of research for a DBA.

“I really like these papers, but they offer little help in nailing down a suitable study [for the DBA]. They are either highly philosophical or strategic nature. I don’t see any possibility for implementing something on the ground using on these papers” [13.02.17].

One of the challenges to narrowing from an initial set of ideas to a research topic, to a refined set of research questions resides in mindset. Managers lean towards a mindset that is synthetic whereas researchers lean towards one that is analytic. In the analytic mindset, there is a focus on breaking things down to their fundamental elements, to discover, whereas in the synthetic mindset, there is a focus on combining fundamental knowledge to create and invent. The difference between the two mindsets is analogous to comparing research with development or invention with application. A particularly useful way to evaluate if the research is sufficiently narrowed is to examine the clarity of the research questions and of the conceptual framework.

“I think the research questions are now sufficiently grounded in the issues raised from the literature review ... and underpinned by professionalism theory and the conceptual framework captures the key concepts identified” [02.05.18]”.

“The Stark et al. framework provides a basis for the framework ... it conceptualises academic programmes preparing students for entry into professions” [01.017.18].

Hence, a key focus of the research proposal should be on arriving at a set of research questions grounded in the literature (and a practical problem) with the support of a conceptual framework that captures the relevant concepts.

7. THE VALUE OF RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

“When I look back on my DBA thesis in ten years’ time, my hope is that my, or related papers, will be well-cited and reflect a sea-change in management education practices based on some of the ideas and suggestions I have put forward “[15.05.18].

One of my motivations for pursuing the DBA in 2014 was that I felt, at that time, that I had flatlined. I had spent over a decade in a sector of higher education that was primarily vocational in nature in which the value placed on knowledge is firmly linked to its applicability in practice. I now longer felt challenged by this viewpoint. As indicated by my notes in preparing for the very first assignment on the DBA, I wanted to prove to myself that I could think at a different level. My stated aims were to: -

“complete a systematic study informed by theory of an interesting and relevant subject matter related to business or management practice” [03.11.14].

“conduct original research that would add something new to the existing body of knowledge in the subject matter” [03.11.14].

So, even from the beginning of the DBA programme, I was prepped to consider both the knowledge creation and knowledge application aspects to my research. As I have discovered, the issue of theory versus practice (or rigour versus relevance) is an age-old problem not only in the field of management but, in many fields.

“The literature on management education seems to regurgitate remedies for the theory-practice gap and highlight the, so-called double hurdle of rigour and relevance. I can’t understand what’s so unique about management that they seem unsurmountable”. [03.11.17]

Put simply, there was, is and probably will be an ever-present tension between knowing and doing, not just in business but in other professional schools, such as medicine, engineering, law etc. However, two journal articles during my studies stood out in informing this issue.

“Alajoutsijarvi’s (2008) article provides a very interesting perspective on the relevance of management scholarship. He points out that ‘relevance’ derives from the French word, which means ‘aiding’ or ‘helping’. But this does not mean ‘prescription’ or ‘immediate assistance’. For me, relevance is very much in the eye of the beholder. Management research, may help!” [03.11.17].”

“Whereas Spender (2013) distinguishes between two types of value creation, one theoretical and the other practical, Thorpe et al. (2011) indicates there is actually a continuum of these, ranging from theory development, to articulating the theory’s relationship with practice, to engaging with users, to dissemination and to prescribing its use.” [04.11.17]

So, whilst there is a tendency to immediately dichotomise theory and practice, or rigour and relevance, it does not have to be this way. In fact, Pasteur places them, not at two ends of a spectrum, but orthogonally to each other. My view on the relevance of management research has, therefore, change over the duration of my studies from one in which I would have leaned towards believing in the irrelevance of managerial research to leaning towards a belief that relevance emerges over time, that rigour and relevance are not opposable views and that it takes a concerted effort by practitioners and researchers, together, to articulate relevance. Therein lies part of my motivation for pursuing this study.

“There seems to be a noticeable correlation between the perpetual debate on rigour and relevance and the ongoing criticism of MBAs. This correlation seems important ... employers recruit MBA graduates that are educated by management researchers, who have, at least in theory [if you’ll excuse the pun] internalised management research knowledge”. [06.11.17].

“I think Simon’s analogy – no reason why physics should be useless nor why inventory control should be intellectually stimulating – is really pertinent to the debate on rigour and relevance in management” [16.11.17].

There seems to be multiple suggestions in the literature that management business schools pursue management research as an end to itself. Yet, I don’t quite understand where this is coming from ... virtually research funding requires [applications] to demonstrate impact and potential application” [19.11.17]

If management is to become a legitimate profession and business schools are to become a professional school, then management educators and scholars will need to deal effectively with the challenges of pursuing two types of value, [i] knowledge and [ii] application. Abandoning either cannot be within their charter. Although business schools probably fare worse than other professional schools, such as medical or law schools, in this regard, this thesis clearly demonstrates that they have made some significant progress in catching up. It is in this context, that we see the potential for Herbert Simon’s (1967, p. 15) idea for an “explicit, abstract, intellectual theory of the processes of synthesis and design” to be realised.

8. FINAL COMMENTS

“The current situation with training managers bears a great resemblance to the medical training situation in the 1990s, which could constitute an argument in favor of educating management students in the principles of evidence-based practice” (Barends, 2015, p. 29).

On reflecting on the extent to which I believe the study addresses the research questions, I am drawn to Eric Barends thesis comparing the status quo of management education to that of medical training in the 1990s. It is evident that professionalism is embedded in executive MBAs and that this embeddedness is deepening through synthesis-oriented interventions, such as evidence-based management, design thinking and training in ethical reasoning, judgement and rhetoric. Diversity of practice and fragmented knowledge exist as they do in medicine. Yet, they cannot be excuses for management scholars to neglect systemising management’s knowledge base. Indeed, it appears plausible that an overarching set of competencies, values and behaviours for professional executives in strategic roles transcend contextual limitations.

Indeed, Barends (2015) depiction of medical education involving problem-based learning, peer learning, reflection, coaching, teamwork, integrating scientific evidence into practice appears similar to the direction in which executive MBAs are moving today. The three-tier movement in this direction may be problematic given that MBAs, who are dragging their heels, could tarnish those MBAs that are innovating. With respect to the ethical component of managerial professionalism, there have been attempts to replicate the Hippocratic Oath (e.g. Escher and Anderson, 2010). Yet, it is difficult to see how acceptance of such an oath can gain traction without acknowledging the creative nature and political realities of managerial roles, which are tilted away from regulation. Ethics is intertwined with increasingly complex global challenges, such as wealth distribution, environmental sustainability, taxation on capital flows etc. This study highlights evidence to suggest that executive MBAs are exposing their students to this complexity in their decision-making and ethical judgements. Like in medicine, there also appears to be behavioural norms, which managers are expected to assimilate. These behaviours are visible in their leadership roles. In the absence of self-regulation, behavioural moderation appears all the more important. It is, perhaps, for this reason that executive MBA programmes place such a premium on supporting relationship learning and interpersonal skills development.

Thus, despite the contested nature of management as a profession, this study finds that professionalism, in particular a managerial form, carries significant resonance with executive MBA educators and learners as a metaphor for improving the practices of their field.

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