ZIMBABWE’S MOST PREFERRED MBA PROGRAM

LOCAL MBA EDUCATION AT CROSS ROADS?

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Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 4

Survey Methodology ..................................................................................................................... 5

Results ........................................................................................................................................ 5

Which MBA Degree do you prefer? ............................................................................................... 7

What can be done to improve the quality of our MBA graduates? .................................................. 9

Observations ................................................................................................................................. 10

Recommendations ......................................................................................................................... 11
Introduction

We have all seen and experienced corporate scandals of unimaginable proportions in many companies in Zimbabwe since dollarisation. These failures cut across so many sectors of our economy today. In the financial sector it is properly dressed and it is called “curatorship,” in other sectors there is no name for it. Shareholders, clients and employees are left shell shocked when their beloved firm suddenly succumbs to death. The surprising thing is that we have very educated managers but the company performance we are seeing does not match their credentials.

In 2011 we undertook a survey of employed Zimbabweans. 47.78% of the participating 858 employees were managers. 47.90% of the participating managers held a post graduate degree, 26.70% of the managers had an undergraduate degree and only 21.00% had a diploma. Many organisations are putting preference on applicants with a post graduate degree when managerial vacancies arise. The most popular of these post graduate degrees is the Master of Business Administration.

Zimbabwe has 13 operational universities. These are University of Zimbabwe, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe Catholic University, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe Open University, Lupane State University, Great Zimbabwe University, Solusi University, Africa University, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Bindura University of Science Education, Women University in Africa and Gwanda State University. Of these 7 offer an MBA program.

It is often assumed that once a person has gone through an MBA program their performance significantly increase. If anything, the harsh operating environment that charasterised our economy between the period 2007 – early 2009 put to test the caliber of our MBA graduates. If indeed the goal of undertaking an MBA is to enhance understanding of business operations and together with it overall managerial competency why do we have so many qualified managers but yet so many poorly performing companies? This research has been done with this perspective in mind.
Survey Methodology

A questionnaire with 5 questions was emailed to managers and executives on our email mailing list. The questions asked the respondents for their opinion on a variety of issues related to MBA education in Zimbabwe. A total of 62 executives of varied age groups, education levels, gender and functions responded to the questionnaire. SurveyMonkey was also used to collect data. In all instances, all universities were listed and the executives were asked to rate/ select the appropriate university depending on the question. Collected responses were subsequently analyzed and interpreted to the production of this report. All analysis was done using SPSS.

Results

Based on your experience with an MBA holder which university produces the most productive and high performing students?

Our assessment suggests that the University of Zimbabwe is the most reputable university offering MBA program. 45.00% of the respondents indicated the University of Zimbabwe as producing the most productive and highly performing MBA students. This was followed by the National University of Science and Technology (32.00%), Midlands State University (13.00%) and Africa University (10.00%). It is important to note that though other universities that offer MBA’s such as Women University in Africa, Great Zimbabwe University and Zimbabwe Open University were listed, none of the survey respondents felt the students from these universities were as competitive.
Based on your experience with an MBA program, rate the quality of MBA graduates from each of the following universities: University of Zimbabwe, National University of Science and Technology, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe Open University, Great Zimbabwe University, Africa University and Women University in Africa.

As mentioned above, we believe that the current most competitive MBA program is the one offered by the University of Zimbabwe. 78.00% of the survey respondents said that based on their experience, the performance of employees who went through the University of Zimbabwe MBA program was either very acceptable or completely acceptable. The second most preferred MBA program is the one offered by the National University of Science and Technology. 76.00% of the participants indicated National University of Science and Technology. 29.00% of the survey respondents said that based on their experience, the performance of employees who went through Midlands States University program was either very acceptable or completely acceptable. Also 29.00% of the participants highlighted that Africa University MBA program produces productive and high performing MBA graduates. Only 6.00% of the survey respondents said that based on their experience, the
performance of employees who went through Zimbabwe Open University program was either very acceptable or completely acceptable.

Which MBA Degree do you prefer?

Managers are not going to simply accept an MBA degree at face value; if anything, they are very choosy as to where a subordinate gets their MBA. For instance 45.90% of the participating managers said they preferred local MBA’s over others (South African, European, American, Asian and Australian) – only 16.39% of the respondents were indifferent. What this tells us is that if you have an American MBA, when assessing suitability of qualifications, there is 1 in every 2 chances that a person with a local MBA will be preferred.
Also the participants were asked which programme they would prefer for their employee to undertake between MBA Degree and a Leadership Development Programme (LDP). 32.30% of the respondents would prefer MBA Degree whilst 17.70% selected LDP, however 50% indicated that they would prefer their employee(s) to do both programmes as each program would cover where the other program lacks.
What can be done to improve the quality of our MBA graduates?

Our research shows, beyond the modules and the structure of the overall program, recruiting managers and executives still have concerns with the degree to which MBA programs are in harmony with the expectations and needs of industry. Most (29.79%) of the executives that responded to our survey said that MBA programs must be more practical than they are academic. Similarly, 13.83% of the participating executive asserted that MBA program modules must be taught by industrialist (that is people with hands on experience in industry). Also the participants indicated that MBA should be offered to the working class or experienced individuals who have an insight of what is happening in the business world this was stated by 10.64% of the executive. Participants also highlighted that not only experience should be taken into consideration for applicants but also the entry requirements should be more stringent, individuals with at least 2:1 and above class degree should only be taken for the MBA program, this was suggested by 10.46% of the respondents. 10.46% stated that modules offered under an MBA Degree must be relevant to the operating environment.
**Observations**

Our findings suggest that the University of Zimbabwe MBA graduates are currently the most preferred in industry. The determining factor in preference is performance. To be deemed successful, after going through the MBA program, a positive change in the performance of the employee must be seen.

Our research confirms the general hypothesis that performance improves after going through an MBA program, but it also comes with a health warning on the perceived quality of some local MBA programs and graduates. Whilst most of the responding managers affirmed that the performance of their subordinates improved after going through the MBA
program not all of them feel that the value of an MBA program from the different universities is the same.

Prospective MBA applicants and company personnel responsible for training and recruitment need to be aware that it is not just a matter of completing an MBA. There are issues of university credibility, scope of the program, relevance of the modules, skills and competencies to be acquired – amongst others – that are very important and need to be considered before enrolling for an MBA program. With a typical MBA program costing US$ 2,400 per academic year and added to this the productive time spent by employees studying or attending lessons – it is important to begin to ask: is the MBA really worth it OR perhaps, is it all sufficient?

Some of our key observations from this research have been that an MBA program in itself is insufficient in developing a fully competent manager. Most MBA programs are only as important in grounding an employee on how to manage the various functions of the business but they fall short of helping students drive innovation, entrepreneurship and productivity in their employing organisations. These are management imperatives we believe are needed now more than ever if we are succeed at transforming our economy to become a globally competitive one. In addition, we have also argued for the need to improve to enrolment criteria by focusing more on recruiting applicants who are serious about adding value to their employing organisation and communities. Only in this way can we have managers who can competently lead our companies to success.

**Recommendations**

A competitive and relevant MBA program is one that is designed to help graduates identify and solve local operational problems. Arguably, there is no value in graduates spending two years studying foreign business processes and operational risks which all too often do not harmonize with a third world economy such as ours. Similarly, employees and employers alike will get no value in doing a local MBA whose modules are generic (that is not customised to meet local management expectations and key operational issues).
The goal of the MBA program is to prepare learners for business and management. MBA programs, like any other learning programs, exist to create an environment where learners will be able to gain knowledge about business and learn how to manage a business or become a part of a management team. In general, MBA programs have changed with the changing environment and are now offering more modules that are designed to prepare learners to manage business. An example here is the inclusion of information technology (IT) into the curricular.

A university whose number one goal is to simply increase MBA enrolment numbers and will therefore take any applicant is on an unsustainable that will soon backfire. As universities release more and more MBA graduates focus will begin to move away from the qualification in itself to the accrediting university and the performance of the graduate. The primary criteria as to which university will be preferred will be the performance of the graduates. We believe that to maintain credibility, universities must begin to focus more on the caliber of applicants that they are admitting into their programs.

We have mentioned in this report that the primary objective of an MBA program is to help the students enhance their managerial competency. The key word here is “managerial.” Not everyone that is being admitted into an MBA school is managerial material and this is discrediting the accrediting universities. No matter how good the MBA program is and even if MBA facilitators teach their students very well, if the initial selection criteria of the program did not select students on their leadership potential both the student and the tutors are wasting their time.

MBA tutors, students and company managers alike must understand that in reality an MBA program can only supply knowledge, skills, relationships, and many other opportunities but it cannot provide leadership talent, passion, and purpose which many of our company needs today. Companies are looking for talented managers, managers who are passionate about what they do and are fired up and ready to inspire their teams to accomplish feats for themselves and their employers. We believe that truly MBA material must prove beyond a doubt that they are already adding value to their work teams and the communities that they
live in. The key question that should be therefore asked at recruitment into an MBA program is: “please demonstrate what value you are already adding to the organisation that you are working for and your community?”

The role of managers is to add value. We have heard debates about the minimum years of experience a person should have before being enrolled into an MBA program or what the minimum age of enrolment should be? Whilst we believe that maturity (through age) and exposure (through experience) are important, we believe that more important is the value added by the person because this is what managers are supposed to do.