An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Business Simulation Course at Payap University

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DECLARATION

This Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institute, college or university except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the Thesis, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Recent educational reform in Thailand has recognised the importance of a student-centred approach to learning. This change of emphasis reflects a global trend to prepare high level graduates who can meet the present and future needs of communities in general and of business in particular. By meeting the challenges presented by globalisation, Thai universities can grow and thrive in a new economic era, which is characterised by constant change and ever-increasing educational demands. Courses which prepare students to meet the practical demands of the workplace are being introduced in universities worldwide. To test whether experiential learning is practicable in a university learning environment, a Business Simulation Course (BSC) at Payap University was evaluated. The course is intended to facilitate business students' learning, by integrating theory with practice, which involves students working in 'real-life' business contexts.

The study data were collected from three sample groups of stakeholders. Stakeholders sampled included: BSC students, staff members at Payap University and non-university respondents who included villager leaders, parents of students, suppliers and policy-makers. Eighty respondents were surveyed by questionnaire, and 20 respondents were interviewed. The data were collected during the second semester of the 2003 academic year. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data were undertaken, in addition to a review of relevant literature. In this study, a 'grounded theory' approach used the modified 'Constant Comparative Method' as a means of both data collection and data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998b).

The findings of the study indicated that the course is an effective means of linking theory with practice by experiential learning. Stakeholders expressed the view that practical courses such as the BSC helped students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills and gave them the necessary experience to work co-operatively in a 'real' business world. However, non-university stakeholders were more in agreement with this point than students and staff. The data also indicated that students tended to prefer classroom learning by case study to learning-by-doing in a

'bona fide' business setting. The reasons given for this were that stress levels were higher for students in experiential learning, largely due to the extra demands on their time and the added pressure of teamwork. In addition, increased resourcing of the course was seen as necessary to produce more effective teaching and learning outcomes in the BSC. The data also indicated that stakeholders believed that working in the community context is an important focus of the university because each institution is part of a unique local community. Also, all stakeholders recognised that business ethics are an important aspect of business life, which should be incorporated in the curriculum. However, students, staff and non-university stakeholders all agreed that learning in a simulated business environment is useful for future employment, because it allows students to experience 'real-life' business problems and develop solutions to them.

Thus the study provides valuable feedback from stakeholders in the BSC. This is useful as part of the process of improving curriculum design as it closes the loop between purpose —implementation — review of the course. This feedback enables faculty staff at Payap University responsible for curriculum design and implementation to refine their activities in courses such as the BSC. Feedback is also provided in the term of useful practical and theoretical advice to the university sector. Finally, policy-makers senior bureaucrats and high level administrators in government will also benefit from the insights provided by this study.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

BHERT	Business/Higher Education Round Table
BSC	Business Simulation Course at Payap University
ECA	Europe and Central Asia
MOE	Ministry of Education (Thailand)
MUA	Ministry of University Affairs
NUS	Non-University Stakeholder
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONEC	Office of the National Education Commission (Thailand)
OTOP	One Tumbon (sub-district) One Product (Product Community)
PBL	Problem-based Learning
PDC	Payap Dummy Company
PYU	Payap University
UNESCO	The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WCHE	World Conference of Higher Education

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research project and to provide a description of the context of the study. It considers higher education in a globalised environment and explores Thai views on higher education, with a particular emphasis on issues relevant to the introduction of new teaching methods in Thai higher education.

In Thailand's Educational Reform Bill (1999), the Thai government expressed a strong belief in higher education as a driving force in social and economic progress. The Reform Bill mandated that teaching methods at all levels of the Thai education system should shift from a traditional 'teacher-centred' approach to what is referred to as a 'student-centred' approach, and this may be said to be influenced by recent Western education models involving such changes in pedagogical thought. According to published government policy, the Thai State is required to provide education and training to supply graduates to the private business sector (Office of the National Education Commission, 1998). It is required also to provide teaching development which will satisfy the economic and social needs of the Twenty-First Century Thai society in the global marketplace, while promoting local wisdom and national arts and culture (ONEC, 1998).

Globalisation creates a new set of global phenomena which have cultural, economic, and political implications for nations. Interpretation of these phenomena hinges on the particular disciplinary and theoretical background under consideration. Many scholars have highlighted the decline of the nation-state and the concomitant strengthening of supranational organisations, as a result of the hybridisation of cultures, expansion of international trade and finance, which increasingly operate on a global scale in real time (Monkman & Baird, 2002).

The business world is changing dramatically and university business schools need to adapt their curricula to provide the best fit within their cultures and their institutions, to meet the needs of the 21st century global community. As a result, universities today must not only provide conceptual knowledge to their students, but also need to round it off with training in relevant skills, particularly those related to communication and to the use of technology. Thus, academic learning is affirmed and enhanced through practical application, using simulations, problem-based projects, internships and similar hands-on learning opportunities.

This study investigates the situation in Thai universities in general and focuses on the Business Simulation Course (BSC) at Payap University in particular. The BSC is designed to meet the university's goals and therefore implement Thai government policy. This study poses five research questions to elucidate 'what' and 'how' the BSC at Payap University provides 'bona fide' business experience to students in an educational context.

1.1 Recent Changes in Higher Education in the Global Context

Higher education has changed throughout the world during the past four or five decades (Brown, Halsey, Lauder & Wells, 1997; Fullan, 1993). Many of the activities of educators have involved changes in higher education at both an institutional and national level, in response to the process of globalisation. Moore (2001) asserted that globalisation can be defined as an information revolution which is 'creating strong links between nations, peoples, and companies, even as the embrace of free markets is fuelling enormous increases in international commerce and encouraging democracy' (p. 18).

UNESCO Education (2003) described globalisation as a multi-faceted process involving the flow of technology, knowledge, people, values and ideas, which affects each country in a different way. This is due to each nation's individual history, traditions, cultures, resources and priorities. Institutions of higher education must take into account the demands of the world of work in the scientific, technological and economic sectors. These demands are all part of the development of higher education policy affecting institutions and society.

Globalisation is of particular importance to Thailand (a developing country) since globalisation can speed up the transmission of knowledge and technology to developing countries (UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). The potential and actual implications of globalisation for higher education are many and diverse. For example, teaching in English can be seen as a marker of change in pedagogy in Thai education, in response to globalisation. According to Chandarasom (2002), 'This is a very fundamental factor in enabling our economy to compete with the outside world more effectively and gain better competitive advantages against other economies' (p. 15).

Thus, educational change, particularly at tertiary level perhaps, is required in countries undertaking social, cultural and economic structural changes. All nations are becoming aware of the importance of designing effective educational policies, specifically to 'produce' highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens and to provide opportunities for higher learning and for learning throughout life (UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). As a result of these pressures, higher education must now prepare students (particularly those studying business degrees) to perform well in the global marketplace. Globalisation is having a dramatic effect on education in most countries, particularly in regard to setting educational standards, agendas, teaching approaches, assessment methods, curricula and new technologies. This study intentionally addresses specific elements of globalisation, namely the growing importance of the knowledge society and the knowledge economy, both of which affect and are affected by higher education. In this research, an investigation of relevant literature was undertaken to assess how curricula and teaching are changing in higher education institutions around the world in response to the demands referred to above (Ensor, 2004).

Higher Education Change in Europe and Central Asian Countries

The impact of globalisation, capitalism and technology is affecting the whole world in all areas including those of politics, trade and investment, finance and communication and, as a consequence, each country's education system (Berryman, 2000; Kogan, 1979; Shinawatra, 2001; Young, 1998). This is evident in Confucian heritage cultures such as Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore where there is typically an emphasis on transmission of a body of traditional knowledge by memorisation

(Marton, Dall'Alba & Kun, 1996). In these Asian countries, some changes in the direction of Western style education have been implemented successfully in recent times (Lee, 2003; Shinmahara, 1997).

Since the 1960s, research in both Britain and the United States has highlighted ways in which social and economic change affect education (Becher, Embling & Kogan, 1978; Litt & Parkinson, 1979). According to Berryman (2000), 'Europe and Central Asian (ECA) education systems must respond to the new and civic imperatives of emerging markets and open societies, because these changes will dramatically affect the knowledge, skills, and values that citizens need' (p. 7). Asian nations recently have begun to incorporate some of the social, economic and educational changes which have occurred in OECD countries over the last 40 years (Berryman, 2000; Kogan, 1979). Berryman (2000) described the economic imperative for Asian nations as follows:

> *ECA countries are moving at different rates from centrally planned economies to market economies. This shift will increasingly require workers with better information-processing, problem-solving, and knowing-how-to-learn skills. Available international test data show that ECA countries are significantly behind OECD countries in many such skills* (p. 7).

According to the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (2003), higher education must focus on meeting social and economic needs of people. The relevance of higher education to the needs of society and the world of work must be a priority of tertiary institutions:

> *Institutions need improved mechanisms to monitor societal needs and values, and to assess employer satisfaction with the performance of graduates. Development of entrepreneurial skills and initiatives should become a major goal within curricula.*
>
> *A major cause of graduate unemployment is lack of adequate employment opportunities…lack of relevance of higher education in general and of necessary competencies and skills required by graduates also have to be recognised also as critical factors. Innovation and reform of higher education still have a long way to go, including overcoming the 'ivory-tower' tradition of universities…* (pp. 19-20).

As a consequence of the increasing awareness of governments about the need to develop such skills in their communities, there is a movement towards reform and

change in education in Asia and the Pacific region (Townsend & Cheng, 2000; Young, 1998).

It is clear that ongoing socio-economic and global changes require education to be revised continuously and updated (Young, 1998). Education is dynamic, not static, and educational development is necessary to support relevant student learning and development. This can be achieved by providing curricula and dynamic instruction to help all students develop along the pathways that support success, both at university and in life. At present, most countries in Asia are aware of the need for major changes in their higher education systems, including the methods of teaching and learning, to support their social and economic development (UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2003). As a consequence of such awareness educational priorities have changed, in order to cope with the challenges of responding to the new social demands, mostly arising from economic change (Berryman, 2000; Townsend & Cheng, 2000; Young, 1998). In particular, some of the changes in higher education due to globalisation have led to an increasing focus on providing wider educational opportunities for greater numbers of people requiring innovative pedagogical approaches and curriculum design.

1.1.1 Mass Access to Higher Education

In countries such as Thailand, recognition of the need for mass education has arisen as a result of the increasing technological complexity of the 21st century global environment (Schwartzman, 2003; UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). Significant higher education changes have occurred also in response to an enormous increase in access to higher education (Becher et al., 1978; Collins, 1979; Kogan, 1978, 1979; Litt & Parkinson, 1979; Sauvy, 1973; Trowler, 1998; Young, 1998).

Student enrolments in higher education have expanded worldwide, from 13 million in 1960 to 82 million in 1995 (UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). Mass higher education has resulted in the need for teachers to think about their role in society and to reappraise how their teaching meets the needs of students under new circumstances. As a result, systems of higher education are now more diversified. Jarvis (2001) asserted that when adults come to the campus in large

numbers the traditional organisation has to change. This change involves new types of courses; new ways of teaching and courses arranged at convenient times for adults to attend. They are characterised by innovations which allow institutions to offer a wide variety of education and training opportunities, such as through traditional degrees, short courses, part-time study, flexible schedules, modularised courses and supported learning-at-a- distance education. All of this was depicted well at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (1998):

> *In a world undergoing rapid changes, there is a perceived need for a new vision and paradigm of higher education, which should be student-oriented, calling in most countries for in-depth reforms and an open access policy so as to cater for ever more diversified categories of people, and of its contents, methods, practices and means of delivery, based on new types of links and partnerships with the community and with the broadest sectors of society* (pp. 12-13).

The Thai Situation:

In Thailand until recently, higher education was available only to the socioeconomic elite. In 2000, the Thai higher education system had a total of 1,639,149 students studying in higher education institutions (Harman, 2002). From 1977 onwards, it can be said that the Thai government's efforts have been geared in one direction, that is towards increasing access to secondary and tertiary education as a means to obtain a better quality of life for more Thai citizens (Ministry of Education, Thailand, 1998). Watanachai (2002), stated in regard to the development of Thai education, 'It is necessary to focus on developing educational quality and providing opportunities for students to further their higher education' (p. 2), and the government has emphasised education as a critical tool of national development (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999; O'Sullivan & Tajaroensuk, 1997; Trowler, 1998), while the main concerns about higher education development in Thailand are to provide mass higher education for Thai people of diverse social, economic and geographical backgrounds. This reflects the concerns of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century, which stated that education increasingly has become knowledge-based, so that higher learning is now an essential component of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development, involving individuals, communities and nations (UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998)

To address this issue, the Thai government has decided to invest in the development of an education network project, called the 'EdNet project', in order to ensure that

people of different social status will have a better chance to gain access to the higher education delivery system (Chandarasom, 2002). EdNet is aimed at boosting learning systems in all academic levels from primary schools to universities. SchoolNet, MOE Net, and Uninet are the main networks that provide Internet services to schools, universities and educational institutions According to Nakornthap and Srisa-an (1997) the government has provided a type of 'information technology campus', 'information technology networks', student loan schemes and a reform of the University Entrance Examination System; all of which allow better opportunities for rural students and urban poor to gain access to university.

1.1.2 Innovative Pedagogical Approaches and Curriculum Design

Current developments in higher education in Western countries indicate that numerous educators and policy-makers are advocating a move away from 'teacher-centred' models towards more 'student-centred' and 'community-based' models (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2000; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998). In Western countries such as Australia, the UK and the US, many teachers, it would seem, are shifting from being classroom instructors delivering a prescriptive curriculum, to a new role as facilitators of 'student-centred' learning. As a result of the need to consider such new teaching methods in higher education, change is required in the roles of teachers and learners; therefore, teaching methods need to become more 'learner-centred' and more focussed on how students learn rather than on what teachers teach (Kogan, 1978). In this new learning context, teachers are no longer seen solely as custodians and conduits of knowledge but as facilitators of learning and experts in effective learning (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Huba & Freed, 2000). It might be said that there has been a shift towards a 'constructivist' paradigm (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Ramsden, 1992).

In Thailand, innovations in pedagogy and curriculum design are occurring also. Key scholars and thinkers in Thailand, encouraged and supported by the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC), have contributed to a major rethinking of Thai approaches to teaching, and this is reflected in the Office of the National Education Commission, 1998 which emphasises student-centred active learning (Fry, 2002).

This is particularly true of business curricula which attempt to prepare students for the real-life business world. According to Brady and Kennedy (1998) 'the message from the business community is not only that the curriculum is important but that it must be structured in a particular way to deliver outcomes that are relevant to employment opportunities and needs' (p. 5). Business curricula emphasise skills in areas such as 'problem-solving, synthesis, analytical skills and multiple communication skills' (Haynes, 1987). Some of the main themes of educational change concern fundamental issues of how people work effectively together to achieve group outcomes and to tolerate, legitimise and accommodate change (Kogan, 1978), and this is certainly important in the world of business.

However, new approaches to pedagogy and curriculum change will not be sufficient. New types of expression also will be required, in regard to how teachers communicate with their students, perhaps requiring a shift from 'telling' to 'facilitating' (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; McGill & Beaty, 1995; Ministry of Education Thailand, 1998; Office of the National Education Commission, 2001).

In the Thai context, therefore, the government agencies which oversee tertiary education are encouraging the development of 'student-centred' courses, particularly in areas such as business (Office of the National Education Commission, 2003). These approaches will not be based on rote-learning alone, but will include interactive and practice-based course components and educational experiences; will facilitate comprehension, incorporating practical work to encourage the development of new skills; and involve creativity (UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998).

1.2 The Context of Change in Thai Higher Education

1.2.1 Government Responses to the Need for Change in Thai Higher Education

As a result of the changes in Thai society over the last 30 years, new arrangements in the national curriculum and educational system have been required (Miralao, 2000). Thai universities face much pressure to reform and redefine their roles, in order to meet the challenges for education to sustain development of the national economy and society.

One significant change has been the emergence of private education in Thailand, which is structured and funded in a variety of ways. In some cases, private institutions have been established by churches or philanthropic foundations while in other cases they are run by professional associations or by profit making companies (UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2003):

> *The development of private higher education sectors has raised important policy issues for governments. Of those the most important are about the role of the state in the provision of higher education, the relationship between private higher education institutions and government, and the quality of provision* (p. 8).

Recently, Thaksin Shinawatra, the Prime Minister of Thailand, outlined the strategies for implementation of educational reform to the executives and faculty members of all higher education institutions. Shinawatra (2003) summarised four areas for education reform:

- teaching and learning in higher education to be reshaped, to allow stakeholders to have opportunities to learn from each other;
- institutions to produce enough graduates to serve the society and the market;
- the guiding principles for education reform to include a more flexible approach to learning, involving a less hierarchical model and more collaboration between stakeholders; and
- to be more efficient and 'relevant to the real-world' - to produce graduates who have experience working in 'real-life' contexts.

These changes are in line with global trends in higher education (Office of the National Education Commission, 2003).

These changes acknowledge that Thai higher education institutions should aim to educate students to become well-informed and highly motivated citizens, who can think critically, analyse and solve problems, and demonstrate social responsibility (UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998).

1.2.2 Combining Theory with Practice in Thai Higher Education

In modern economies a new paradigm is emerging which enables students to combine 'received' knowledge and personal knowledge gained from workplace experience. It was argued by UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, WCHE, (1998), that the links between higher education, the workplace and other

sectors of society should be strengthened and renewed. As a consequence, knowledge is both integrated and practical when students study in their field of practice, because they also study the context in which the theory, which is academic-discipline-based, is applied (Jarvis, 2001). Therefore, higher education institutions have revised their curricula to ensure they are aligned more closely with actual practices, through attempting to integrate theory and training in the workplace (UNESCO WCHE, 1998).

Kogan (1978) asserted that education and knowledge are 'social accretions' rather than just being the product of 'specialised training and skill' and must be informed by the 'world of work'. 'Learning by doing' in the business field is particularly relevant, as students who have gained work experience are more likely to be 'work-ready' and to gain employment in graduate-level occupations (Office of the National Education Commission, 2003; UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). Also, in the business field 'learning by doing' in a 'bona fide' business milieu is an effective way of learning how to manage a business, how to solve problems in an organisation, how to manage risk and how to minimise the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice (Colwill & Birchall, 1992). Thus, Thai universities should stress the importance of both academic and employment-related transferable skills, and embed these in regular teaching.

Kogan (1978) earlier had referred to changes in higher education in the OECD countries, where universities were beginning to give students credit for work undertaken outside the universities, reflecting the trend to break down the segregation between university education and higher vocational education. These changes, it was believed, would produce skilled and knowledgeable graduates, who also have the practical experience to help them understand professional practice.

Similarly, in Thailand, according to the Ministry of University Affairs (2001) the aim of Bachelor level degrees is to promote a higher level of knowledge and vocational skills in various disciplines, especially the ability to apply theory to practice, to promote both academic and professional development. Therefore, higher education administration and academic programs and quality assurance programs are being reformed, in order to improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of education

and to achieve international standards of excellence, as stated in the National Education Act (Office of the National Education Commission, 1998).

Many Thai universities have developed teaching methods which combine theory with practice, for example, by giving students opportunities to learn by working in the community while studying (Buchanan, Baldwin & Rudisill, 2002; Laksut, 1980). According to Chandarasom (2002) students should have close contact with the community and business operators, in order to meet the needs of the business community. He stated, 'Universities are encouraged to adjust their curricula to allow students to have hands-on experience from business and industrial operators, which will be beneficial to the students' future' (p. 17). Payap University is an example of the above-mentioned trend in higher education, encouraging 'learning by doing'.

1.2.3 Quality and Quality Assurance in Thai Higher Education

Quality and quality assurance have become major concerns within the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, as governments work to ensure that students receive high quality and relevant education. UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (2003) stated:

> *Many Member States have recently established or strengthened their national mechanisms for quality assurance in higher education, while efforts have been made to develop new quality indicators. In addition, there is increased recognition of the importance of strengthening academic programs through quality assurance and continually striving towards academic excellence* (p. 9).

New quality assurance mechanisms have been established in both private and public sectors in Thailand. According to UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (2003):

> *Over the last 20 years, there has been considerable growth in the number of Quality Assurance Agencies in Thai higher education contexts. These are agencies with responsibility for assessing and ensuring the quality of teaching. As tertiary education has gradually become more accountable to government and the community, in order to meet the requirements of the National Education Act, an educational quality assurance system has been designed and implemented.*

1.2.4 The Context of Curriculum Design: The Vision and Mission of Payap University

In line with the directives of the Ministry of University Affairs, Payap University as a private higher education institution was required to justify whether or not its education quality assurance and reform efforts were aligned with the Ministry's new policies. The design and implementation of Payap University's Business Simulation Course has been driven by dramatic changes in the business world, such as changes in management thinking and the labour market's current and emerging needs (UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2003). At Payap University, the BSC supports the university's goals and the Thai government policy of improving educational opportunities for students.

Payap University was established by the Foundation of the Church of Christ in Thailand in 1974. The vision and mission of the university, as detailed in its quality Assurance Report (Payap University, 2004), are as follows:

The University's vision is:

> *[Payap University aims] to become a leading private higher educational institution with an international focus. It aims to produce graduates with good morality, knowledge and ability in various fields including the construction of new technology to respond to social needs and to develop itself internationally and successfully* (p. 2).

The University's mission is:

> *Payap University strives to adhere to its motto of 'Truth and Service' by seeking academic and moral excellence, thereby encouraging an understanding of truth and an attitude of service toward all. Students learn to acquire knowledge, exhibit wisdom, think creatively, and appreciate self-development. They are expected to develop a capacity for excellence, grow in social responsibility, and to work together effectively* (p. 3).

As implied in the University's mission and vision statements above, the aims of Payap University focus on: student self-development, creative thinking and collaborative learning in a socially responsible way. Moreover, graduates from Payap University are expected to have a sense of altruism and commitment to their community.

Payap University is a non-profit organisation, and it is increasingly concerned with the quality of its courses, facilities, staff and graduates and the deterioration of infrastructure (i.e., computers, laboratories, buildings and libraries). The University aims to meet the demands for development of infrastructure to support the education of highly qualified professionals.

Payap University courses are based on the belief that in order to respond to these requirements, higher education systems and the world of work should co-operate to improve and assess the learning processes provided by higher education institutions, particularly in regard to integrating theory and training on the job (UNESCO Education, 2003).

1.2.5 The Context of Teaching and Learning in the Business Simulation Course (BSC) at Payap University

The Payap University Business Administration Faculty requires all students to complete a practicum experience in a 'bona fide' business setting. This experience is provided as part of the 'Business Simulation Course' (BSC), which has been one of the major capstone subjects in the Marketing Department at Payap University since 1985.

The BSC is designed to provide students with a 'real-life' working experience in a local business environment, for a limited period of one semester. Students are expected to gain an in-depth and practical understanding of business operations and the professional contexts in which they are required to apply the theory and skills they have learned in the formal curriculum. This course can be taken only by senior students who have already accumulated 21 credit points in a marketing major. The 'Business Simulation Course' (MK 480) or 'Dummy Company Practice' (MK 495) is described by Payap University (1999) as follows: 'An opportunity to apply theories and knowledge in real situations, through a "Dummy Company" controlled by an advisor' (p. 234). The course is designed to enable students to acquire the basic skills critical to business success; practical placement provides the opportunity to apply these skills in a 'simulated' business situation. The course objectives of the BSC at Payap University in the 2003 Academic Year stated that students should be able to: apply theoretical knowledge to practice by developing appropriate business skills and

capabilities in real business circumstances; solve typical business related problems; work co-operatively and develop a sense of responsibility and honesty. Furthermore, students' activities should serve and promote the local community and local products, by developing a sense of altruism.

The BSC is an example of a curriculum innovation which seeks to promote favourable and more authentic conditions for teaching a wide range of skills. This course allows students to integrate their knowledge of the functional areas of business, such as marketing, finance, human relations, operations, and management, in one simulated setting. The BSC places the students in a team, which runs a simulated business in a competitive market, via an entity known as the 'Payap Dummy Company' (PDC) or 'Dummy Company'.

Thus the curriculum fits with recent 'western' pedagogical approaches to 'student-centred' and 'experiential' learning, because when students run the 'Dummy Company' they learn from working in a 'real-world' context, which involves suppliers and customers in, and around, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Students have to accept responsibility for product quality, quality of service, and the financial aspects of their business. The BSC requires students to demonstrate their learning of business skills through participating in all aspects of an 'authentic' business. It is a hard task for students to develop themselves academically and professionally in such a short time (only one semester) because they often have little prior experience and limited time is allocated for participating in the BSC. Another factor which is problematic is that the business world can be dynamic and unpredictable. This necessitates the development of advanced critical thinking skills developed in the context of problem-based learning and co-operative learning and, again, this is no easy matter in such a short period of time.

The BSC experience is conceptualised as a working relationship between the university's academic environment and community members. One advantage of community involvement in training experiences is to make students more self-confident when working with other people in 'bona fide' contexts. Through co-operation and group work, students are encouraged to develop the following qualities:

- ability to plan business projects effectively
- higher-order thinking
- problem-solving skills
- essential communication skills
- self-esteem
- tolerance, and
- social awareness.

These skills, it is hoped are transferable and can then be applied in other real-life contexts.

1.2.6 Brief Description of the BSC at Payap University

The Business Simulation Course (BSC) is a ‘capstone’ unit, i.e., it is a required subject for the completion of the Bachelor’s degree in Marketing, Department of Marketing, Faculty of Business Administration, Payap University. The unit has an innovative approach to learning and teaching, in that it integrates ‘learning by doing' with an application to the ‘real world’.

The BSC is available to fourth year students – it is a three credit course and runs for 15 weeks – and it is designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice in business settings. The focus of the course activities is on learning to manage a simulated company called the 'Dummy Company' within a practical business perspective. Academic staff supervise the students and help them develop effective business strategies and solve problems. The number of students supervised by each staff member varies depending on the enrollment of students in each semester.

Prior to the course beginning, students are asked to consider a business with a marketing plan. To assist this critical reflective exercise the academic supervisors give students an ‘advance organiser’ orientation of the course objectives and structure. Students meet with their supervisor twice a week throughout the semester. The meetings are conducted in a business-like manner to model real world practice; for example, academic staff and students are expected to wear appropriate business attire. The ‘Dummy Company’s’ management team conducts the meeting while supervisors observe and provide comments on the proceedings as necessary. For example, they may ask for clarification of some important point or make suggestions

about how in practical terms the Dummy Company's staff will attempt to solve some likely problems. All meetings have formal agendas prepared by the students and Minutes of the meeting are taken. The meeting in simulating a real world experience provides valuable experience for students about how to think and function as a businessman or -woman.

The BSC is structured to provide students with hands-on experience in five main functional areas: Marketing and Sales, Finance and Accounting, Purchasing and Inventory, Human Resource Management, and Information Technology. During the Dummy Company start up period, students who are interested in any of these areas can apply to focus on one or more of them. The students must submit their resumes for initial screening in order that the academic supervisors can appoint the most qualified applicants to the responsible positions. When the Dummy Company's management team is formed and initial plans have been considered, the company will be officially launched. The Management team decides the following: the name of the company, the kind of potential products or service the Dummy Company will provide, the source of suppliers and the producers for the goods or services. The Management team also will negotiate with suppliers and distributors, develop a complete sales and marketing plan, determine pricing, complete a sales forecasting exercise, organize the sales force, develop a business operation plan and budgeting and propose a time-line for the development and implementation of these activities.

Usually, the BSC focuses on five main product categories: Technical, Office Automation & Telecommunication, Household, Natural & Beauty, and One Tambon One Product (OTOP) of which each community is encouraged to produce its most popular products. However, there is no limitation in the range or brands of the products even though there are differences in terms of brand selection, supplier selections, product types or item selections. The students in each semester have to make the decisions based on the best synthesis of the information, knowledge and skills they have from previous semester subjects.

Students are encouraged to apply the management skills they have learned in the classroom. They may, for example, conduct a marketing survey in order to identify the unexplored products with high selling potential, evaluate the growing trends, and

needs of the current market. The main criteria of product selection are the product's quality, design, and wide selection to better serve market needs.

Alternatively, students may begin the life of their Dummy Company by surveying the sources of diverse products and suppliers from a business directory. Most suppliers are locally based companies and encompass other product or service areas as well. During the initial screening process, students meet suppliers, producers or distributors, to discuss details, select the potential items, negotiate the best deals, and to ensure all requirements are met for both parties. Supplier selection decision involves factors such as the company background, the quality of the products and design, price proposed, financial and credit terms, service and delivery, return and exchange policy, and support in term of training and display materials. These are all areas covered in the academic/theoretical curriculum in the previous three years of the degree but in this subject the students have to synthesise and pull together those aspects that will address the practical needs of their Dummy Company.

Following are examples of the BSC's product categories from several years operation:

- Technical (TN), consisted of two main branches: video and audio which comprise TV, VCR, DVD player, camera, MP3, portable electronics; home appliances ranging from refrigerator, air conditioner, microwave oven, rice cookers, etc.
- Office Automation & Telecommunications (OA), the company offered a full line of mobile telephones, 'phone cards, mobile phone accessories, telecommunication equipment, computer, fax machine, copiers, and so on.
- Household (HH), the company provided a wide selection of products ranging from household items, personal care, car care, furniture and home decoration, stationary, bed, bath and more.
- Natural & Beauty (NB), the company supported all beauty and health products, which included skin care, cosmetics, fragrance, spa, hair care, and beauty and health equipment.
- One Tambon One Product (OTOP), this covered a wide range of local community products, such as, food and beverage, handicrafts, gifts and

decoration items, jewellery and fashion accessories, and spa products. Some of these can be found in small villages in Chiang Mai, where they are made by local artisans and producers. (Chiang Mai is considered one of the biggest sources of fine craftsmanship and traditional arts and crafts. Most products are made in a small village, sub-district level (Tambon) by local artisans and producers who use local materials with a unique local folk arts design passed on by their forebears from generation to generation).

Since these local artisans and producers in small villages are not experienced in the areas of sales and marketing, the BSC is a good scheme or channel to help them promote the products and sales with the student's knowledge in marketing and business. The Dummy Company helps distribute the products to various markets, and design packaging for value-added purposes. All of these activities affect and contribute to the dynamic changes in today's market.

Students work closely with members of the various the communities and this strengthens the relationship between the communities and the university and, this in turn, helps their products become sustainable.

From this brief description it can be concluded that the simulation course emphasises trust in the students' ability to take responsibility for their actions and to implement their plan. The analytical performance and the achievement of the business operation are essentially under the students' control. In this real world situation the students gain a great deal of experience in the process of designing, developing and implementing their Company; from its successes as well as from their mistakes. And, in doing so, students demonstrate a wide range of problem solving strategies.

1.2.7 The BSC's Teaching Method: Simulation-Based Approach Versus Real-life Approach

Gilley (1990) stated that simulation is a practical way of learning, and reflects realism, as well as maintaining the dignity of the learner. However, the argument can be made that in some senses, simulation is not realistic; that the students, for example, have far more control of the learning environment than they would have in a real-work environment. Nevertheless, teaching and learning in the BSC differs

from the majority of simulation games which involve students interacting with a computer or other such device. In contrast, the BSC allows students to apply newly acquired theoretical knowledge in a simulated business world, dealing with real customers and real suppliers. As the students make realistic business decisions and run their 'Dummy Company', important business principles become a part of their usual practice. A business education should be much more than just 'classroom learning', and the BSC offers students a wealth of opportunities to apply the skills learned in the virtual world of the classroom to the 'real-world' of business. The emphasis here is on using simulation in order to reflect 'reality'. The BSC is simply the method by which students are exposed to business activities in a 'bona fide' environment. BSC is an innovative model, having the benefits of a simulation-based approach and 'real-world' problem-solving. Thus, it is a model of learning similar to the model of Lebow and Wager (1994), as shown in the comparison in Appendix IV, Figure A: Simulations-based Approach versus Real-life Approach.

Appendix IV, Figure A, describes how a simulation-based approach can be applied and it is then compared to a real-life approach. For example, simulated learning provides environments wherein participants are able to generalise theoretical principles and develop skills. However, a major problem with simulated learning is the lack of continuous problem-solving, because learning is short-term. It involves competitive relations and individual assessment. In contrast, 'real-life' approaches provide 'real' and complex models of reality which is authentic and practical. 'Real-life' situations facilitate continuous problem-solving, which is in-depth and embedded in specific and meaningful contexts. Participants are able to apply theory and skills to 'real-life' contexts which involves developing co-operative relationships and sharing consequences. Ideally, simulation-based and real-life based approaches can be combined, to produce a hybrid model which mimics real-world learning and enhances higher-order learning outcomes. This hybrid model also offers insight into courses like the BSC which include an operating business, so that students can later transfer their simulation-based strategies to real-life situations.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine whether the BSC is an effective means of satisfying the emerging needs of Thai society in producing business graduates capable of integrating theory with practice in the 'real-world' of business. Thus, this

study investigates whether the BSC produces outcomes compatible with the demands of the current labour market and the emerging needs of Thai society.

This study reports on stakeholders' perceptions of whether or not the BSC at Payap University delivers high level student performance, and an enhanced standard of teaching and learning in the business field, placing particular emphasis on the development of business-related generic skills which are required in a wide range of graduate occupations. The design and practical application of the course as a pioneering course of its type (in Thailand at least), is discussed against the background of globalisation and world-wide change in teaching and learning methods, where more emphasis is placed on learning in 'bona fide' contexts than textbook, teacher-directed learning.

The study will suggest improvements to the course, and also provide some guidelines for designing other such tertiary level business courses in Thailand.

1.3.1 Objectives of the Study

The study has three objectives, which are addressed through five research questions. The three objectives are as follows: to assess the implementation of the BSC, to evaluate the effectiveness of students' learning, and to provide advice to curriculum designers at Payap University and at government level.

Objective 1 – To Assess the Quality of the BSC

The study aims to assess the extent to which the innovative curriculum of the BSC at Payap University is successful in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice, by enabling students to apply their knowledge of business in real-life situations. Assessing the implementation of the BSC also involves researching students' co-operation with the stakeholders to solve typical business problems in the BSC.

Objective 2 – To Evaluate the Effectiveness of Students' Learning from the BSC in the Community

The study aims to evaluate students' learning in the BSC, including how students acquire, develop, and apply their knowledge when working with the community, in support of government policies.

Objective 3 – To Provide Advice to Stakeholders

The study aims to provide advice to the university concerning the BSC, including advice on the link between academic knowledge and community service. In addition, the study aims to be useful to policy-makers and senior bureaucrats who are involved in community development initiatives.

1.4 Research Questions

This study was designed to investigate the BSC at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, to ascertain how successful the course is in providing students with a 'bona fide' business experience, and in allowing them to bridge theoretical knowledge with practice by working with the community.

The following research questions were used to set boundaries on what was studied and help to narrow the problem down to a practicable size (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a). Five Research Questions were selected to provide manageable data which addressed the three objectives of the study.

Research Question 1: Stakeholders' Perceptions – Equipping Students for Business

How do stakeholders perceive the Business Simulation Course at Payap University equips students to work in the business world?

Research Question 2: Stakeholders' Perceptions – Applying Theory in Practice

How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice?

Research Question 3: Preparing Students for the World of Work

How effectively does the BSC prepare students to work with the community?

Research Question 4: Stakeholders' Advice to the University

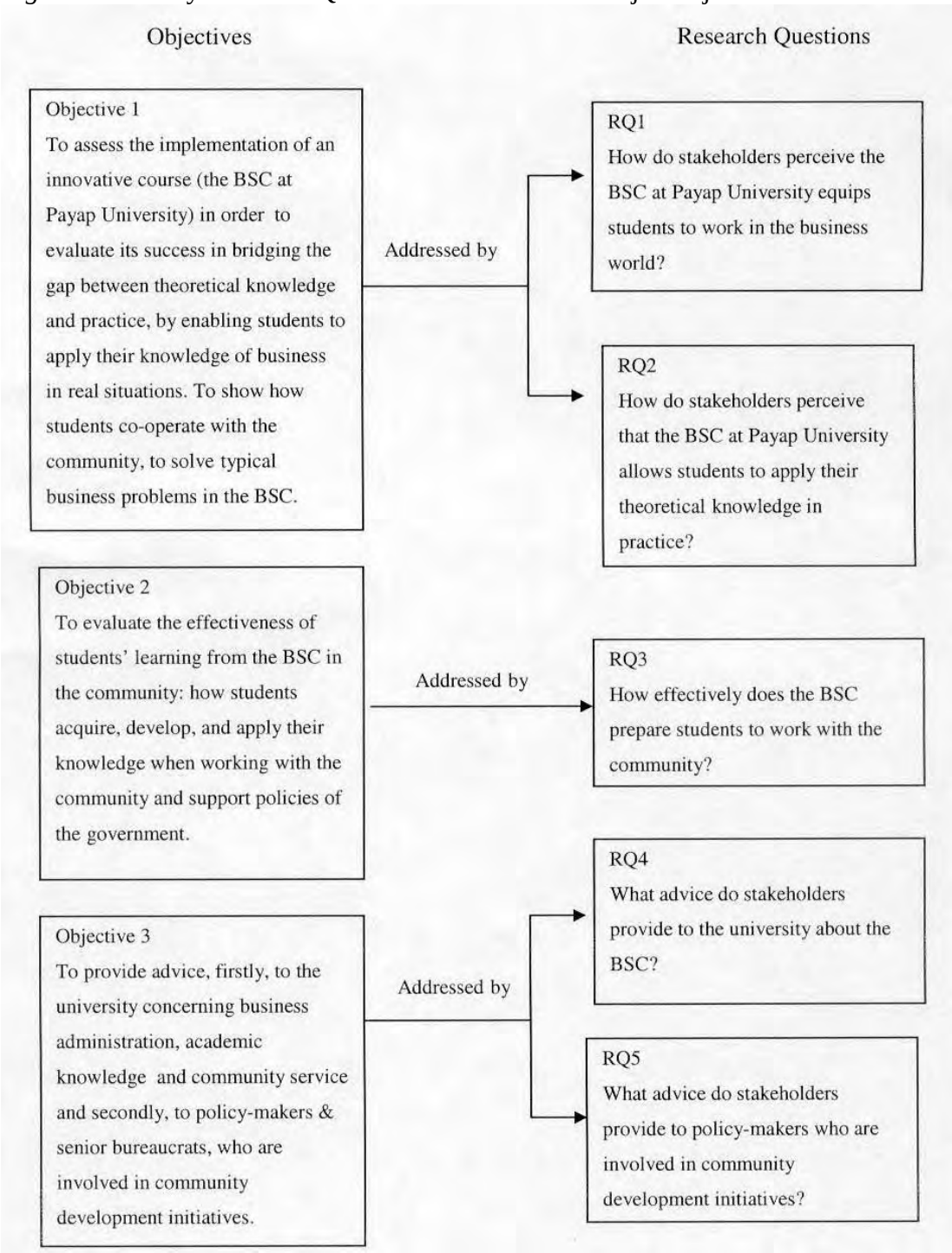
What advice do stakeholders provide to the university about the Business Simulation Course?

Research Question 5: Stakeholders' Advice to Policy-Makers

What advice do stakeholders provide to policy-makers who are involved in community development initiatives?

The manner in which the Research Questions relate to the objectives of the study, which reflect the major issues in the study, is displayed graphically in Figure 1-1.

Figure 1-1: Study Research Questions Matched with Major Objectives



1.5 Contributions of the Study

This study investigates the BSC at Payap University in particular. Thus, the findings provide feedback at the practical level and will be a valuable contribution to developing the quality of teaching and learning at Payap University. The findings may be of assistance also to other Thai university business schools, making them more effective in preparing students for the current and future business world. The

approaches to pedagogy and curriculum design discussed in this study and implemented in the BSC should be of interest to Thai higher education institutions, as they provide insight into how 'student-centred' pedagogy can be effectively implemented in an actual Thai higher education context. Feedback is also provided about the effectiveness of this process, which may lead to increased refinement of curricula at Payap University and other Thai universities.

In addition, this research can be used as a resource by course designers and business faculty members. These professionals can inform themselves about the teaching methods and skills offered in the BSC. The research will provide some useful guidelines for teaching courses such as the BSC in other business schools.

This study provides data on how student learning in the business field could be supported further. For example by government initiatives, such as, in Thailand, One Tumbon (sub-district) One Product (OTOP or 'community products') which is a government policy developed originally in response to economic crisis. The Thai government supports both learning in the business field and community production, by this policy initiative. The ways in which this experience facilitates the employability of graduates is examined. Moreover, the study provides feedback on practical trading strategies used with villagers and suppliers around Chiang Mai. It also includes data about localised government policy initiatives in this area of business activity. Given that Thailand is a developing country, these ambitions are very worthy ones indeed.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are as follows.

First, there was a limited sample size: 80 participants completed the survey-questionnaire, of whom 20 were interviewed. Nevertheless, these numbers represent quite a 'robust' sample.

Second, the data-gathering instruments are relatively unsophisticated and of a self-reporting nature. Nevertheless, this does not mean, the data are necessarily invalid or unreliable. Chapter 3 explains in detail the pilot and other procedures employed.

Finally, the responses in this study are based on the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders' involved in a single course: the BSC at Payap University. Consequently, the respondents' views are particular to one environment, and any attempt to generalise findings to other contexts, especially outside Chiang Mai, must be undertaken with great care.

1.7 Permission to Undertake the Study

Permission to conduct the study was received from the University of Tasmania's Social Sciences Ethics Committee. At Payap University permission for internal participants to complete a questionnaire and interview was obtained from the President of Payap University. Appendix I displays the application approval and information sheet.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 begins by reviewing the literature relevant to the evaluation of curriculum in higher education. It focuses on simulated learning, how students integrate business theory with real-life business practice and also include teaching and learning methods relevant to the BSC. The extant literature concerning the quality of higher education relevant to curricula and the effectiveness of the BSC, authentic assessment of 'bona fide' business experiences, and their place in higher education are reviewed. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 reports the data derived from the data-gathering phase of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the data in the context of the extant literature and addresses the research questions. This discussion includes reflections on the BSC's perceived effectiveness and makes recommendations for future enhancement and revision of the course.

The attachments consist of Appendices. These include: an application approval, information sheet, copies of data collection instruments, the interview schedule, copies of the interview sample transcriptions and the results of the questionnaire analysis.

Summary

Following a brief introduction, this chapter has a number of sections. The first deals with recent changes in higher education in Thailand against a background of globalisation. The second describes the context of change in Thai higher education

which entails innovation in teaching and learning methods, particularly emphasising 'student-centred' learning and 'learning by doing'. Higher education in Thailand has experienced an era of continuous change during the last two decades, requiring universities to seek effective mechanisms for coping with globalisation, economic crisis and dynamic environments, including changing societal values. Payap University's response to recent changes in direction in Thai higher education is discussed, with particular reference to the Business Simulation Course (BSC). The chapter concludes with a statement of the purpose of the study, the research questions and the expected contribution and limitations of the study. Brief statements describe the permission to undertake the study and the structure of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews the extant literature relevant to the several broad areas of the thesis. The main literature area considered is related to the development of business curricula and pedagogy, which incorporates simulated learning. The literature review also helps to develop a conceptual framework for the thesis, related to the research questions and associated objectives presented in Chapter One. For convenience, the literature review is separated into areas related to the research questions, whereas in reality the literature and research questions are interwoven and dynamic rather than, as shown here, static and discrete. Accordingly some literature will be reviewed under one or another research question whereas, in fact, the review may well fit with more than one research question. In this chapter, tables are presented at the beginning of each section to provide an overview of the main research findings in the learning area addressed. Other research is also referenced in each section, but not included in the table.

Simulations are often used in business education for training in management and decision-making (Tonks & Armitage, 1997). Recently, simulations have been made available on the World Wide Web (Cox & Saunders, 1996). However, there is not a large amount of literature on experiential learning specific to business fields. A search of several electronic data bases, such as Taylor and Francis, ERIC, ProQuest and Google revealed that there was little information available that specifically covered the issues mentioned in this section. Consequently, this review has included cognate literature relating more generally to experiential learning in higher education.

The review of the literature focuses on the five research questions, discussing areas relevant to evaluating the effectiveness of the BSC and is divided into sections which relate to each research question. Issues discussed in the literature review include simulated learning, curriculum issues related to simulated learning and recent teaching strategies used in higher education. Second, a review of the relevant

literature on experiential learning and the application of theoretical knowledge to practice is presented. Third, a review is given of approaches to community-based learning and how students work effectively with the local community. Finally, there is a large degree of overlap in the literature related to RQ 4: What advice do stakeholders provide to the university about the BSC? and RQ 5: What advice do stakeholders provide to policy-makers who are involved in community development initiatives? Therefore, this final section reviews a corpus of literature, specifically related to how stakeholders provide advice to the higher education provider, i.e., Payap University, and to policy-makers.

2.1 Stakeholders' Perceptions - Equipping Students for Business

Research Question 1: ***How do stakeholders perceive the Business Simulation Course at Payap University equips students to work in the business world?***

As the BSC takes a simulated learning approach to equip students to work in the real world, the literature reviewed in this section includes research into curriculum issues related to 'real-life' contexts offered by courses such as the BSC. The literature review related to simulated learning is summarised in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1: *Overview of some of the literature relevant to simulated learning*

Author (Year)	Title	Major Focus
Cudworth (1995)	Simulations and Games	Learning from real world contexts is the most powerful learning situation
Knowles (1984)	The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species	Adult education provides the learner's daily experience in the real world
Print (1993)	Curriculum Development and Design	Simulated learning is involved in real-life activities

2.1.1 Simulated Learning

As flagged above, this section reviews the broad area of literature related to simulated learning. There is little or no extant Thai literature on this topic. Nevertheless the available literature related to Western contexts is still of some interest as a background to this study, because much of the information published in English is relevant to subjects taught in business and management fields in Thailand and elsewhere especially as the push is to become more 'Western' in curriculum and

pedagogy. This refers to the increased focus on 'student-centred' learning in Western countries, and an emphasis on autonomous learning, where students construct their own learning, which is often most effective in a curriculum which encourages 'learning by doing' or experiential learning.

Generally simulation differs from other forms of experiential learning by being removed from 'real-life' contexts while practising behaviour which occur in the situation being simulated. For example, in technical courses, it refers to multi-media tutorial programmers. As several researchers (see, for example, Bridges, 1992; Coles, 1997; Kolb, 1984; Schwartz, Mennin & Webb, 2001) found, simulation places students in a particular situation and assigns them a role within that scenario. The user takes on the role and responsibilities in a virtual environment. Therefore, the students gain valuable problem-solving and decision-making skills. Examples of simulations include: simulation games, simulation in language or role-plays, simulation and case study, flight simulation and on-line business simulation programs. There are many advantages of simulated learning cited in the literature. For example, simulated learning provides 'life-like' experience as suggested by Print (1993) and Tansey (cited in Cudworth, 1995). Print (1993) suggested that simulated learning is a way to facilitate effective learning whereby students are able to role-play 'real-life' activities. He noted that students learn things effectively if the activities are 'as life-like as possible' (p. 176).

In addition, simulated learning helps students to develop business judgement in strategic business contexts. Thompson and Stappenbeck (1999) argued business strategy games provide valuable strategic decision-making practice, helping students develop business judgment as they encounter an array of business issues. They explained the benefits of business strategy games with reference to a particular game, as follows:

> *[They]… build your confidence in analysing the revenue-cost-profit economics of a business, help you understand how the functional pieces of a business fit together, and develop your powers of managerial judgment. You will gain needed experience and practice in assessing business risk, analysing industry and competitive conditions, making decisions from a companywide perspective, thinking strategically about a company's situation and future prospects, developing strategies and revising them in light of changing conditions, and applying what you have learned…The bottom line is that playing 'The Business Strategy Game' will make*

> *you better prepared for playing the game of business in real-life* (p. 3).

Related to experimental simulations is problem-based learning (PBL) which explores a practical application of simulation-based learning in an actual workplace situation. PBL is used in many medical schools for example (Coles, 1997; Schwartz et al., 2001). Similarly, simulated learning in business is used to help students become skilled in applying their knowledge to actual business situations (Print, 1993) while they study business subjects, including: marketing, finance, accounting, human resource management and organisational management. Simulation provides a realistic situation, allowing for more extensive interaction by students, and for them to get more personally involved (Cudworth, 1995; Hyland, 1993; Knowles, 1980, 1984, 1990).

According to Paul (1996), the underlying concept of experiential learning can be expressed as 'learning by doing' (p. 750). Adams (1973) and Cudworth (1995) described business simulation as a way of students learning by doing, as simulated learning is experiential (Kolb, 1984), that is, it involves experience in 'real-life' contexts. When students learn by involvement in experiential forms of learning, this type of learning reflects reality. This view has also been expressed by several other scholars, for example, Print (1993), Tonks and Armitage (1997), Thomson and Stappenbeck (1999). Thus, these are generally considered to be very powerful learning strategies with numerous advantages, to educate qualified graduates for the world of work (UNESCO Education, 2001). The most important advantage of simulated learning is that it provides an opportunity to apply learning to the 'real world' (Cudworth, 1995; Waddel cited in Gilley, 1990). As Barnett and Hallam (1999) stated, students who have developed a well-formulated and integrated professional approach are likely to fare better than their less experienced peers when operating in the 'real-world'.

Livingston and Stoll (cited in Cudworth, 1995), described advantages of simulated learning as follows:

> *A simulation is self-motivating. In many cases students work as part of a team, learning from each other and practising co-operative skills. It has been suggested that simulations enable the less successful student to learn from the more successful* (p. 261).

Cudworth (1995) argued that simulated learning occurs as a result of students' experiences of the process of working in a 'real-life' situation. Moreover, he argued another significant and important advantage of simulated learning is that simulations allow participants to work 'without the responsibility of the real world' (p. 261). Similarly, Waddel stated 'The learners can gain from simulations without paying the consequences for a wrong decision which would occur in a daily routine' (p. 274). Another crucial feature of an optimal system for simulated learning is its capability to keep track of the improvements of the students when they learn co-operatively (Cudworth, 1995; Pedler, 1991).

2.1.2 New Teaching Approaches in Higher Education Relevant to Simulated Learning

The literature reviewed relating to new teaching strategies that include research on independent or autonomous learning, problem-based learning and co-operative learning, is summarised in Table 2-2.

Table 2-2: *Overview of some of the literature dealing with teaching approaches applicable to higher education in Thailand*

Author (Year)	Title	Major Focus
Boud (1988)	Moving Towards Autonomy	How autonomous learning provides opportunities to practise the skills needed for independent learning
Bridges (1992)	Problem-based Learning for Administrators	Problem-based education: preparing students for the workplace
Brookfield (1996)	Adult Learning: Overview	Adult education practice in societies
Gilbert & Foster (1997)	Experiences With Problem-based Learning in Business and Management	Problem-based learning as an educational investment
Knowles (1984)	The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species	How adult learning allows learners to set and solve problems
Kolb (1984)	Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development	How learning results from reflection on one's experience
Slavin (1995)	Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice	The importance of group goals and individual accountability in co-operative learning

Changes in Approaches to Teaching in Higher Education

Brady (1985) identified a 'traditional' or 'classical' education as one which is predominantly 'teacher-centred', focusing on the expository approaches of narration and explanation to facilitate learning. In the 'student-centred' approach, teachers facilitate students' learning in different ways so that they are able to develop their own understanding of what they have learned, the process involved in gaining this knowledge and how the outcome is measured (Brady, 1985; Kolb, 1984). Brady (1985) stated that teachers should incorporate the principles of constructivist learning, collaborative learning and co-operative learning in their pedagogy. At tertiary level the success or otherwise of 'student-centred' learning hinges on the ability of faculty members themselves to work as facilitators of learning. In addition to the need to support 'new teaching' methods, there is a need also to model the new teaching strategies and skills required for successfully teaching the combining of theoretical knowledge with effective practice. The 'new teaching' approach as described by Buchanan et al., (2002) is more 'student-centred', which means more practise and less isolated learning of theory. Students develop their skills, instigate higher-order levels of thinking and bring into play problem-solving skills, all of which are features of autonomous learning (see Appendix IV, Figure B: Traditional versus New Teaching Methods in Higher Education).

Faculty members frequently teach by oral exposition of course material, however if this is augmented by practical experience in the field, the learning experience could be deeper. As Farrah (1990) argued, it is important to acknowledge

> *the educational value of the learners' rich life experiences, fostering a sense of self worth, supportively challenging ways of thinking and believing, and encouraging critical reflection and application as well as active participant involvement* (p. 161).

A Paradigm Shift from Teaching to Learning in Thai Instructors' Perspective

This student-centred approach contrasts with the traditional Thai instructional perspective (see Appendix IV, Figure C: a paradigm shift from teaching to learning, adapted from Pedler, 1991), where the students are guided by the original design of the material and are instructed by teachers about what teachers regard to be relevant (O'Sullivan & Tajaroensuk, 1997). The accurate storage and retrieval of externally

defined information is required of students. Traditional instruction is based specifically on logical dependencies in the knowledge domain and learning objectives. So the outcome of traditional instruction can be that students learn specific information by rote, rather than understanding underlying relationships. Students are asked to pay attention to what the teacher has focussed on and have few opportunities to use their own experience or follow their own areas of interest (Klatt, 1999). However in most Western countries, the last three decades or so have seen more emphasis on pedagogical innovation, particularly in the areas of autonomous learning, PBL and co-operative learning (see, for example, Boud, 1988; Bridges, 1992; Slavin, 1990, 1995, 1996; UNESCO Education, 2001).

Overall, to learn effectively in the higher education milieu students are expected to develop their academic abilities, to possess technical skills and focus on subject knowledge in practice, as stated by Ramsden (1992):

> *In all subject areas, these abilities involve combining and relating ideas so that the knowledge can be used effectively. Lecturers want their students to learn how to analyse what is unfamiliar to them, to assess proposed solutions to problems critically, to recognise the style and persuasiveness of concepts that describe the physical or social world, and to be able to apply ideas learned in formal classes to the world outside the classroom* (p. 38).

Following are examples of new teaching strategies in higher education applicable to simulated learning such as the BSC.

The Suitability of Simulated or Experiential Learning for Adult Learners

Experiential learning appears to be ideally suited to the ways in which many adults prefer to learn. As suggested by several researchers (see, for example, Brookfield, 1996; Jarvis, 1987; Knowles 1980, 1984, 1990), students' work experience in simulated learning fits the varied ways in which adult learners learn, as in simulated learning different courses of action are open to learners. Knowles (1980)suggested further that teachers of adults should provide some mechanism for learners to build on past experience and to determine their needs as they engage in learning activities.

According to Jarvis (1995), simulated learning involves the students in much more complex problem-solving than less student-centred forms of learning and is related

to vocational education which is valued highly in the education of adults, as the simulated situation relates closely to reality.

Gilley (1990) explained the value of experiential learning as follows:

> *Experiential learning can develop in adults the ability to learn in a self-directed fashion. This is encouraged by the opportunity to see the real consequence of one's actions, to feel the exhilaration of success as well as the frustration of failure. Second, adults can develop functional skills and attitudes necessary for effective adult life. These include skills of interpersonal interaction, group processing, intercultural communication, coping with ambiguity, and working on real-life problems with other adults* (p. 261).

According to Gilley (1990), the role of facilitators in simulated experience is that they must have adequate knowledge to develop the skills and attitudes desired. Jarvis (1995), also stressed the importance of critical reflection on learning: 'Simulation should also be followed by a period of debriefing, during which time learning experience may be reflected upon and ideas be allowed to crystallise in the minds of the participants' (p. 129). However, Gilley (1990), Print (1993) and Jarvis (1995) also stated that simulated learning can be less than ideal learning because it can be extremely time-consuming and expensive.

Independent Learning (Autonomous Learning)

According to Boud (1988), in general, higher education institutions encourage students to operate more independently than schools do. He also claimed that in higher education teachers can enable students to learn more effectively without the constant presence of a teacher, by helping students develop autonomy in learning. Here supervisors need to facilitate the students' learning processes by assisting them to take responsibility for their investigations and to be independent in their study.

Additionally, Boud (1988) reported that students who have opportunities to participate in decision-making develop additional skills in their areas of specialisation. Thus, learning to succeed in the world of work is dependent on students developing autonomous learning strategies and being able to use their own resources. Independent learning allows students to solve problems when they arise at work.

According to Boud (1988), autonomous learning typically occurs when decisions are made by learners. He claimed that to use this strategy, students need the learning skills to be able to make most decisions about learning as 'highly responsive' learners (p. 24). Similarly, Cottrell (2001) stated, 'The emphasis within current pedagogical thought is on increasing students' active participation within the learning process in order to foster independence and autonomy' (p. 5).

Students, however, need to be guided towards autonomy through careful structuring of opportunities and experiences and also need help to identify their skill requirements (Boud, 1988; Cottrell, 2001). Autonomy and independent learning are related to problem-based learning and experiential learning (Brookfield, 1996; Henry, 1989; Kolb, 1984; Pedler, 1991) which are key elements. As part of this process students should analyse their experience - by reflecting, evaluating and, as a consequence, reconstructing their tasks, thus requiring less control by their supervisors (Andresen, Boud & Cohen, 2000).

Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning is a form of independent learning, which involves students and their facilitators engaging in 'transactions' whereby the role of the teacher can be compared to that of an advisor, observer, co-learner and a facilitator of learning (Brady, 1995). As a consequence of this, learning becomes an ongoing process of problem-solving embedded in social experience. This approach has been part of the recent changes in higher education that go beyond classroom instruction as students apply their knowledge and training to 'real-life' situations encountered in local communities (Barnett, 1997; Savin-Baden, 2000).

PBL has become a widespread teaching methodology in disciplines where students must learn to apply knowledge, not just to acquire it. According to Barnett (1997), universities are now encouraged to promote 'critical thinking' in their students. PBL in higher education refers to the ways in which students interpret their knowledge, learning and concepts in order to solve a specific problem (Boud, 1985; Savin-Baden, 2000), and through such interpretations understand their own learning processes better. As Savin-Baden (2000), asserted:

> *Problem-based learning is an approach to learning through which many students have been enabled to understand their own situations*

> *and frameworks so that they are able to perceive how they learn* (p. 2).

Savin-Baden (2000) argued that teaching strategies which use learning problem-solving techniques in higher education facilitate students by encouraging them to work in groups or teams to solve typical problems. PBL is a powerful learning process, because students use 'real world' problems to develop an understanding of concepts, collaborative work and effective communication. It is a strategy that promotes good learning outcomes, by enabling students to learn content and develop critical thinking skills in a practical course (Boud, 1985; Brown & Pendlebury, 1997; Mayer, 1996b; Savin-Baden, 2000).

According to Brown and Pendlebury (1997), when learning by doing in 'real-life' contexts, students will need to find solutions to 'real-world' problems. They explained that this involves students developing their own interpretation of these problems. A number of scholars (see, for example, Boud, 1985; Knowles, 1984; Savin-Baden, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2001) have suggested that in PBL the following factors should apply:

- Teachers should model and coach only as needed; students should develop strategies to facilitate and direct their own learning.
- The role of the students is as participants; they learn through being involved in complex situations.
- The students' role in the problem is that of stakeholders. They are immersed in the situation, and learn about events as they occur.
- Students investigate and resolve problems in a real situation, for which they set the parameters.
- Students synthesise and construct knowledge to create solutions to problems.

There is a high degree of overlap between the principles and practices of experiential and problem-based learning, and adult learning, as noted by Higgs (1988). She reported that learning from experience involves the learners in problem identification, and finding the solution to the problems enables them to develop skills which accentuate adult learning principles. This view is in accord with a range of theories on adult learning (Knowles, 1990).

Bridges (1992) claimed the major goal of PBL is to promote skills in lifelong learning. He suggested that 'student-centred learning addresses this goal but in a limited fashion' (p. 110). Some scholars (see, for example, Brookfield, 1996; Knowles, 1990) have argued that adult learning is based on the adult tendency to prefer self-direction, experiences which are rich learning resources, and the preference for learning generated by 'real-life' events, such as problem-solving in simulated learning contexts. Bridges suggested further that PBL projects acquaint students with a range of practices and possibilities for independent, self-directed and lifelong learning. Therefore, PBL is an appropriate learning approach for universities, because this approach responds to and addresses some of the learners' needs (Jarvis, 2001).

Co-Operative Learning/ Teamwork

Slavin (1990) described co-operative learning as depending on two essential features. These are group goals or positive interdependence, and individual accountability, as follows:

> *Cooperative groups must work together to earn recognition, grades, rewards, and other indicators of group success. Simply asking students to work together is not enough. The second essential feature is individual accountability: the group's success must depend on the individual learning of all group members* (p. 52).

Galton and Williamson (1992) described types of learning other than individual strategies, such as co-operative and collaborative groups in the compulsory education sectors. These designations are also applicable to groups at the tertiary level. Slavin (1995) agreed with this viewpoint, stating that '…research over the last twenty years has identified co-operative learning methods that can be used effectively at every grade level to teach every type of content' (p. 2). He reported further, that there are many reasons for co-operative learning to enter the mainstream of education practice.

A number of researchers (see, for example, Galton and Williamson, 1992; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1990; Slavin, 1995) stated that in co-operative learning, across all ages, the development of the social skills necessary to co-operate is a key to high quality group work. Students work in their groups to solve problems using the skills and knowledge of each student. When students have different abilities, they are expected to work on separate but related tasks towards a single outcome. For

collaborative learning, individual student performance is used, for example, working on the same task, contributing to a single outcome, which involves problem-solving activities. Pedler (1991) stated that when students work collaboratively, 'they acquire practice and experience not just by formal methods of teaching but through simulation, interaction with peers, and development' (p. 169).

Johnson et al., (1990) argued that co-operative learning represents the structured end of the collaborative learning continuum. In practice, however, the distinction between co-operative and collaborative group work is difficult to establish (Galton & Williamson, 1992). For example, when students work as a co-operative group, they also collaborate, because the group is expected to work together to provide a single outcome. Nevertheless, in this study the view is taken that the main learning strategy in the BSC is co-operative rather than collaborative.

Another point of view on the inherent value of co-operative groups is that they teach students to work effectively on specific tasks. As Johnson and Johnson (1994) stated:

> *The purpose of co-operative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her own right. Individual accountability is the key to ensuring that all group members are, in fact, strengthened by learning cooperatively* (p. 35).

Likewise, Slavin (1995) maintained that the most important goal of co-operative learning is to provide students with the knowledge, concepts and skills to become contributing members of the society (p. 15). Moreover, he claimed that co-operative learning provides an environment where students work together to learn, as opposed to competing with each other. He also suggested that co-operative learning can be used for issue-based learning, where students work together to solve problems, discuss, and compare information.

Over several studies, Slavin (1983, 1990, 1995) demonstrated that students who work in co-operative groups learn more than those engaged in traditional learning activities. He detailed that when students work together they need to employ their abilities in leadership, trust-building, conflict-management, constructive criticism, encouragement, compromise, negotiation and clarification. These roles should be undertaken by particular students, especially the more able students, who are expected to boost the team performance, by consciously working with their

colleagues. In addition, Slavin (1995) concluded that positive effects on student achievement will occur when co-operative integrated group goals and individual accountability are used together (p. 19).

A number of educators (see, for example, Barry & King, 1998; Galton & Williamson, 1992; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994; Slavin, 1983, 1990, 1995, 1996) confirmed that co-operative learning is expected to be more productive than competitive and individualistic strategies. The literature on co-operative learning refers to key elements such as 'group goals and individual accountability'. Slavin (1996), stated that 'Individual accountability means that the team's success depends on the individual learning of all team members' (p. 139). The purpose of the activity in co-operative learning is to promote socialisation and general higher-order thinking or problem-solving skills. For Slavin (1995), co-operative learning methods have in common the idea that students should work together to learn and are responsible, to some degree, for each other's learning as well as their own.

Similarly, Nevin, Smith and Udvari-Solner (1994), when considering teaching in business schools, stated that effective implementation of co-operative learning depends on supervisors who address the elements that contribute to the effectiveness of co-operative efforts. They reported that students working together to accomplish a group's goal are at the heart of co-operative learning. They suggested that student groups should be structured to foster positive interdependence (the 'sink or swim together' feeling). For example, in the BSC, when students run their business, supervisors need to provide them with structured time to support each other's learning, through training each other, sharing, and encouraging learning efforts. To assist students' skills in teamwork, Mulford, Silins and Leithwood (2004) suggested some 'warm-up' activities are done first. Mulford et al., (2004) explained:

> *The first,* ***Ice-Breaker****, provides an opportunity for sharing information and mixing. The second,* ***Interdependence****, explores the effects of collaboration and competition in group problem-solving as well as how task-relevant information is shared. The third,* ***Trading****, helps participants become aware that individuals can react differently to exactly the same stimuli and that a person's view can be affected by the position taken by the group* (p. 36).

As the success of achieving a group task greatly depends on the willingness of group members to work together, these 'warm-up' activities will help in building the students' co-operative learning attitude.

It is clear from the above discussion, that changes in teaching methods in higher education institutions have to take skills into account in their programmes, rather than leaving these 'less important' matters until later (Jarvis, 2001), when the students have graduated. Thus, 'new teaching' methods must include practice-based learning which is at the heart of learning in higher education today (Griffiths & Guile, 1999; Mortimore, 1999).

2.1.3 Curriculum Issues Related to Real-Life Contexts

As mentioned in Chapter One, in Thailand and in other developing economies, there is recognition that educational change is being initiated by increasing global competition. A review of the relevant literature was undertaken to assess how curricula and teaching are altering in higher education institutions all over the world, in response to these demands (Becher et al., 1978; Berryman, 2000; Ensor, 2004; Litt & Parkinson, 1979; Prawat, 1992; UNESCO Asia and the Pacific Regional Bureau for Education Bangkok, 2002).

According to the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok (2002), the new dynamic approach to curriculum development 'involves a complex process influenced by decision-making practices that are influenced by various aspects of the socio-cultural, political and economical milieu' (p. 39). The essential features of curricula, therefore, may require more careful linking of practical enterprise and the use of a number of curriculum approaches which have emerged over the decades (Marsh & Willis, 2003). Sources of the literature relevant to curriculum issues related to 'real world' business contexts are summarised in Table 2-3.

Table 2-3: *Overview of some of the literature relevant to curriculum issues related to learning in real world business contexts*

Author (Year)	Title	Major Focus
Brady (1995)	Curriculum Development	Curriculum development involves the relationship between the essential curriculum elements in the process of curriculum development
Brady & Kennedy (2003)	Curriculum Construction	Business curriculum relevant to outcomes (employment opportunities)
Marsh & Willis (2003)	Curriculum: Alternative Approaches, Ongoing Issues	Curriculum development, implementation, evaluation and the interface of politics and curriculum decision-making
Ornstein & Hunkins (1998)	Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues	Curriculum text incorporates theory to identify worthwhile practices in the real world

Curriculum Development or Design Models

Since the early 1960s, it became apparent to researchers evaluating educational curricula that curriculum design affected the effectiveness of education programs (Madaus, Stufflebeam & Scriven, 1983). The range of models available and the varied types of curriculum possible, present challenges to the vast array of participants involved in education (Brady, 1995; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998).

Curriculum development models can be categorized in terms of their flexibility. This flexibility is depicted as a continuum between two extremes, with the 'rational or objective' models being the most rigid, and the 'dynamic interactive' models being the most flexible (Marsh & Willis, 2003; Print, 1993; Tyler, 1983). Walker's model, for example, which is one of the 'dynamic interactive' models, can be applied, so that students become engaged in 'real-life' situations. The application of models such as Walker's means that the curriculum is continuously changed and developed further as a consequence of encounters with the 'real-world'. Marsh and Willis (2003) stated that Walker's model is 'dynamic-interactive' because it uses methodologies from the social sciences to produce an accurate description of what *actually happens* (researcher emphasis), when people endeavour to develop a curriculum.

Curriculum models can provide realistic and detailed perspectives on some particulars of the curriculum in action (Marsh & Willis, 2003). These models are influenced by a view of knowledge and reality as a dynamic, emerging phenomenon, where self and others interact in real world contexts. Ornstein and Hunkins (1998), pointed out the applicability of curriculum development models to the real world of work as follows:

> *By practice, we mean the procedures, methods, and skills that apply to the working world, where a person is on the job or actively involved in his or her profession. These procedures and methods are teachable and can be applied in different situations* (p. 21).

To reflect this reality, curriculum models require acknowledgement of the connection between theory and practice. This suggests that when students applied their theoretical knowledge in practice, their results should be assessable as successful or effective, or otherwise.

Curriculum Evaluation

Updating curricula must necessarily be preceded by an evaluation of how effectively they facilitate their design objectives. The main purpose of curriculum evaluation is to judge programmes or projects in order to facilitate or improve them. Curriculum evaluation involves the whole process of planning and implementing a curriculum, which may lead directly to a further cycle of beneficial change (Marsh & Willis, 2003). According to Marsh and Willis (2003), the purposes of curriculum evaluation include the following:

- to improve teaching and to better meet the needs of students, in line with the concept of 'student-centred' learning;
- to examine any effects of introducing a new curriculum; and
- to justify university practices to the community.

There can be no improvement in curriculum without evaluation. However, curriculum evaluation assesses interaction between teachers and students within the curriculum, in particular settings (Fullan, 2001). As described by Marsh and Willis (2003), curriculum evaluation is:

> *is not confined to investigating only what students have learned or to analysing lesson plans. Rather, curriculum evaluation can involve examination of the goals, rationale, and structure of both the planned curriculum and the enacted curriculum; a study of the context in*

> *which the enacted curriculum occurs (including inputs from parents and the community); and an analysis of the interests, motivations, reactions, and achievements of the students experiencing the curriculum* (p. 277).

There are many curriculum evaluation models from which to choose. For example, Worthen and Sanders (1973) described a number of such models, ranging from Stake's 'Countenance Model' to Stufflebeam's 'CIPP Model'. Some of these models involve 'experimentation' and 'testing' while others seek to 'illuminate' key aspects of the course under consideration and the context in which it is implemented, focusing on description and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction (Brady, 1995). Each educational situation and the context in which it exists is unique; therefore different types of evaluation will be suitable for different curricula (Brady, 1995; Marsh, 1986; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998).

One approach to curriculum evaluation that is often appropriate for case study is the 'Illuminative Model', developed by Parlett and Hamilton (1977). The 'Illuminative Model' is a model which claims to represent a paradigm shift involving new suppositions, concepts and methodologies, and according to Marsh and Willis (2003), this model may be appropriate for courses like the BSC, because such courses are never implemented exactly as planned, due to the contingencies in each learning milieu.

Business Curricula

According to Brady and Kennedy (2003), a business school's core curriculum should contain a series of courses designed to provide students with a solid foundation in the academic disciplines and applied function areas necessary to compete in a global economy. They stated further, 'The curriculum is important and [it] must be structured in a particular way to deliver outcomes that are relevant to employment opportunities and the economic needs of society' (p. 5). Moreover, the curriculum content in business professional programs should contribute to the students' capacity to function well in the world of business. As Brady and Kennedy (2003) stated, 'Business people see the curriculum as the means by which students gain the requisite knowledge and skills to make them productive workers' (p. 4). This approach to learning is enhanced by co-curricular opportunities which bring students into contact with 'real-world' issues.

Business Schools typically teach communication skills, creativity, entrepreneurship, business ethics, information technology, interpersonal skills and problem-solving (Schmidt, 1991). These teaching areas also highlight critical thinking, technological literacy and exposure to 'real-world' situations. Therefore, the business curriculum should be designed to emphasise the importance of planning to confront changes and encourage progress towards goals (Brady & Kennedy, 1998). The curriculum seeks to improve the quality of students in a 'real' business world, in response to global competition and the liberalisation of trade (Schmidt, 1991; Shinawatra, 2003; Stinson & Milter, 1996).

Miralao (2000) and the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok (2002) provided valuable guidelines for the improvement of business curricula. These guide lines are based on changes which have occurred in the world of work where, for example, the demands of a global economy have exerted pressure on labour markets, requiring new types of skills and competencies to be developed by graduates. The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok (2002), summed up the situation well with the following statement:

> *The rapidly changing social, political and economical environment calls for a constant updating of teaching and learning areas so as to meet the demands of the global society and labour markets* (p. 46).

Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment is particularly suited to courses such as the BSC, where learning in real-life contexts needs to be assessed. Authentic assessment is a form of assessment in which students are asked to demonstrate their mastery of the subject, which includes the achievement of essential knowledge and skills. Some literature relevant to authentic assessment related to real world contexts is summarised in Table 2-4.

Table 2-4: *Overview of some of the literature relevant to authentic assessment in higher education*

Author (Year)	Title	Major Focus
Fischer & King (1995)	Authentic Assessment: A Guide to Implementation	Assists students to demonstrate knowledge and solve problems in real-life
Marsh & Willis (2003)	Curriculum: Alternative Approaches, Ongoing Issues	The arguments (pro and con) for traditional and authentic assessment
Rudner & Boston (1994)	Performance Assessment	Authentic assessments address the skills and abilities needed to perform actual tasks

A number of researchers have given definitions of authentic assessment, for example, Fischer and King (1995), described authentic assessment as:

> *when students do something other than the traditional norm-referenced or criterion-referenced paper-and-pencil measurement, requiring students not only to respond but also to demonstrate knowledge and skills* (p. 2).

However, Rudner and Boston (1994), suggested that such authentic assessment actually involves learning and stated that 'The process of assessment is itself a constructivist learning experience, requiring students to apply thinking skills, to understand the nature of high quality performance, and to provide feedback to themselves and others' (p. 7).

Authentic assessment incorporates a wide variety of methods to correspond as closely as possible to 'real world' student experiences (Custer, 1994; Fischer & King, 1995; Herman, Aschbacher & Winters, 1992; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Mueller, 2003; Rudner, 1994; Wiggins, 1998). Torrance (1993) stated that authentic assessment involves higher order skills and competencies, such as problem-solving, investigation and analysis. Boud (1995), argued that the importance of this assessment perspective is that it relates teaching directly to assessment which, in turn, impacts on student learning.

In simulated learning, authentic assessment is emphasised, to discover whether or not students can solve problems successfully, or describe the process of solving problems. The performance testing of problem-solving is valid, reliable and objective

when using authentic (realistic) tasks, whereas traditional tests may lack these features (Mayer, 1996b).

Authentic assessment is more complete and representative than traditional assessment, using different techniques from the traditional standardised test (see Appendix IV, Figure D: The Attributes of Traditional and Authentic Assessment). In the BSC context, assessment should be related to how students manage a business in a real world context. Greater stress on understanding, hands-on learning experiences, and collaborative group work will help students use the tools, techniques, and ideas to develop their understanding of the world and enable them to develop solutions to real-life problems (Custer, 1994; Fischer & King 1995; Kerka, 1995).

However, a number of scholars (Linn, Baker & Dunbar, 1991; Marsh & Willis 2003; Torrance, 1993), referred to the disadvantages of authentic assessment; in particular, that it can be very time-consuming when compared with other assessment methods. They also stated that justifying the use of authentic assessment tasks to others may be difficult, as they may question the validity of the continuous assessment method, because traditional assessment methods assess only the finished products or the outcomes (Huba & Freed, 2000; Linn et al., 1991; Marsh & Willis, 2003: Torrance, 1993).

On the other hand, Kauchak and Eggen (1998) reported some difficulty with traditional assessment including focus on knowledge and offering little insight into learners' thought processes and problem-solving skills. They stated that traditional pen- and paper-based assessment does not assess students' ability to apply their understanding to 'real' world problems (p. 379). As Pryor and Torrance (cited in Marsh & Willis, 2003) stated, 'In authentic assessment, therefore, the tasks students undertake are more practical, realistic, and challenging than traditional paper-pencil tests' (p. 287).

Some advantages of authentic assessment include that it does not encourage rote learning and passive test taking. Instead, it focuses on students' analytical skills, ability to integrate what they learn, creativity, ability to work collaboratively, and written and oral expression skills (Huba & Freed, 2000; Marsh & Willis, 2003). Thus, the literature suggests that authentic assessment is aligned closely with

curricula such as the BSC, as they assess thinking and doing, theory and practice, in real-world contexts (Kerka, 1995). Overall, assessing for problem-solving is an appropriate assessment strategy for a practice-based course such as the BSC.

2.2 Stakeholders' Perceptions: Applying Theory in Practice

Research Question 2: ***How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their knowledge in practice?***

The effectiveness of the transfer of learning from theory to practice in the business simulation course, is a key aspect of this research. The focus of this section is the transfer of theory into practice, which is an experiential learning method (Adams, 1973; Barnett & Hallam, 1999; Cudworth, 1995; Knowles, 1990; Kolb, 1984). Some literature relevant to this process is summarised briefly below in Table 2.5.

Table 2-5: *Overview of some of the literature relevant to the transfer of learning: from theory to practice*

Author (Year)	Title	Major Focus
Andresen, Boud & Cohen (2000)	Experience-based Learning	Experiential learning is a powerful tool for enabling students to practise their theory.
Knowles (1984, 1990)	The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species	The resource of greatest value in adult education is the learner's experience
Kolb (1984)	Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development	Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it and learning is the process whereby knowledge is constructed through experience

2.2.1 Transfer of Learning: From Theory to Practice

The literature reviewed here shows clearly that theoretical knowledge of the type that might be acquired in a lecture situation can be transformed to practical understandings through means such as simulations. This study, at RQ 2, tests this broad claim in the BSC case.

According to Knowles (1990), the transfer of knowledge and principles to novel situations can mirror the ways in which interaction occurs between learners and their

environment. He stated further that it is an effective alternative learning method, to learn by initiating problem-solving or 'getting the students into the situation' in a highly realistic manner (pp. 75-76). The transfer of learning occurs when students use their theoretical knowledge to inform their performance.

As described in section 2.1.1, simulated learning is experiential (Kolb, 1984). Transferring theoretical knowledge into practice develops business students' understanding and enables them to apply their knowledge to 'real-life' business practice. There are a number of definitions of learning by doing, or experiential learning. For example, Kolb (cited in Peterson, 1989), described experiential learning as a process of learning, rather than the outcome of learning. As Kolb (1984) stated, 'Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (p. 38). Experiential learning is the process whereby students analyse their experience by reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing their experience, both individually and collectively (Andresen et al., 2000). Similarly, McGill and Weil (1989) portrayed experiential learning as 'self-managed, by individuals and groups, or facilitated by trainers or change agents outside post-school education' (p. 248).

Boud (1988) argued that the features of experiential learning include autonomous learning and that it may be less controllable and more context-related than traditional learning. These characteristics make it an important area for the development of ideas which can be applied in more conventional settings.

According to Andresen et al., (2000), experiential methods have been a powerful tool for enabling professionals to acknowledge students' position in their practice. They reported that there are several forms of experiential learning used in vocational and professional education, such as: internships, on-the-job training, workshops, case study approaches and simulations (p. 233). Through such experiences, the opportunities for students to combine theory with practice are mutually constructed and co-operative learning demonstrates the benefits of students working with others in collective learning efforts (Livingston & Stoll, cited in Cudworth, 1995). The course should focus on students' learning needs and include theory and practice, to develop desired outcomes.

Business simulation learning is described as the experience of students in embedding business skills in simulated business environments. Students are required to apply theoretical knowledge or textbook principles, in a context where practical skills, problem-solving, working co-operatively and social skills also are required (Knowles, 1980, 1990; Marsh & Willis, 2003). Knowles claimed further that the experience of adult learners includes simulated learning, skill-practise exercises, group discussion and community development.

2.2.2 Alternative Approaches to Curriculum Construction: Applying Theory in Practice

As the BSC attempts to equip students to work in a 'real' business world, the literature reviewed in this section includes research into curriculum issues related to practice-based courses such as the BSC. Some literature relevant to curriculum issues which are related to applying theoretical knowledge to practice is summarised in Table 2-6.

Table 2-6: *Overview of some of the literature relevant to issues in practice-based curricula*

Author (Year)	Title	Major Focus
Brady & Kennedy (1988)	Curriculum Construction	Learning by doing is an effective strategy in a real world business context
Marsh & Willis (2003)	Curriculum: Alternative Approaches, Ongoing Issues	An effective curriculum is when students combine theory with practice
Ornstein & Hunkins (1998)	Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues	Practical approaches allow students to apply theory to the working world

The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (1998) encouraged apprenticeship/work study opportunities for students and the revision of curricula to align them more closely with work practices. This was seen as a way to strengthen the world of work, through co-operation with higher education institutions. Additionally, job-related technical skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and practical business skills also are needed in curricula, in order to produce qualified students who are capable of competing in the job market and who can function effectively in the globalisation era (Ministry of University Affairs, 2000).

The Long Term Plan in Higher Education, in use in Thailand since the late 1980s, argued that the current style of higher education was not suitable to produce quality graduates. It was argued that using a teacher-centred approach produced students who lacked the ability to think creatively, solve problems and use their knowledge in appropriate and adaptive ways (Standen & Herrington, 1997; The Committee of Thai Education, 1996).

Curriculum development models are able to provide realistic and detailed particulars of curricula in action (Marsh & Willis, 2003). These models are influenced by the view of knowledge and reality as a dynamic, emerging phenomenon, where self and others interact in real world contexts. Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) argued that:

> *By practice, we mean the procedures, methods, and skills that apply to the working world, where a person is on the job or actively involved in his or her profession. These procedures and methods are teachable and can be applied in different situations* (p. 21).

There is a considerable body of literature supporting the design of curricula based on 'learning by practising' (Buchanan et al., 2002; Colwill & Birchall, 1992; Fullan, 2001; Kolb, 1984; McGill & Beaty, 1995). However, strategic change needs to be reflected in curriculum design and performance measurement systems, in terms of the learning outcomes of graduates (Selen, 2001). To reflect this reality, curriculum development models require more than acknowledgement of the connection between theory and practice. It is also necessary that when students apply their theoretical knowledge in practice, their outcomes should be able to be considered as successful or as effective in a real business environment.

According to Brady and Kennedy (1998), in the business field 'learning by doing' is an effective way of teaching students to manage a business in a real-life environment, to solve problems in an organisation, to manage risk and to minimise the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice. They reported that 'Business people see the curriculum as the means by which students gain the requisite knowledge and skills to make them productive workers' (p. 5). Therefore, the curriculum should be developed with regard to the relevance of the concepts used to the practice of business, or the effectiveness of the pedagogy in the preparation of students to become business people (Brady & Kennedy, 1998; Milter & Stinson, 1995; Stinson & Milter, 1996).

2.3 Preparing Students for the World of Work

Research Question 3: ***How effectively does the BSC prepare students to work with the community?***

The BSC uses a 'real-world' approach to developing skills which students can use to work effectively with the community. The literature relevant to community-based learning is reviewed in this section. It describes the nature and purpose of students' work with the community. The issues involved in community-based learning are examined to address this research question and they include community-based learning for adults and curriculum design to achieve the goals and purposes of community stakeholders. Some literature relevant to this key issue is summarised in Table 2-7.

Table 2-7: *Overview of some of the literature relevant to community-focused learning*

Author (Year)	Title	Major Focus
Boud & Solomon (2001)	Repositioning Universities and Work	Universities should promote cooperative relationships between themselves and the community
Jacoby (1996)	Service-Learning in Today's Higher Education	Community-based learning encourages students to deal actively with their communities
Knowles (1980)	The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy	Adult education combines processes and activities involved in social practice
Marsh & Willis (2003)	Curriculum Alternative Approaches, Ongoing Issues	Curriculum planning involves social groups
Owens & Wang (1996)	Community-Based Learning: A Foundation for Meaningful Education Reform	Community-based learning is experiential as students work with community and apply theoretical knowledge to solve problems

This section describes the importance of learning which is related to work outside the classrooms for students in higher education, discussing the nature and purpose of students' work within their community. These learning experiences are available only in community with others. The outcomes of community-based learning include the

development of a sense of community and altruism and commitment in students, as discussed below.

2.3.1 Community-Based Learning

Currently, numerous educators and policy makers are advocating a move away from 'teacher-centred' models, towards more 'learner-centred' and 'community-based' models (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Grossman et al., 2000; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998). These new teaching methods are important elements of the recent changes in higher education. According to McGill and Beaty (1995), these changes represent:

> *a powerful method to those who wish to bring together the world of theory and the world of practice. It offers a clear structure to those who see important links between education and the world within (personal development) and between learning and the world 'out there' (development of the material and interpersonal world)* (p. 236).

According to Owens and Wang (1996), community-based learning is an educational initiative which links students with local communities in courses where they grapple with the application of theoretical knowledge to concrete problems. Additionally, community-based learning is experiential, encouraging students to deal actively with others, to promote their learning and development and to address community issues (Jacoby, 1996; Owens & Wang, 1996). Moreover, Jacoby (1996) argued that in the community-based learning context, the ideal reflection of social issues should include opportunities for participants to receive feedback from those community persons who are involved in the program.

Similarly, Boud and Solomon (2001) described work-based learning, as expected in the BSC, as education which attempts to be involved with the economic, social and educational demands of the community. It is used to describe a class of university programmes which allows university and work organisations to create new teaching and learning opportunities in the workplace (p. 4). In its principal context, the term work-based learning is similar to community-based learning, because both types of learning provide a fundamental challenge to existing practice, by linking the 'inside' and the 'outside'.

According to Boud and Solomon (2001), when students incorporate knowledge and experiences that link learning to workplace performance, this could add a quality to

the third participant - the university (p. 18). Moreover, they stated that, 'This is important for the university's positioning of itself at a time when the market place rewards close co-operative relationships between higher education learning and the 'real' world' (p. 18).

As a result, students are motivated to study and view education as an exciting opportunity through which they learn, develop, and apply academic and vocational skills in a workplace context, to address the 'real-life' needs of their local communities. Community-based learning can lead to the establishment of relationships between students and community members, and educational institutions and community, which are linked and aligned to achieve mutually valued learning outcomes (Schroeder, 2003). Additionally, the literature stresses that the key concepts of community-based learning are reflection and reciprocity (Jacoby, 1996).

Boud, Solomon and Symes (2001) argued that work-based learning also reveals definitely attractive reciprocal gains for all its participants. In work-based learning, they refer to how partnerships between an external organisation and an educational institution are established specifically to foster learning (p. 4). These organisations can include private, public or community sectors of the economy. Furthermore, they pointed out that it is important for the university's positioning of itself to reward close co-operative relationships between higher education learning and the 'real' world (p. 18).

However, Owens and Wang (1996) reported that some of the barriers to community-based learning are the amount of time, effort, expense involved and taking attention away from the traditional curriculum content, although they acknowledge the importance of applying knowledge to 'real-world' contexts. Consequently, while the literature points to highly positive aspects of community learning, there may be some difficulties associated with it.

2.3.2 The Sense of Community and Commitment to Altruism

As mentioned above, Knowles (1980) referred to the idea of 'maturity education'. Such maturity involves a capacity for altruism:

> *We come into the world in a state of total self-centeredness, and one of our central tasks for the rest of our lives is to become increasingly*

> *able to care about others. Conditions that induce a spirit of rivalry toward others rather than helpfulness toward others - such as the competition for grades promoted by traditional schooling - interfere with maturation in this dimension. Incidentally, there are some psychiatrists who hold that altruism is the single best criterion of mental health* (p. 31).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Sergiovanni (1994) had similar thoughts on this issue, offering the view that a sense of community promotes a sense that members have of belonging, a sense that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to thinking, growing and inquiring in an area where learning is an approach as well as an activity. They suggested that a sense of responsibility emerges for addressing awareness of community through students' commitment to shared goals.

Obst and White (2004) reported that it is difficult to measure whether or not a sense of community exists among community members. Data from their study referred to whether members expect to remain in community for a long time, or do not have long-term membership prospects. However, this does not mean that a psychological sense of community cannot exist in more temporary communities. Several researchers (e.g., Berman, 1997; McMillan & Chavis, 1986 and Schroeder, 2003) reported that development of a sense of community has become increasingly important in the context of community-based learning. Working with the community and serving its needs are both high priorities for Payap University. It is interesting to note that the research cited above supports the importance of achieving these community-development goals, as well as the achievement of successful business outcomes in the BSC.

The literature reviewed here indicates courses such as the BSC may very well build sense of community and, indeed, a commitment to altruism among their students.

2.3.3 Curriculum to Achieve the Goals and Purpose of Community Stakeholders

Brady and Kennedy (2003) stated that the important task of setting the vocational curriculum within the school curriculum should provide students with the essential knowledge and skills to enable them to participate actively in the world of work (p.

9). Thus, planning the curriculum should involve decision-making by curriculum developers or syllabus committees which take account of the needs of students, including what students should learn and what learners must acquire (Print, 1993).

However, several scholars have argued that school knowledge is not controlled by teachers but by major groups holding vested interests in using the curriculum to maintain their privileged positions in the social order (Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Marsh & Willis, 2003). Marsh and Willis (2003) stated that the process of curriculum planning and development needs '*external facilitators*' (i.e., parents, community groups and local industries) to guide the curriculum planners. They also reported that curriculum evaluation is necessary to improve teaching and to better meet the needs of students, in line with the concept of 'student-centred' learning. Curriculum evaluation should also be used to examine the effects of introducing a new curriculum and to justify university practices to the community.

Schroeder (2003) reported on recent industry critiques regarding the poor preparation of graduates for the workplace and the lack of service and institutional assistance to local communities and states. He suggested that curricula in higher education should be more relevant to the needs of employers, communities and students, and should implement innovative pedagogies that help bridge the gap between ideal academic standards and actual student performance. To achieve curriculum goals, community stakeholders and institutions must be involved in curriculum design.

Berman (1997) found that to improve curriculum design to achieve community goals, co-operative learning environments are more effective in social problem-solving and in resolving conflicts, than individual learning. Moreover, he suggested that in pedagogy for the 21st century, the curriculum should emphasise educational practices to help young people understand how their lives are related to others and to the world. Thus, the new pedagogy should produce learners with new insights into the development of social consciousness and a sense of social responsibility to their communities and this awareness must be included in higher education.

At present, higher education curricula are designed to enable students to achieve not just a thorough knowledge of the subject they are studying, but also the skills needed to be socially active and fulfilled citizens who can contribute effectively to the

economic prosperity of the country (Honeybone, Blumhof & Hall, 2002). According to Coleman (1997), the idea of human capital is the most important development in the economics of education in the past 30 years. Human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities which make them able to act in new ways. Thus, investing in human capital increases the wealth of a society, in improved human skills, knowledge and understanding. Such investment, it is claimed, can occur through course such as the BSC.

Academic personnel should play a major role in determining the curriculum, but consultation with all stakeholders is an essential part of the process of designing courses. All of this is good advice to those concerned with the effectiveness and efficiency of the BSC.

2.4 Stakeholders' Advice

Research Questions 4 and 5: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to the university and policy-makers who are involved in community development initiatives of the Business Simulation Course?***

In this section, the literature review is not divided between RQ 4 and RQ 5, because a large degree of overlap is present in the literature. Therefore the information from a corpus of literature is combined which relates to both questions. This section therefore, focuses upon both Thai and Western literature which discusses the importance of the advice stakeholders provide to the university about community priorities and curriculum design in courses such as the BSC, to help determine higher education policy in Thailand and elsewhere.

According to Bridgman and Davis (2000), much policy begins with identifying issues by interest groups, followed by discussion of problems which emerge and ultimately demand government action. Consultation with stakeholders helps governments to understand the key issues in areas such as higher education.

Curriculum planning is most effective when contributed to by all key stakeholders - especially parents, students and external facilitators, such as community members and local industries, who have special knowledge, skills, or experience. These qualities are helpful in guiding the planners (Marsh & Willis, 2003). These

stakeholders are able to provide guidelines for integration of curricula into the life of the community and they should be encouraged to participate more (Fullan, 1999).

In short, to achieve the purpose of community stakeholders, curriculum planning and design for business courses at tertiary level should take into account the views of supervisors, students, parents and agencies; cultural and historic matters; and the specific economic circumstances, combining relevant theory with practical application in real-life contexts (Ainley, 1994; Milter & Stinson, 1995; Schmidt, 1991; UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). Business schools should offer a curriculum that reflects the needs of the communities within which they operate.

Social science research is also a useful input into public policy-making. For example, according to Weiss (1977), social science research is useful to open up new vistas for government agencies. Input from such research looks at problems from a different standpoint and offers government bodies a new perspective for considering solutions. Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) pointed out the importance of not just leaving social problem-solving to governments because 'interest groups provide essential information and help distil policy issues to manageable proportions…' (p. 140). Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) argued for allowing interest groups to bring diverse perspectives to bear on a problem. The interest-group system frequently can help evolve a policy choice that is more intelligent than what could be accomplished by a narrow policy-making process which, as Safran (cited in Lindblom and Woodhouse, 1993) stated, 'cannot substitute itself for the expertise of a group' (p. 78).

Next, the literature review considers curriculum issues and types of teaching strategy in higher education. In particular, the literature on curriculum and ethics in business schools is reviewed to address RQ 4 and RQ 5. Finally, the literature relevant to pedagogy for higher education is considered. The key issues are summarised in Table 2-8.

Table 2-8: *Overview of some of the literature relevant to administration and policy study*

Author (Year)	Title	Major Focus
Barnett & Hallam (1999)	Teaching for Supercomplexity: A Pedagogy for Higher Education	Pedagogical practices have exhibited a resistance to change in higher education
Ewin (1992)	Why Worry About Business Ethics?	Business people should be ethical in their business behaviour
Marsh & Willis (2003)	Curriculum Alternative Approaches, Ongoing Issues	The process of curriculum: planning, implementing and evaluating

2.4.1 Curriculum Design in Higher Education

Curriculum design in higher education should be based on developing the population's knowledge and skills, which then produces real economic and social changes (Kaewdang, 2001; McGill & Beaty, 1995; Miralao & Gregorio, 2000; Shinawatra, 2003; Young, 1998). Curriculum design also should be related to appropriate methods of evaluation and designed to provide the information needed by government departments, to enable them to produce quality education for the nation. In addition, curriculum design should be appropriate to each institution's policies and community's practice, depending on its resources, as suggested by several researchers (Fullan, 2001; McLaughlin & Mitra, cited in Fullan, 2001; UNESCO WCHE, 1998). Hence, to determine curriculum needs at university level, feedback from stakeholders is essential.

2.4.2 A Local Focus for Curriculum Implementation

According to the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok (2002), curriculum content should be based on local needs in the region:

> *Curriculum content should be based on the local needs and relevance for the learners. In this regard, most countries have placed increased emphasis on the local or school-based curriculum, to be developed by teachers and local authorities, which is the best level at which to perceive and integrate the realities of the communities* (p. 32).

This is also true of higher education. It is essential for quality education that curriculum content should be relevant to the local cultural and socio-economic realities, to promote the political rationale of educational governance. However, the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok (2002), has

mentioned some constraints affecting the implementation of local curricula which are relevant also to Thai universities. These include: the lack of competent staff (teachers and administration); lack of funding; resistance to change from teachers and the constraint of university entrance exams (the structure of the higher education system). For example, teachers tend to be afraid of innovation, partly because they prefer the familiar, and partly because the vested interests of most people are normally bound up with the existing set-up (Hargreaves, 1995, cited in UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, 2002; Yibing, 2001).

2.4.3 Business Ethics

In particular, business curricula need to address the issue of how to incorporate business ethics into the curriculum. Business ethics need to be given a higher priority in curriculum development, as discussed below.

A number of scholars have asserted that the term 'business ethics' refers to rules concerning the actual practice of business (Carroll, 1989; Desjardins & McCall, 1990). Carroll described 'ethical behaviour' in business as an expectation by society or particular groups that business people have a code of ethics by which they abide. However, some business people believe that ethics and business do not fit together. As Caroll (1989) pointed out:

> *The public's view of business's ethics has never been very high,… many people see business ethics as essentially a contradiction in terms and that there is only a fine line between a business executive and a crook* (p. 78).

According to Ewin (1992), many people believe that 'They [business people] cannot behave in an ethical way and stay in business; they must be hard-nosed and nasty' (p. 50). One explanation for this is offered by Ewin as follows: 'Business people are adults, and once somebody has reached adulthood it looks as though ethics education is either unnecessary or impossible' (p. 21). In fact, ethics and business are inseparable, and this awareness should be universally expressed in the business curricula. Ewin (1992) acknowledged this, stating that business schools need to have business ethics in their curriculum, because ethics are essential in business. He noted that 'A business ethics course will not turn the unethical into ethical people, but it will help ethical people to be better and more effective at being ethical' (p. 58).

However Ewin considered that it is difficult directly to teach people to be ethical or honest since 'Ethics can … be frustrating because it offers few black-and-white solutions; instead, it offers complex problems, hard choices, and uncertain outcomes… in ethics there is no cookbook formula' (p. 8). Also it is hard for ethical education to transfer knowledge or understanding which differs from what is learned in other subjects. However, in Ewin's view (1992), people do need to learn how to be good corporate citizens.

Teachers involved in the process of education are expected to help students develop awareness of the importance of community values and a sense of social responsibility. According to Bottery (1992), students need to have the education and the experience to enable them to understand the workings of their community. Bobbitt (cited in Bottery, 1992) stated that the objectives of curriculum construction in management subjects should be based on the values and actual practices extant in business at the time. He suggested that:

> *The central theory [of curriculum] is simple. Human life, however varied, consists in the performance of specific activities. Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities… This requires only that one go out into the world of affairs and discover the particulars of which their affairs consist. These will show the abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciation and forms of knowledge that men need. These will be the objectives of the curriculum* (p. 26).

Thus, business schools have to be prepared to take responsibility for producing ethical business students.

2.4.4 A Pedagogy for Higher Education

Pedagogy refers to teaching methods rather than curriculum content. According to Barnett and Hallam (1999), a pedagogy which adequately prepares students for adapting to the circumstances of a 'real' world is one in which a student learns from a world without stable meanings, in other words, from a world in which uncertainty, ambiguity and contestability come to the fore. Students must learn how to engage with others, and develop preparedness and capability in practical situations. Barnett and Hallam (1999) stated that teaching concepts should focus on student independence in the following areas: critical thinking, reflection and critical self-reflection (p. 146). Although lecturers in higher education claim to value these

qualities in students, according to research by Fox (1983), and Kember and Gow (1994), lecturers' conceptions of teaching may be placed upon a continuum, between a knowledge-centred and a student-centred approached. According to Barnett and Hallam (1999), in reality lecturers often force students into a dependent role, by adopting strategies that severely limit students' pedagogical space.

According to Barnett and Hallam (1999), a type of 'conspiracy' develops between lecturers and students to ensure that pedagogical processes are as free as possible of unpredictability, stress, openness and multiple contending voices. Thus, both parties allow lecturers to dominate pedagogical transactions in higher education, although Barnett and Hallam (1999) suggested that this approach was more appropriate to mediaeval universities (p. 146-7). On the other hand, Brady and Kennedy (2003) stated that this transaction model could also be 'student-centred' which involves some structuring by teachers.

Any change affects students' experiences and perceptions of a new learning milieu and the learning approaches which need to be adopted. It is important to combine appropriate subject matter with an emphasis on students' intellectual and personal development, because pedagogy is concerned also with a student's capacity to act purposively in the unpredictable world outside academia.

Unfortunately sticking to a teacher-centred approach does not equip students for the 'complex' world of the twenty-first century which has been termed 'supercomplexity' by Barnett and Hallam (1999). They defined 'supercomplexity' as 'a state of affairs where one is faced with alternative frameworks of interpretation through which to make sense of one's world and to act purposively in it' (p. 138). The dilemma of 'supercomplexity' is that it requires understanding of the world, of action and identity, including self-understanding.

Similarly, in the 21st century, Thailand is faced with a multiplicity of ideals regarding the achievement of productive social and economic outcomes. Thai society also has an increasingly complex array of stakeholders. In addition, the mission of higher education is moving towards broader societal participation in line with the Government's intention which also presents challenges in the design and delivery of higher education (Harman, 2002).

Summary

In this chapter, a corpus of literature relevant to this research into the value of the pedagogy and curriculum implemented in the Business Simulation Course at Payap University, Thailand was reviewed. This chapter has brought together a wide range of literature on teaching and learning approaches relevant to the BSC. Literature emphasising experiential learning, curriculum issues related to 'real-life' contexts and the application of theoretical knowledge in practice was reviewed. Literature on curriculum design and the importance of stakeholders' advice to this process was examined, in addition to the importance of the new pedagogy in preparing students for the world of work, by means of courses such as the BSC. This preparation is aligned with community-based learning and the importance of relating such courses as the BSC to the needs of the business and local community is confirmed by the literature.

The literature reviewed in this section offers many challenges to Thai higher education curriculum planners and also offers the researcher much guidance in the research design to evaluate the BSC.

Chapter Three describes the research methodology and data gathering methods used for this research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study to address the five research questions. The chapter is in five separate sections: first, a general overview of the research approach is provided; second, the selection of the sample on which the study was based is discussed; third, the procedure used in the study for data gathering is illustrated; fourth, the developmental phases of the research methodology are described. Lastly, the approaches used to analyse the data obtained from both questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviewing are reported. The chapter concludes with a brief orientation to the presentation of the findings generated by the research methods.

3.1 The Selection of the Research Approach

This section reviews the possible research design approaches for the research project. The key point, in this regard, is that the research approach selected was seen as the most appropriate combination of methods which was available to the researcher for investigating the study's five research questions.

A modified case study approach was used for this study because the researcher is researching a particular phenomenon within a bounded system (Stake, 1995), that is, the Business Simulation Course (BSC) at Payap University. The modified case study approach used in this study allowed the researcher to interpret the data from the participants' perspectives. This approach investigates a phenomenon within a real-life context, which provides a sense of reality, describing what the informants feel, perceive, and how they behave (Merriam, 1998). This is relevant because using data which reflects the 'reality' of the participants in the study is likely to enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide for action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998b).

As Burns (2000) asserted, 'the case study is the preferred strategy when 'how', 'who', 'why' or 'what' questions are being asked' (p. 460). He suggested that the use of case study research was appropriate when the researcher had little control over

events, or when the focus was on a contemporary phenomenon within a 'real-life' context.

Case study research is a time-honoured, traditional approach to the study of topics in social science and management. It is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case or cases and tries to understand its activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995). The single case can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory-building. Merriam (1998) stated:

> *A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research* (p. 19).

A case study may be defined as a form of research with an interest in individual cases, rather than by the methods of inquiry used (Stake, 1994). Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) described the characteristics of case study as: the study of phenomena by focusing on specific instances; an in-depth study of each case; the study of a phenomenon in its natural context, and the study of the perspectives of case study participants. In addition, Yin (1998) argued that case studies typically involve investigation of a phenomenon for which the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context should be clarified as part of the case study, in other words a bounded system.

The first stage in case study methodology is the development of the case study protocol (Yin, 1994). This will follow comprehensive relevant readings on the topic, which will help to develop the research questions further. The research design is the sequence of events which connect the empirical data to a study's introductory research questions. In designing and conducting a study of a single case, the unit of analysis must be defined. The researcher must be sure that the case is, in fact, relevant to the issues and questions of interest (Yin, 1994).

This study focuses on the in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon, the BSC at Payap University and specifically its effectiveness as a business course. The perspectives in this study are those of the participants: administrators, colleagues and students in the university; government officers, parents, suppliers and villagers. The

BSC can be defined as 'a bounded system' (Smith cited in Stake, 1995), as the BSC is a single case, explored as a single entity or 'phenomenon', bounded by time and activity, with detailed information collected by using a variety of data collection procedures.

A case study is the ideal research technique for the BSC, because this study deals with people and their perspectives (qualitative data) and business data (quantitative data). In this study, numbers and words are both needed to present the data. Thus a mixed method is used, known as a semi-qualitative research procedure approach to the case study. The data gained from all sources are analysed in the effectiveness of the BSC at Payap University. In this study, qualitative and quantitative data will be both presented in the form of words and numbers, gathered by questionnaires, interviews, and from analysis of documents. Qualitative methods will be used to seek out and organise data concerning what comprises the BSC, based on social science theory and methodology, rather than focusing on achieving a situationally defined goal. However, some important issues such as 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity' arise while using a case study approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.1.1 Issues of Trustworthiness and Authenticity in Qualitative Research

Trustworthiness refers to validity and reliability which is harder to establish in qualitative research than in quantitative research (Merriam, 1998). Merriam stated further that conducting research in an ethical manner is an important part of the process of establishing validity and reliability. A definition of reliability includes the qualities of: dependability, stability, consistency, predictability, and accuracy. Researchers establish reliability through triangulation. Merriam (1998) explained that 'Triangulation, especially in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, strengthens reliability as well as internal validity' (p. 207). Reliability in case studies is more focused on dependability so that the results make sense and are agreed to by all concerned. The notion of reliability with regard to instrumentation can be applied to qualitative case studies in a sense similar to its meaning in traditional research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail is used to authenticate how the data were obtained and the decisions made about data and categories. Merriam (1998) stated that 'Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behaviour is never static…However, researchers seek to describe and

explain the world as those in the world experience it' (p. 205). This compares with quantitative research, where 'Reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results' (p.205).

Gall et al., (1996) defined reliability as 'the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher' (p. 572). Denscombe (2003) also stressed the importance of generalisability to establish reliability of research instruments:

> *Reliability is whether the research instruments are neutral in their effect, and would measure the same result when used on other occasions (and applied to the same 'object'). But, with qualitative research the researcher's self, as we have argued, is an integral part of the research instrument. The issue of reliability, then, is transformed into the question: If someone else did the research would he or she have got the same results and arrived at the same conclusions?* (p. 273)

3.1.2 Triangulation in Qualitative Research

Burns (2000) defined triangulation as 'the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour' (p. 419). He asserted that triangulation can be achieved by checking different data sources with the same method, or by using different methods in relation to the same object of study. In addition, Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that triangulation is a method of confirming findings, in that 'triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it' (p. 266).

According to Patton (1990), 'One important way to strengthen a study design is through triangulation, or the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena or programs' (p. 187). This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The use of a multiple-methods and a multiple-sources approach in this study was a form of triangulated research strategy. The data gathering methods in this study included: questionnaires, interviews, and document review which in combination increase confidence in the study.

Gathering the data involved many participants from different places and socio-economic backgrounds: administrators, colleagues, and students at Payap University located in Chiang Mai, Thailand, as well as relevant government officials, and members of the private sector, such as suppliers, parents, alumni and villagers. Different sources of data capture different points of view, so divergent sources contribute significantly to 'credibility'. In this study, a variety of data from multiple sources have been included to confirm the credibility of the data. Multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data were used for this study and the designated data gathering tools were chosen to ensure a high level of reliability and validity of the quantitative data and credibility, dependability and transferability of the qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.2 Data Gathering Approaches and Instruments

Data gathering instruments are an important consideration for researchers. Most researchers know that data are only useful within a specific context. In particular, good researchers know which data are useful and relevant, and which are not. For these reasons, this study examined a single case in depth and used different data gathering approaches. As Bouma (2000) stated:

> *It is often better to use several data-gathering techniques to answer a research question. Using a variety of techniques may provide different perspectives on the situation, thereby increasing what is known about it* (p. 182).

Strauss (1987) indicated that varied materials (for example, documents, questionnaires and interviews) provide indispensable data for social research. Thus the major tools of data gathering instruments in this mixed-mode study were documents, questionnaires and interviews. The respondents were stakeholders who had different relationships with the BSC who provided their perceptions about the effectiveness of the BSC. The nature of each instrument is described as below.

3.2.1 Documents

Documents are crucial components of research as they make the researcher aware of what the current issues are. They enshrine the 'official story' of a phenomenon, a story that insider accounts may contradict (Denscombe, 2003). Research involves surveying the contents of documents, to encompass existing material on a topic, while getting a view of the landscape (Denscombe, 2003).

In qualitative research, documents are used to answer the question 'What was happening at this time and place to these people?' (Bouma, 2000). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998a), 'It is not that we use experience or literature as data but rather that we use the properties and dimensions derived from the comparative incidents to examine the data in front of us' (p. 80).

Document analysis was part of the framework of data gathering in this study. Analysis of the documents was undertaken to develop the conceptual structure of the study by first examining the official story. The documents studied were the Payap University's mission and vision statements; a description and course objectives of the BSC at Payap University; the government's policy on community products (OTOP); and the National Educational Act. Document analysis helped with the design of the questionnaires and confirmed the instruments of the study. Furthermore, reviewing the course description and course objectives of the BSC was a vital part of evaluating the effectiveness of the course.

Utility of Documents in Relation to the Study:

Denscombe (2003) stated that documents generally provide a source of data which is permanent, stable, available and of a high level of credibility in a form that can be checked by others and the data are open to public scrutiny. Documents can provide an important historical perspective on any area of education (Wellington, 2000). In this study, documents provide excellent sources of additional data including: course outlines and course objectives, textbooks, policy documents, and the University Education Curriculum. The data found in documents can be used in a similar manner to data from interviews in qualitative research. Documents can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated (Merriam, 1998). Document analysis deals with large volumes of source material, so it forms, when used carefully, a sound means of triangulation, helping to increase the trustworthiness, reliability and validity of research (Wellington, 2000).

3.2.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are structured ways of collecting data from a population or a sample of a population (Burns, 2000). The researcher used both closed and open-ended questions because closed questions can limit the scope of responses, and may

therefore produce a focused response more easily than open-ended questions. Also closed questions are more easily administered to large numbers of respondents. Open-ended questions broaden the scope of possible responses, provide support in formulating other more specific questions and provide a context for deeper understanding of responses. Open-ended questions also allow for the written opinions and views of respondents providing an authenticity and vividness which tables of figures seldom can (Wellington, 2000).

The questionnaire used in the study was based on an assumption that the respondents would be willing and able to give truthful answers (Burns, 2000). It was intended to provide accurate information and the researcher has confidence that the responses to the questionnaires are as full and honest as they can be (Denscombe, 2003). Questionnaires were distributed to students who studied the BSC in the second term of the 2003 academic year. Supervisors, faculty staff, suppliers, villagers and bureaucrats were surveyed at the same time. In this study, the researcher assumed that all respondents were involved with the BSC. They were contacted face-to-face and by telephone to ask for their permission and were asked to sign the Consent Form before the questionnaires were administered. However, the respondents were free to answer in their own time. The researcher avoided the need for respondents to mail the questionnaires, by collecting them from the Marketing Department at Payap University, or collecting them from the respondents personally. This maximised the return rate.

As a mechanism for obtaining information and opinion, questionnaires have a number of advantages and disadvantages when compared with other tools. The key strengths and weaknesses of questionnaires in this study are described below.

Utility of the Questionnaires in Relation to the Study

Cost was an important factor in this study, so the questionnaire was a desirable research tool because it was not expensive to administrater, particularly because the respondents were in diverse locations; for example, villagers, suppliers and government officers surveyed, were geographically distant from each other (Denscombe, 2001).

According to Denscombe (2003), the data collected via questionnaires are little affected by interpersonal factors. Also, questionnaires are easy to organise and supply standardised answers. For example, outsider participants were from a range of educational backgrounds, so instructions and questions asked were simple with the purpose of the survey explained clearly in print.

In this type of study, questionnaires can guarantee confidentiality and often participants will provide a more forthright response than in a personal interview. This was particularly important as confidential business relationships were investigated and relationships between the university, students, villagers and bureaucrats are sensitive. Also, direct contact is able to be avoided, which is important in the Thai cultural context, as when interviewed face-to-face people may feel that they should answer in a way that pleases the interviewer (this is particularly so when the participants are students). If questionnaires are written, the respondents feel free to answer in their own time and at their own pace (Wellington, 2000), without fear or favour

In this study, open-ended questions allowed respondents to include more information about their feelings, attitudes and understanding of the subject. This allowed the researcher to better access the respondents' true feelings on an issue.

Poorly developed questionnaires may be ambiguous, incomplete or poorly completed so that answers cannot be followed up (Denscombe, 2001). With complex instruments, ambiguity or vagueness can cause poor responses, thus, in this study a pilot of the questions dealt with this problem. Following administration of the questionnaire, oral interviews were used to clarify information given in the questionnaire. In addition, respondents may be limited in expressing their opinions, as a result of instrument-design considerations. However, alternatively, open-ended instruments could produce data that cannot be merged easily for systematic analysis. Following up questionnaires with oral semi-structured interviews should help to deal with these difficulties.

3.2.3 Interviews

Interviews involve hypothesising and establishing an understanding of a situation which is not generally associated with a casual conversation (Denscombe, 2003). Interviews are question-and-answer sessions, used to gather experiential data. As Merriam (1998) stated, 'The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter, in which one person elicits information from another' (p. 71). Interviews have been described as falling into three categories: unstructured (open-ended), semi-structured and structured (Burns, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Wellington, 2000).

Merriam (1998) asserted that 'interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured. In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions' (p. 74). The purpose of interviews, as argued by Patton (1990), is as follows:

> *We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe…The fact of the matter is that we cannot observe everything…The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit* (p. 278).

These data offer a sense of reality, expressing as clearly as possible what the informant feels (Burns, 2000). In addition, interviews can obtain information which other methods cannot reach (Wellington, 2000). However, comparability of the information between informants is difficult to assess and response-coding difficulties are likely to arise (Burns, 2000).

The main type of interview used in this study was semi-structured, in order to provide in-depth data drawn from the personal experiences of participants involved in the BSC at Payap University. A semi-structured interview asks questions which are more flexible than the close-ended type and permits a more complex response from the informants.

The researcher asked the respondents for permission to use an audio-tape recorder for later transcription to avoid the need to concentrate on note-taking, because audio-taping has the obvious advantage of recording the subject's responses verbatim (Burns, 2000). The interviews of 'inside' participants were conducted in a comfortable private room at Payap University to avoid any disturbance. For 'outside'

participants, the interviews occurred at the participants' houses or offices – it was left to them to decide which was preferable.

Utility of Semi-structured Interviewing in the Study

Interview can provide information about participants' internal meanings and ways of thinking, because the interview focuses on the crucial issues of the study, so it will affect the quality of the data collected. Wellington (2000) stated that 'We can probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives' (p. 71).

In this study, the researcher was not inhibited in communication with participants because some of them are the interviewer's students and colleagues and others are known by reputation. The researcher used language natural to the respondents and tried to understand and fit responses into the concepts of the study. Language is an important aspect of the study and its use underlies the content of the study. Also in the Thai culture, to communicate with villagers in an informal way could be a way of obtaining more detailed or more precise information (Wellington, 2000).

In-person interviews usually are expensive and analysis of data can be difficult and time-consuming. The transcribing and coding of interview data is a major task for the researcher, occurring after the data have been collected (Denscombe, 2001).

3.3 Selection of the Sample

A sample can be selected from any part of a population, and does not necessarily have to be a large one. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that 'Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth, unlike quantitative researchers, who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance' (p. 77). The samples should represent and relate to the characteristic that the researchers want to study, in order to make any valid generalisation about the population from which the sample was selected (Burns, 2000).

The sample types used in this study were purposive, random and opportunity samples drawn from administrators, colleagues and students at Payap University. These are known as the 'inside' participants. The purposive and opportunity sample

consisted of 'outside' participants such as government officials, suppliers, customers, parents and villagers. Samples were separated into two groups because it was expected that 'insider' participants would know and understand the course objectives of the BSC and the university policy in a different manner than 'outsider' participants. Therefore, 'insiders' were expected to have an in-depth understanding of the course and so to provide qualitatively different types of responses to respondents classified as 'outsiders'. It was thought 'outsider' participants would provide a wider contextual perspective through their understanding and knowledge of the local business community and the patterns of local contextual activity, as well as some specific knowledge about the BSC, both in the field and as delivered by the university.

3.3.1 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is a technique for selecting data sources, where researchers draw the sample from specific respondents. The people are chosen because researchers, using their own 'judgement intuition', select the people or groups who they consider would best suit their study (Bouma, 2000). Purposive sampling techniques can produce the most valuable data because the respondents are selected with a specific purpose in mind, which can be critical for the research (Denscombe, 2001). Furthermore, Merriam (1998), stated that 'Purposeful … sampling is well-known and widely used nonprobability sampling strategies in qualitative research' (p. 67).

Purposive sampling was useful in the study and provided key information, because this type of sampling is based on the assumption that the researchers want to select a highly representative sample (Merriam, 1998). For this study the purposive sample included the administrators of Payap University, for example, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, all Heads of Department of the Business Administration Faculty, Marketing Department staff, students who managed the 'Dummy Company' in the second term of the 2003 academic year (Management Team), government officers, village leaders and suppliers.

3.3.2 Random Sampling

Gall et al., (1996) described random sampling as occurring when a group of individuals is chosen by a procedure in which all the individuals in the defined

population have an equal and independent chance of being selected as a member of the sample. As a result, random sampling yields research data which can be generalised and adds credibility to a larger population within boundaries of error that can be determined by statistical formula.

Random sampling can be used within the modified case study and, indeed, this is one strategy that can be employed for addressing validity (Merriam, 1998). The random samples in this study were drawn from the population of students who studied in the BSC during the second term of the 2003 academic year. To obtain the random sample, the students' ID code numbers were written on slips of paper, placed in a container, then shuffled. The slips were drawn out at random. The researcher retained the name of each student that was drawn out and continued drawing slips from the remainder until the required sample size was obtained.

3.3.3 Opportunity Sampling

Denscombe (2001) explained that 'Opportunity sampling or convenience sampling is built upon selections which suit the convenience of the researcher and which are 'first to hand" (p. 16). This means that the sample consists of the persons selected because they were available. The opportunity sampling in this study included staff, alumni and students' parents. This type of sampling was used because the researcher could not choose other suitable subjects who were available at an appropriate time.

The total sample in this study was 100 participants, 80 of whom were invited to complete questionnaires and 20 of whom were interviewed (see Figure 3.1: Description of sample that completed the questionnaire and Figure 3.2: Description of sample that completed the interviews). Of these 80 respondents to the questionnaire, 39 were students, 26 were staff and 15 were non-university stakeholders.

Students

Of the 39 students 53.80% were male and 46.20% were female, while most (94.90%) were studying in year four of their degree (two were year three students). Most (74.40%) came from areas outside the Chang Mai province, and most (almost 90%) attended a government school before entering university. Interestingly, almost 70%

of participating students had fathers who were business owners, and (since many women in Thailand have occupations matching their husbands') just over half of them also reported that their mothers were business owners as well (Appendix IV, Table A-1).

Staff

Most faculty members surveyed had a Master level degree (84.60%). The majority of the faculty members surveyed were females (65.40%), had worked at Payap University for more than five years, while 19.20 percent worked in another university with a BSC. (Appendix IV, Table A-2)

Non-university Stakeholders

There were more female non-university respondents than male (67%: 33%). Most were aged from 25 years up (87.70%), and most were local residents (53.30%). They were mainly qualified at Bachelor Degree level or higher (93.37%) and many were working in the private business sector (40%) as small business owners (Appendix IV, Table A-3).

Sample of Data Gathering from Questionnaires

The 'inside' participants were further sub-divided into 2 groups: staff and students. Purposive and opportunity sampling of staff was undertaken, whereas purposive and random sampling of students was carried out. In the 'outside' participants group, samples were purposive or opportunity, with no random samples.

Figure 3-1: Description of sample that completed the questionnaire

Inside Participants				**Outside Participants**	
Staff		**Students**		**Non-university**	
Purposive (N=19)		*Purposive (N=16)*		*Purposive (N=10)*	
Business Faculty Administrators	7	Management team in the BSC during 2/2003	16	Government Officers	3
Marketing Department staff	7			Suppliers	4
Heads of Department of Business Administration Faculty	5			Customer	1
				Villagers	2
Random (None)	-	*Random N=23)* Students who studied in the BSC during 2/2003	23	*Random (none)*	-
Opportunity (N=7)		*Opportunity (None)*	-	*Opportunity(N=5)*	
Staff	7			Student's Parent	1
				Alumni	4
Total	26	Total	39	Total	15

Sample of Data Gathering from Interviews

The participants in the interviews were divided into 2 groups: insiders and outsiders. From the group of inside participants, purposive, random and opportunity samples were selected. In the outside participants group, only purposive sampling was used.

Figure 3-2: Description of sample that completed the interviews

Inside Participants		**Outside Participants**	
Purposive (N=6)		*Purposive (N=8)*	
Vice President for Academic Affairs	1	Government Officers	3
Business Faculty Administrators (All respondents to questionnaire as well)	5	Supplier	1
		Villager leader	1
		Student's Parent	1
		Alumni	2
Random (N=5)		*Random (none)*	-
Students who studied in the Business Simulation Course during 2/2003	5		
Opportunity (N=1)		*Opportunity (none)*	-
Staff	1		
Total	12	Total	8

3.4 Developmental Phases of the Research Methodology

The developmental phases in the study consisted of four major tasks: ethics application, development of the research instruments and methods, data gathering time-line and pilot study.

3.4.1 Ethics Application

This study deals with human subjects, so the researcher must be aware of the ethics involved. Participants must understand the nature and the aims of the study and must agree to participate without physical or emotional coercion (Burns, 2000). The focus was the protection of human participants in research. This study involved administrators of the college, colleagues, and students at Payap University, as well as relevant government officials, and members of the private sector, such as suppliers and villagers; so matters of privacy, informed consent and confidentiality were essential ethical considerations. Participants gave informed consent before they became involved in the research and were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any stage. This clarified the situation and provided a degree of evidence that the people had been informed and had agreed to take part. Ethics includes the commitment to research questions that are designed to contribute to knowledge, protection of truth, and reliance on reliable research methods and should be appropriate to the discipline (Commonwealth of Australia, 1999). Before conducting the study, permission was sought from The University of Tasmania Human Ethics Committee and from Payap University as well. Permission to conduct the research was given by the Northern Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee and its Application Approval is shown in Appendix I.

3.4.2 Development of the Data Gathering Research Instruments and Methods

The two data gathering instruments, questionnaire and interview schedule, were developed for the purpose of gathering data.

Research Instruments

The draft research instruments, both questionnaire and interview schedule, were designed first in the English language and were developed by the researcher and reviewed by the researcher's supervisor. The research was conducted with

stakeholders in the BSC, comprising students and staff at Payap University and non-university stakeholders in and around Chiang Mai, Thailand. Therefore, the research instruments were presented in a Thai language version which was clear and understandable to all respondents. The English version of the instruments was reviewed by faculty members from the English Department at Payap University who are fluent in both the Thai and English languages, in order to determine content validity, readability and appropriateness to the Thai context.

Questionnaire Design

According to Burns (2000) questionnaire design is vital to a successful study since 'A well-planned and carefully constructed questionnaire will increase the response rate and will also greatly facilitate the summarisation and analysis of the collected data' (p. 574). A questionnaire can serve the purpose of the study and provide written information supplied by participants in response to questions asked by the researcher. Denscombe (2003) asserted that the information questionnaires address tends to fall into two categories, that is, 'facts' and 'opinions' as follows:

> *Factual information does not require much in the way of judgement or personal attitudes on the part of respondents. It just requires respondents to reveal (accurately and honestly), information about: their address, age, sex…*
>
> *Opinions, attitudes, views, beliefs, preferences etc. can also be investigated using questionnaires. In this case, though, respondents are required to reveal information about feelings, to express values, to weigh up alternatives etc., in a way that calls for judgement about things rather than the mere reporting of facts* (p. 146).

The questionnaire was designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from 80 respondents (see Appendix II). The questionnaire utilised a common instrument with modifications for each stakeholder group. In the discussion to follow, the instrument will be presented as it relates to each particular stakeholder group.

Student Questionnaire

Section A 1: Student respondent's biographical data

Section A 2: Students' opinions of the BSC

Section B-F: Structured questions related to respondents' attitudes to the BSC

Section G: Open-ended questions.

Staff Questionnaire

Section A: Staff respondents' biographical data

Section B-F: Structured questions related to respondents' attitudes to the BSC

Section G: Open-ended questions.

Non-university questionnaire

Section A: Non-university respondents' biographical data

Section B-F: Structured questions related to respondents' attitudes to the BSC

Section G: Open-ended questions.

In this study, the respondents were chosen by a variety of targeted sampling approaches: random, opportunity and purposive. Questionnaires were sent to 26 administrators, including faculty staff, and 39 students who studied the Business Simulation Course in the second term of the 2003 academic year at Payap University. The 15 non-university stakeholders comprised: suppliers, customers, student's parent, alumni, villagers and government officers. The details of the sample completing the questionnaires are shown in Figure 3-1 (p. 76). It is to be noted the questionnaire consisted of the same 37 items from sections B-F and three open-ended items from section G as indicated below:

Section A: Stakeholders' biographical data and Students' opinions of the BSC

Firstly, the students were asked in section A 1: biographical questions, concerned with gender, year of study, residential status, and parents' occupation. In section A 2: they were asked questions regarding their perceptions of study in the BSC. In the staff questionnaire, the staff were asked biographical questions involved with gender of respondents, age, status, length of work experience and number of years involved with the BSC, and educational background. Finally, the non-university stakeholders were asked biographical questions which dealt with gender, age, location of residence, occupation, and academic background.

Section B-F: Structured questions relating to respondents' attitudes to the BSC

Subjects were asked to mark their agreement or disagreement with each of 37 statements on a five-point scale, known as a Likert scale (Burns, 2000; Denscombe, 2003). However, this study was coded in reverse scoring, because of Thai cultural preferences which prefer to read and judge 'Strongly Agree' as 5, which can

legitimately be seen as the most positive score. The lowest score is coded as 1, which refers to 'Strongly Disagree'. Thus, the numbers used in this instrument were: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Uncertain (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1).

Section G: Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions were incorporated in the Questionnaire in order to obtain responses which reflect participants' true feelings, and allow them to give their suggestions and to express their views fully. Denscombe (2003), explained the advantage of open-ended questions, 'The information gathered by way of the responses is more likely to reflect the full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent. Respondents are allowed space to express themselves in their own words' (p. 156). The respondents were asked three questions regarding teaching and learning in the BSC at Payap University.

The Interview

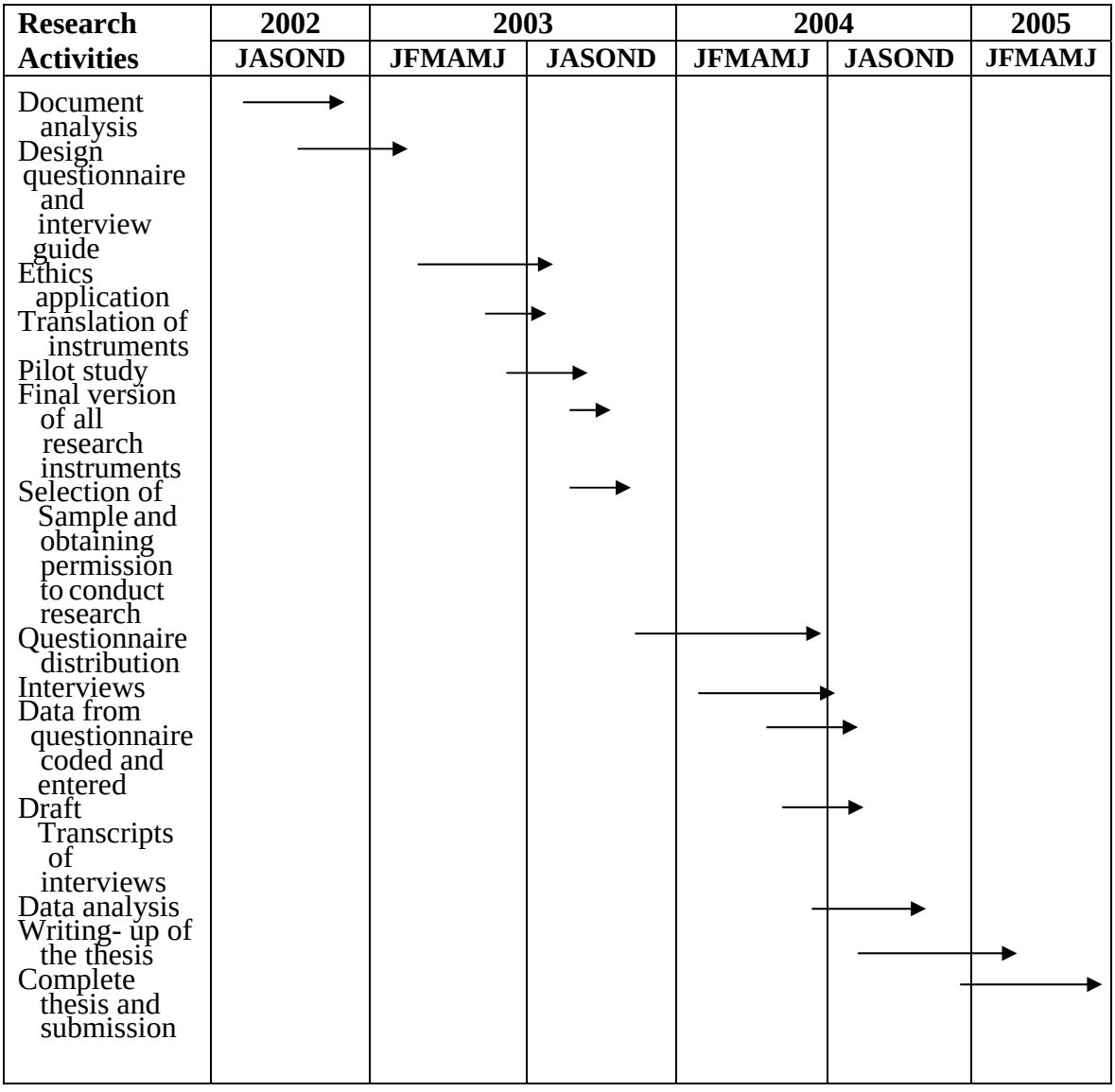
Arrangements for the conduct of interviews in this study were that the prospective interviewees were contacted in advance to invite them to participate in the study. Denscombe (2003) stated that, 'To emphasize what ought to be obvious, [such] authorization to conduct the interviews must be gained before the interviews take place' (p. 173). The interview was guided by a list of ten questions to be explored, as listed in the 'Interview Guide' and the 'Information Sheet' (see Appendix I) which were sent to the respondents to ask their permission to be interviewed. A mutually convenient time for an interview of about 30-45 minutes was then arranged. All respondents were asked the same questions.

The interview involved 20 respondents, including 12 'inside' participants comprising: six administrators, who were chosen via a purposive sample, five randomly sampled students who managed the 'Dummy Company' in the second semester in the 2003 academic year, and one staff member who was, in essence, an 'opportunity' sample. The interview data from eight 'outside' participants comprised three government officers, one supplier, one villager leader, one student's parent and two alumni. These respondents were chosen via the purposive sampling method. The details of the sample who participated in interviews are shown in Figure 3-2 (p. 76).

3.4.3 Data Gathering Time-Line

A proposed time-line for major activities associated with the developmental phase of the research methodology, including data gathering procedure, data analysis, writing-up of the thesis, and complete thesis and submission is illustrated in Figure 3-3.

Figure 3-3: Time-Line for the Research Activities



The research procedures were conducted during the period between July 2002, when the research project began, and February 2004, when all data gathered from the investigation had been recorded. Further, data analysis and writing-up of the thesis were done from mid-February 2004 to May, 2005. It was anticipated that the completion of the thesis and submission would occur between May and June 2005. A

description of these developmental phases of the research methodology and the research activities mentioned above, are presented and discussed in some detail below.

3.4.4 Pilot Study

The term 'pilot study' refers to mini versions of a full-scale study. It includes pre-testing the instruments such as questionnaires or interview schedules to determine whether they obtained the desired data (Burns, 2000). Pilot studies fulfil a range of important functions and provide valuable insights for the researcher, especially in this case, a pre-test of both the questionnaire and semi-structured interview in the Thai version, in order to make clear and understandable the meaning of question items proposed in the questionnaire and interview guide. The pilot study supplied the instructions to complete the questionnaire without ambiguities, and determined whether the time allowed for completing the questionnaire was adequate (Burns, 2000; Gall et al., 1996).

In this case, the pilot study included both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was trialled with ten 'inside' participants: five staff and five students, and two 'outside' participants, i.e., a parent and a supplier. The pilot interviews were constructed with four 'inside' participants: two academic faculty members, two students, and two 'outside' participants, i.e., a supplier and a parent. The pilot study provided necessary feedback for the improvement of the question items and instructions. For example, in the case of a vague interview question (item 2), the researcher added the course description of the BSC to make the question quite clear. The content validity of the research instruments was established at this stage. Based on the results of the pilot study, the final questionnaire and semi-structured interviewing guide were prepared.

3.5 Data Analysis

As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggested, the purpose of qualitative research is to understand the particular situation being investigated. Depending on the nature of the case, other forms of data analysis may be added to give depth to the study. In this study, the 'grounded theory' approach used the modified 'Constant Comparative

Method' as a means of both data collection and data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998b).

Documents, questionnaire returns and interview transcripts were analysed to derive answers to the research questions. Burns (2000) stated:

> *The purpose of analysing the data is to find meaning in the data; this is done by systematically arranging and presenting the information. It has to be organised so that comparisons, contrasts and insights can be made and demonstrated* (p.430).

The qualitative researcher will begin by categorising the data. As notes are read and re-read it is possible to start grouping items together. In this manner the researcher may cross categories to produce 'themes'. Miles and Hubermann (1994) put their view that qualitative analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. They described each of these activities as follows. (i) Data reduction refers to the process of data selection and condensation. In this stage, data are collated, summarised, coded and sorted out into themes, clusters and categories. It is a form of analysis that sharpens, focuses and organises data. (ii) Data display is not separate from analysis; it is part of analysis as it is designed to assemble 'organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action' (p. 11), then 'displayed' in pictorial, diagrammatic or visual form. This 'display' allows the researcher to conceptualise the data, leading towards interpretation and conclusion-drawing. (iii) Conclusion-drawing and verification, the third process, involves interpreting and giving meaning to data. Conclusions are also verified as the analysis proceeds. This process involves searching for themes, patterns and regularities, and the activity of comparing or contrasting units of data.

Glasser and Strauss (1967) developed the 'Constant Comparative Method' which continues the process of comparing segments within and across categories. The data are classified into categories, themes and issues, to deal with the meaning of the texts in terms of their implied meanings (Denscombe, 2003). This strategy was used by the researcher in this study. The approaches taken to the analysis of these data are shown below.

3.5.1 Analysis of the Document Data

Denscombe (2003) stated that 'content analysis is a method which helps the researcher to analyse the content of documents' (p. 221). The study of documents is usually done in conjunction with other methods, and analysis of a range of documents will often be done in a case study, in conjunction with interviews or questionnaires (Wellington, 2000). In this study, the document data focused on educational policy documents or official material, such as: course outlines, the University Handbook and the University Quality Assurance Report, policy documents and textbooks, as mentioned in section 3.2.1. These data were analysed by using the 'Constant Comparative Method' in grounded theory (Wellington, 2000), (see Appendix IV, Figure E: The 'Constant Comparative Method').

3.5.2 Analysis of the Questionnaire Data

Analysis of the questionnaire data used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data from the questionnaire survey were coded for statistical analysis, using techniques available on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS for Windows Version 10). Quantitative data were presented as descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, and standard deviations. Differences in mean scores of the three demographic groups were probed for using the independent samples t-test. Data analysis in a descriptive survey, may simply consist of determining the frequencies for the major variables involved in a study. The questionnaire returns were analysed and further clarification was sought in the interviews. In this study the qualitative analysis began by grouping the data (responses to questions) from the question in reference to each research question.

Research Question 1: ***How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University equips students to work in the business world?***

This research question was examined through ten questions from the questionnaire (items: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 31, 35, and 37). These items sought information on how the BSC prepares students for employment in the business world. These related items are clustered as follows:

(i) Students in the BSC learn in the domain of real-life contexts: Items 1, 9 and 35

(ii) Student skills development in the BSC: Items 2 and 7

(iii) Co-operative learning in the BSC: Item 4

(iv) Students develop professional business skills: Items 5, 8, 31 and 37

Research Question 2: ***How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their knowledge in practice?***

This research question was examined through 14 questions from the questionnaire (items: 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 32, 33, 34, and 36). These data reflect the respondents' views on whether or not the BSC allows students to combine theory with practice. The data were tabulated under the following four categories:

(i) The BSC allows students to develop critical thinking and deal with typical problems in company management: Items 3, 6 and 16

(ii) Higher education needs a practical curriculum which bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and realistic application: Items 10, 12, 32, 33 and 34

(iii) Teaching and learning in the BSC at Payap University aims at achieving the course objectives: Items 11, 14, 15, 17 and 36

(iv) Students in the BSC learn from their practice in the community: Item 20

Research Question 3: ***How effectively do students work with the community?***

This research question was examined through nine questions from the questionnaire (items: 13, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26). The data were collected from the respondents' statements, to determine their perception of how effectively students in the BSC at Payap University worked with their community. Responses were grouped into three main categories as follows:

(i) Whether or how graduates are capable of working in the real world: Item 13

(ii) How the university and the community work together: Items 18, 21, 22 and 25

(iii) The role played by students and the University, via the BSC, in the community: Items 19, 23, 24 and 26

Research Question 4: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to the university about the Business Simulation Course?***

This research question was examined through two questions from the questionnaire: items 27 and 29, which consider the feedback provided to the university by

stakeholders and the need for the university to respond to the stakeholders' feedback. The data are presented in two categories as follows:

(i) The university needs advice from stakeholders in relation to the BSC: Item 27

(ii) The university needs to respond to stakeholders' feedback to achieve accreditation: Item 29

Research Question 5: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to policy makers who are involved in community development initiatives?***

This research question was examined through two questions from the questionnaire: items 28 and 30. These data were gathered from the questionnaires to address RQ 5, and were presented in two categories as follows:

(i) The university seeks advice from other stakeholders in relation to the BSC: Item 28

(ii) The university demonstrates a strong commitment to community consultation: Item 30

3.5.3 Analysis of the Interview Data

Data analysis of the semi-structured interviews was assigned a meaning (interpretation) derived from common cultural usage or experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998b). The interview data were classified into categories, themes, issues or topics, concepts, and propositions. Coding began while the data were still being collected. This early coding assisted the researcher to focus on the main aspects of the project, as they developed. Transcripts of interview recordings were translated into English and relevant segments of the conversation were analysed (Merriam, 1998). Sample transcripts from student, staff and non-university stakeholders are shown in Appendix III.

In analysing the interview data in this study, categories were developed from the research questions, from key concepts and important issues. A system for coding was used to organise data into categories and themes. These procedures resulted in the following data category coding structures, listed below.

Research Question 1: ***How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University equips students to work in the business world?***

The responses to the questions in the RQ 1 cluster listed above were analysed to identify the following categories, themes and issues. The important issues emerging from RQ 1 are categorised below:

Category I: Factors which stakeholders perceive as causing stress to students in the BSC (Interview Question 1);

Theme: Stress factors

Issues:
- Lack of teamwork
- Sales targets and assessment
- Time management and course loads

Category II: Stakeholders' perceptions of the major skills gained in the Business Simulation Course (Interview Question 2);

Theme: Skills gained

Issues:
- Development of real-life business experience
- Development of business skills to apply theory in practice
- Self-development

Category III: Stakeholders' perceptions of the main features of the Business Simulation Course. Sub-questions in relation to RQ 1 were asked to ascertain stakeholders' opinions (Interview Question 3.1- 3.4).

Theme: Main features of the BSC

Sub-question *3.1 Real-life contexts*

Issue 1:
- Differences between the 'Dummy Company' and 'Bona Fide' Companies

Sub-issues: Flexibility

Time constraints

Sub-question *3.2 Working co-operatively*

Issue 2:
- The importance of co-operation in the BSC

Sub-question	*3.3 Building a co-operative working relationship among the BSC students, the University and the community*
Issue 3:	• Building a co-operative working relationship among the BSC students, the University and the Community
Sub-issues:	Community support for the BSC students Improve working relationships
Sub-question	*3.4 Students work with the community*
Issue 4:	• Students work with the community
Sub-issues:	Value-adding and friendship Reciprocal or 'Win-Win' situation Communication

Research Question 2: ***How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their knowledge in practice?***

The responses to the questions in the RQ 2 cluster listed above were analysed to identify the following categories, themes and issues. The important issues emerging from RQ 2 are categorised below:

Category I:	Students' Application of theory to practice in the BSC (Interview Question 4);
Theme:	Applying knowledge in practice
Issues:	• The importance of bridging theory and practice in the BSC • Theory and its role in guiding practice

Category II:	Strengths and Weaknesses of the BSC (Interview Question 5)
Issues:	• Strengths • Weaknesses

Research Question 3: ***How effectively do students work with the community?***

The responses to the questions in the RQ 3 cluster listed above were analysed to identify the following categories, themes and issues. The important issues emerging from RQ 3 are categorised below:

Category I: Students in the BSC work with the community (Interview Question 6);

Theme: Business etiquette

Issues:
- Business etiquette for business students
- Business knowledge and business skills for professionals

Category II: Benefits of students' activities in the BSC to the community (Interview Question 7);

Theme: Social and economic benefits

Issues:
- The BSC promotes a sense of altruism
- The benefits of direct marketing
- The BSC promotes and fosters reciprocity among participants

Category III: Students have a sense of belonging and commitment to the community (Interview Question 8)

Theme: Expression of sense of altruism and community involvement

Issue:
- Sense of belonging and commitment

Research Question 4: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to the university about the Business Simulation Course?***

The responses to the questions in the RQ 4 cluster listed above were analysed to identify the following categories, themes and issues. The important issues emerging from RQ 4 are categorised below:

Category I: Advice to administrators of Payap University about the BSC (Interview Question 9)

Theme: Different stakeholders' perspectives on the BSC

Issues:
- The BSC needs a suitable location and appropriate equipment to transact business
- A student perspective on the unique demands and requirements of the BSC
- A staff perspective on the unique demands and requirements of the BSC
- The BSC's importance to Payap University

Research Question 5: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to policy makers who are involved in community development initiatives?***

The responses to the questions in the RQ 5 cluster listed above were analysed to identify the following categories, themes and issues. The important issues emerging from RQ 5 are categorised below:

Category I: Advice to policy makers about the BSC (Interview Question 10)

Theme: Policy makers and their role in supporting the BSC

Issues:

- Policy guidelines for government support of practical courses
- Government's role in promoting the BSC
- Financial support to the BSC
- Standardisation of community products
- Support with distributing community products

It can be seen that the major categories are based on the themes arising from the study's research questions. Issues and sub-issues became apparent to the researcher through the continued analysis of the messages contained in the data.

3.6 Confidentiality and Security

With the aim of ensuring confidentiality and security for all participants, it was decided by the researcher that the risks associated with this study were minimal and mainly concerned the information that was collected from the subjects themselves. Participants were invited to cease the activity if any discomfort should arise during the study. Participants were informed that all material would remain anonymous. No identifying codes were used. All raw data will be held on University of Tasmania premises for a period of at least 5 years. The data will be kept secure in a locked filing cabinet in the PhD room at the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania. The data will be destroyed by shredding after five years.

Summary

In this chapter, the research approach and research methodology were described, including a discussion of the approach taken to the collection of the data, and an introduction to its subsequent analysis. This chapter described trustworthiness and credibility in the research methodologies that have been established for the purpose

of the study, using the following sources of data: documents, questionnaires, and interviews.

In Chapter Four, the quantitative data from the questionnaire are presented in the demographic survey and attitude questions. The qualitative results are presented from open-ended questions together with quotations associated with the interview data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

In the rapidly changing circumstances of business, the pressure to remain relevant is ever present. The responsibility of higher education to design appropriate business curricula requires the inclusion of both theoretical knowledge and the practical aspects of business studies. This study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of experiential learning such as the Business Simulation Course (BSC) at Payap University. This involved seeking stakeholders' opinions related to the BSC's provision of experiential and problem-based learning in teaching students to apply theory in practice. The study sought the opinions of multiple stakeholders: students, staff and non-university stakeholders in the BSC, primarily to obtain an in-depth knowledge on the existing course. This study is reported as a narrative, containing direct quotations from interview statements. The results of the study are intended to provide specific advice to the university and more broadly to policy-makers concerning the effectiveness of the BSC in meeting its goals and on such issues as the integration of theory and practice in higher education.

The study used a multi-method approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods. The data were gathered via document analysis, questionnaires and interview. The study addressed five research questions, as follows:

RQ 1	How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University equips students to work in the business world?
RQ 2	How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their knowledge in practice?
RQ 3	How effectively does the BSC prepare students to work with the community?
RQ 4	What advice do stakeholders provide to the university about the Business Simulation Course?
RQ 5	What advice do stakeholders provide to policy-makers who are

involved in community development initiatives?

As presented earlier (Chapter Three), this study used a multi-method approach. The qualitative aspects of the results are described and discussed in conjunction with the quantitative results. Quantitative data from the questionnaire are presented as descriptive statistics, such as means and percentages. The qualitative data were derived from answers to open-ended questions and to the items in the questionnaire. Interview data were analysed manually through a modified 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or 'Constant Comparative Method' approach (Wellington, 2000), using the methods described in Chapter Three.

Data gathering involved the distribution of 80 questionnaires and conducting 20 interviews. Demographic information was obtained from the questionnaire respondents, who comprised: 39 students, 26 staff members and 15 non-university participants (the latter comprising: suppliers, community members and government officers). The results are divided into two sections: data related to questionnaire and from interview.

4.1 Data Related to Research Questions

The questionnaires were completed by 80 respondents, and an additional 20 respondents were interviewed. The respondents were students, staff members, community members and government officers. The results obtained from the questionnaire and interview data (both quantitative and qualitative), are presented as findings in this section.

In qualitative research, according to Patton (1990) 'the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit' (p. 278). In this study the interview questions sought interviewees' opinions on the effectiveness of the BSC at Payap University (A copy of the Interview Questions is shown in Appendix III). In relation to the quantitative data, mean scores are cited from the questionnaire responses. These data identified a statistically significant relationship between the mean scores of each group on the stakeholders' attitude towards the effectiveness of the BSC at Payap University. The questionnaire and interview data were analysed manually through a modified grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a), involving grouping the data into categories. The data are presented as a set of

interrelated concepts. As Strauss and Corbin explained, by "constructed' we mean that an analyst reduces data from many cases into concepts and sets of relational statements that can be used to explain, in a general sense, what is going on' (p. 145).

4.1.1 Stakeholders' Perceptions - Equipping Students for Business

Research Question 1: ***How do stakeholders perceive the Business Simulation Course at Payap University equips students to work in the business world?***

Questionnaire Data

Responses to the following items were analysed to determine the mean score for each item:

- Students in the BSC learn in the domain of real-life contexts (Items 1, 9, and 35);
- Student skills development in the BSC (Items 2, and 7);
- Co-operative learning in the BSC (Item 4);
- Students develop professional business skills (Items 5, 8, 31 and 37).

These items sought information on how the BSC prepares students for employment in the business world. The data from the Questionnaire are presented in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1: *Items Related to Simulated/ Real-life Context Learning in the BSC*

Items	Mean Score		
	Students	Staff	NUS [1]
1. *The Business Simulation Course is the way to develop students to do business in real-life contexts.	4.18	4.62	4.40
2. The students who manage the 'dummy company' (i.e., management team members) can gain more experience than the other students from the Business Simulation Course.	4.03	4.15	4.27
4. *Students develop their skills in co-operative learning, while working with colleagues and the community.	4.10	4.31	4.67
5. Students develop in professional expertise in the commercial environment as a result of the Business Simulation Course.	3.92	3.88	4.07
7. Students learn to adapt and adjust to different situations as they go through the Business Simulation Course.	4.10	4.19	4.40
8. The Business Simulation Course improves students' grasp of business skills.	3.64	3.73	3.80
9. *Business skills in the Business Simulation Course are mostly learned from the real world context.	4.10	4.08	4.33
31. *The students were given freedom to develop the company plan and to manage it.	3.21	2.92	3.60
35. Students in business school should be concerned with reality; learning about business does not take place in isolation.	3.95	4.19	4.33
37. The 'simulated company' is a profitable business - as profitable as other enterprises.	3.90	3.96	4.07

Key: * these items are discussed in the following section

[1] NUS refers to non-university stakeholders

The data shown in Table 4-1 indicate that staff respondents strongly believe the BSC is an appropriate way to develop students' ability to transact business in the 'real' world; that is, learning in a real situation can develop students' business skills. Staff opinions, however differ considerably from student opinions (Mean Score 4.62 versus 4.18) (Item1). This difference is statistically significant at the <.05 level, with $t = 2.35$ and $p = .02$. Moreover, all respondents believed that students learned business skills within a 'real' world context, through the BSC. However, staff respondents supported this proposition less strongly (but not to a statistically

significant extent: t = 1.27, p = .21) than non-university respondents, while students agreed closely with staff (Item 9, Mean Score was between 4.08 - 4.33).

The respondents indicated clearly that students in the BSC work co-operatively with colleagues and the community (Item 4). In terms of Mean Scores attained, each group of respondents had a positive view of students' performance in this area. This is reflected in the closeness of the Mean Scores, i.e., 4.10 - 4.67.

There were substantial differences of opinion about whether students had sufficient autonomy when running the 'Dummy Company' reflected in the mean scores (Item 31). Staff expressed the view that when students studied in the BSC, they were limited to the extent they could develop the company plan (Mean Score was 2.92 and 3.21 for student respondents). However, non-university respondents disagreed with these two groups' feeling that when students studied in the BSC, they had a great deal of freedom when running the 'Dummy Company' (Mean Score was 3.60). The difference between staff and non-university respondents is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level ($t = 2.19$, $p = .03$), however the difference in regard to students and non-university respondents is not significant ($t = 1.38$, $p = .17$).

Interview Data

The interview questions sought stakeholders' views on how teaching and learning in the BSC equips students to work in the real business world. These questions sought to answer RQ 1. The data from the interviews are presented, as follows:

- *Factors which stakeholders perceive cause stress to students in the BSC (Interview Question 1);*
- *Stakeholders' perceptions of the major skills gained in the BSC (Interview Question 2);*
- *Stakeholders' perceptions of the main feature of the BSC and compare them with the simulation in 'bona fide' companies (Interview Question 3.1- 3.4).*

4.1.1.1 Factors Which Stakeholders Perceive Cause Stress for Students in the BSC

Interviewees were asked about their perceptions of the stress involved in studying in the BSC. It was hypothesised by the researcher that working in the business world might make different demands on students from studying theory, possibly leading to an increase in stress due to the challenges of doing business in the real world. Accordingly, respondents were asked to give their views.

Interview Question 1:
Students may experience a lot of stress when they study in the Business Simulation Course. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why/ Why not?

All interview respondents agreed that students felt some stress. Stakeholders perceived that the BSC equipped students to work in the real world of business, by exposing them to the kind of stresses they will encounter and by allowing them to develop strategies to deal with these stresses.

Overall, from the interview data, a number of causes of stress were identified and were grouped under the following sub-headings, which will be discussed in turn:

- *Lack of teamwork*
- *Sales targets and assessment*
- *Time management and course loads*

Lack of teamwork

All student respondents with first hand experience of working in the BSC commented that the lack of teamwork caused them stress. The following extracts from two interview responses are indicative of students' opinions:

> *As you know, when people work as a team, there are always problems… the more people the more problems… sometimes when we order products, there is a shortage. Thus, the stresses occur because we cannot respond to the customers' needs. This also occurs because the management team can't work appropriately when they run the company* (STU # 1).

> *Any management system which is complicated requires organisation, which means that someone needs to take responsibility for this. Besides, there are many co-operating parties when we work together; therefore, if there are problems or disagreements, there might be*

> *objections from the organisation or the outsiders, mostly about the process of work, because it has to do with people* (STU # 4).

Two of the students who held positions in the Management Team identified other students in the 'Dummy Company' as the cause of their stress.

> *Actually, students who run the 'Dummy Company' take their positions very seriously; they feel a responsibility to do their best. They have to work co-operatively to meet the company's goals but sometimes it is hard to do that. The stresses in teamwork occur when some people do not work as a team, and do not pull their weight* (STU # 5).

Another student felt that, dealing with 'staff' in the 'Dummy Company' (fellow students) and customers was stressful.

> *I work in a Management Team and sometimes when we run the 'Dummy Company' we disagree with those whom we must deal with, such as sales supervisors and sales representatives…. When customers buy things they want a receipt immediately. Meeting customers' demands means that I am absent from class often because customers' needs must be met as a priority, and this need might occur when I have a class. They [customers] don't understand what I am doing. It is a great responsibility to work as the treasurer* (STU # 2).

Staff and non-university stakeholders also identified working cooperatively as a major challenge in the BSC. Typical comments were as follows:

> *The stress depends on many factors, such as, the course objectives, assessment pressures, the advisors who control the class and students' uncertainty about working co-operatively as a team* (STA # 7).

> *When students are assigned sales targets, the company requires everyone's co-operation. If students work more co-operatively, their stress might decrease* (NUS # 3).

All respondents believed that better co-operation between students in the BSC was essential to the success of its business operations. When students work in small teams in the 'Dummy Company' they have the opportunity to learn to share specific experiences and knowledge, listen to and present different viewpoints, and develop their business skills as a group.

Sales targets and assessment

Questionnaire data show students' opinions of their experience with the BSC. The data in Appendix IV, Table A-4 show that the majority (79.50 %) had sales experience working as sales representatives in the BSC and almost half (48.70 %)

were part of the administrative team in the 'Dummy Company'. Moreover, the data show that almost two-thirds of students were confident about meeting their company's goals (64 percent, Item 11). Two-thirds (67 percent) reported that they were meeting their sales targets, while 28 percent were 'not quite sure' and 5 percent (2 students), were not confident at all of meeting the targets (Item 12).

Three quarters of the interviewees agreed that meeting sales targets was a major cause of stress, especially if achieving the sales target was assessed. Comments made by interviewees included:

> *When I was a student sales representative and before I began studying in the BSC, my sales target was around 20,000 Baht. When I studied in this course, I was quite shocked! The sales target increased 10 times, so that I was worried that I could not reach the sales target* (STU # 1).

> *The company sales target was so high! It was 6 million Baht, but at the end of the project, we exceeded the sales target and sold more than 7 million Baht! That decreased our stress in the end* (STU # 5).

Additionally, most respondents said they were afraid that they could not meet the sales objectives and believed that this would affect their grades. This opinion was shared by most students in the BSC. Some non-university members and staff also reflected these concerns:

> *I absolutely agree. The Business Simulation study makes the students who take this course different from those who do not, and sometimes it causes them stress, because business has its own mechanisms which are different and difficult. Some items, we think can be done, but when it comes to real practice, there might be something blocking it.… Stress occurred when the BSC assessed students for achievement of sales targets* (NUS # 1).

> *If students concentrate on sales volume and think that the number of sales is going to affect their scores or grades, then they put pressure on their family and relatives to buy products from them* (NUS # 8).

> *Students might be stressed because they are in the real business world, thus when they run the company they want to reach the sales target and they worry that this might affect their grades* (STA # 2).

One staff respondent, on the other hand, was not sure that sales targets caused stress to students in the BSC. As this respondent commented:

> *Personally, I agree that students get stressed but I'm not sure that it is because of the sales target. I think the aim of teaching and learning in*

> *the BSC is not profit-oriented. Rather, it is about how students collaborate with others. However, this also depends on advisors, course objectives and assessment* (STA # 1).

Another staff respondent had a positive view of the sales targets and argued that setting a sales target encouraged students to reach the company's goals: '*From a teacher's viewpoint, I think sales targets must be set as an important aspect in the BSC*' (STA # 6).

Time management and course loads

Staff opinions differed on the suitability of the study programme. Staff members considered that there was too much activity required in the BSC. As one commented:

> *Senior students have many activities, not only major subjects but the other core business courses as well. They have to work hard both in class and on fieldwork. I think the study programme is an unsuitable programme* (STA # 6).

However, other staff members thought that the BSC requirements reflected the importance of the course to students, for example:

> *I think it [the BSC] is the major subject of importance to the senior students. It is not like traditional subjects, and so they have to work harder than in other subjects and it is time consuming* (STA # 3).

The pressure of limited time was seen as a stress-producing factor by another staff member:

> *Time is another factor that caused students stress because this unit takes so much time and they [students in the BSC] are attached to their work* (STA # 1).

Generally, staff agreed that stress was a factor in the BSC; however, they saw it as having multiple causes. However, one staff member stated that stress was often self-induced and was not always negative in its effect, as follows:

> *They might have some stress but not too much and not all of them [students in the BSC]. I believe only some of them do. We know this from discussing the issue with the students. This type of stress comes from the students themselves. They are afraid that they might be unable to do the practice, or fail to sell the amount fixed by the company. Therefore, students will feel stress and, after that, the stress they have is like the power pushing them to a higher level of responsibility and duty* (STA # 4).

Lack of experience was identified as a cause of stress by a student, who commented:

> *I agree because it is like training for a career and it is like the first time at running a real business, which we have never done before. It is the work which I experience with outsiders, apart from the teacher and other students; we don't know them and have never done this business before.… However, if students really focus on their work, grade and points will be something that they worry less about, because their main aim will be to work better* (STU # 4).

4.1.1.2 Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Major Skills Gained in the Business Simulation Course

Interview question 2 was included to ascertain whether or not stakeholders agreed that the BSC would equip students with the skills needed to run a business.

Interview Question 2:
A description of the Business Simulation Course is, 'An opportunity to apply theories and knowledge in real situations, through a dummy company controlled by an advisor'. Do you think that when students run their company, they will develop the skills as outlined in the course description? How?

All of the respondents considered that the course provided an excellent opportunity to test theory in practice. The interview data are presented in the following section and grouped under three sub-headings:

- *Development of real-life business experience*
- *Development of business skills to apply theory in practice*
- *Self-development.*

Development of real-life business experience

According to the course description, the BSC is a practical course where students develop a business plan of their own and develop marketing strategies for their 'Dummy Company'. Student respondents agreed that the BSC allowed them to experience real business practice and develop the skills necessary for running a 'bona fide' business. As one student commented:

> *I agree that after enrolling in the BSC, I have to sell products. For me, it is not familiar territory. However, I realised that this experience could give me a real world practice (STU # 1).*

Comments from non-university interviewees were positive in this regard and included:

> *…students have a chance to work in a 'real' situation. They decide how to sell products in the real market. I think they obtain more than 80 percent of their knowledge from real-life contexts* (NUS # 1).

> *It [The BSC] uses real-life situations and theory. In some situations we brought them in as guides but, in practice, it did not go as proposed. Therefore, having a dummy company and working in a real situation will help us see results sooner. Students will have a chance to develop themselves better than only being in the classroom all the time* (NUS # 2).

> *Although this is a simulated company, they are operating in a real business world: selling, working cooperatively and experiencing stresses. When students graduate they use these experiences in real world contexts. The more problems, the more opportunities there are to solve problems. This will be a valuable experience* (NUS # 3).

Development of business skills to apply theory in practice

In the BSC, simulation is used to help business students become skilled in applying their knowledge to actual business situations. In addition, the BSC offers students the opportunity to understand and learn how to apply their theoretical knowledge to real-life business experience. Students acknowledged the importance of developing business skills and agreed that the course enabled them to do so by providing opportunities to learn in the workplace:

> *It stands to reason that business people should have this knowledge and skill …when I graduate, having worked in a 'bona fide' company, will give me invaluable experience* (STU # 2).

> *I think it [the BSC] can develop business skills because we first studied various courses and we obtained knowledge of theories, strategies and planning. Then we brought all these things into use when running the 'Dummy Company'. It is something that we have practised, as in a real job, so we need to plan and think about which strategy to use, based on the theories studied and practical experience* (STU # 4).

The same respondent commented that the BSC produced a positive and optimistic approach to working and decision-making in the real world:

> *I think that now I am more enthusiastic… gaining more experiences from planning, making contact with outsiders, deciding what strategy to use, writing letters and making business appointments* (STU # 4).

Several staff respondents agreed that the course was designed to enable students to learn the theory and then apply it in practice. They also felt that the practical aspect of the course helped develop business skills. Some of their comments were as follows:

> …*When considering the marketing strategy, students have brought the theories they have studied into use. Then, after that they have to make it practical by going out to meet customers and use the assigned plan in their work and activities in the community according to the business plan description* (STA # 4).

> *I agree 100 percent that students are able to apply their knowledge in real situations in the BSC. If they don't have crucial knowledge they cannot run their business* (STA # 5).

One non-university respondent pointed out the difficulty of surviving in business without practical experience:

> *Business students, who have never had experience involving things such as: money, profit and loss, and a sense of entrepreneurship, cannot understand real business life. They are only concepts (NUS # 5).*

Self-Development

There was an overwhelmingly positive response from students who ran the BSC, in regard to how it promoted self-development. Their responses included:

> *I enjoyed selling things, providing service to others, working cooperatively and learning how to be a leader. I have developed myself in many ways - such as how to deal with people and how to solve problems. In addition, I learned more about marketing strategies* (STU # 1).

> *I learned to develop my personality for example, how to present myself and carry on a professional conversation* (STU # 3).

> *I think in the area of responsibility i.e. when we work on the 'Dummy Company', actually doing the business, we have to be responsible for ourselves and also for our colleagues* (STU # 4).

> *I have developed my personality as a sales representative, which I learned from my marketing subjects* (STU # 5).

The above comments indicated that students in the BSC believed that they have become skilled and knowledgeable in the areas required, that is, business strategies, problem-solving and communications skills. They reported that these skills are essential for a successful business career.

4.1.1.3 Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Main Features of the Business Simulation Course

Interviewees were asked their opinions of the main features of the BSC.

Interview Question 3:
Can you identify the main features of the Business Simulation Course, and compare them with the experience in 'bona fide' companies?

The responses for this question are grouped under the following headings, which were categories identified as the main features of the BSC.

1. Real-life contexts
2. Working co-operatively
3. Building a co-operative working relationship among the BSC students, the University and the Community
4. Students' work with the community.

Real-life contexts

The respondents were asked to compare their experience of the BSC (a 'simulated' company) with 'bona fide' companies. The findings present respondents perceptions of the differences between the 'Dummy Company' and 'bona fide' companies, under the following sub-headings: flexibility and time constraints.

- *Flexibility*

Responses from interviewees reported differences between the 'Dummy Company' and 'bona fide' companies. The BSC established the simulated company which was required to operate in a 'real' business environment. However, the BSC also contained flexible elements, such as flexible working hours, conditions of work and a flexible application of rules which would not be a feature of a 'bona fide' company. Two comments from student and staff respondents illustrate their opinions of the flexible working environment in the BSC.

> *The BSC was more flexible than a 'bona fide' company, for instance, it provided off-duty time and co-operative working. Staff advisors were available to give advice* (STU # 5).

> *This is rather obvious because the 'Dummy Company' has so much flexibility. Regulations and rules are often flexible. However, there*

> *will be some factors which will make students feel it is difficult to follow the rules* (STA # 4).

- *Time constraints*

Many non-university stakeholders mentioned that the time needed to run the students' company was not sufficient, nor was the 'Dummy Company' adequate preparation for doing real business. The students also said that the 'Dummy Company' lacked continuity, in that normal business processes which occur over a longer period of time needed to be concentrated into one semester and that the 'Dummy Company' was limited by time constraints. This was noted as being different from a 'bona fide' business situation where the sole focus of activity would be working in the company. Typical comments were:

> *The 'Dummy Company' is a short-term course and allows students to start their business without considering their abilities or state of preparation* (NUS # 3).

> *…the BSC is a short-term course, designed for students to learn from real companies, in a real business situation. It is not meant to keep going continuously like a real business* (NUS # 5).

> *They [students in the BSC] couldn't spend all their time at the BSC… It's difficult for students to work eight hours a day, as they would do in a real company, due to other demands on their time* (STA # 6).

Working co-operatively

Students identified working co-operatively as one of the main aims of the BSC. Data from respondents revealed that all respondents agreed that co-operation among students was essential to the achievement of the company's goals. Respondents reported that individual differences could be an asset, because students could contribute their individual talents to the company. Some of the data regarding stakeholders' views about the importance of working co-operatively in the BSC are presented below.

- *The importance of co-operation in the BSC*

Assessable courses at university level involve competition and typically are based on individual ability. Conversely, success in business requires teamwork and group skills. Some students found these contrasting demands hard to manage. Student responses to the need to work co-operatively reflected two main attitudes. Firstly, students had a positive approach to achieving the company's goals through co-

operation with others who might be more capable. One student respondent's opinion was representative of this view:

> *…some students cannot reach sales targets, but once the others do, overall the company hits the sales objective. Right now, the sales are more than six million Baht, whereas the sale target was only six million Baht* (STU # 2).

Secondly, other students expressed the view that it was difficult to work co-operatively, because everyone did not work according to their job description. A student commented:

> *I think, in an organisation like the 'Dummy Company', everybody has to be involved. If anyone is missing; for example, if any position in the Management Team is not represented, there will be an obstacle in the work system because each position or each function has its own unique and important role to play* (STU # 4).

All staff agreed that co-operation among students would help achieve the company's goals. Staff expressed their agreement in the following comments:

> *This is true. If students co-operate, follow the rules, or take on a high level of responsibility, that will help a lot in terms of success* (STA # 4).

> *I agree! 100 percent, co-operative working will be through and through the best route to success. For me, I think quantity is less important than working co-operatively with quality* (STA # 5).

> *I agree, it's a course objective to measure how well students work as a team because this course [the BSC] focuses on teamwork* (STA # 7).

The non-university stakeholders also stated that students need to work co-operatively to achieve the company's goals. Non-university members observed that there are some obstructions to working as a team in the 'Dummy Company'. As one non-university respondent commented:

> *The BSC is a co-operative venture, so students should have a strong commitment to each other when they work and take more responsibility. For example, some students who managed the company - such as the General Manager - worked seriously, while the others didn't. Some students work in the management team because their friends did and when they found that it was hard work, then they gave up. This must affect their teamwork* (NUS # 1).

Students working in the BSC must make a significant commitment of time and work together to achieve the company's goals. A co-operative atmosphere does seem to

exist in the 'Dummy Company'. Overall, it was suggested that working co-operatively was seen as highly desirable, essential to success, and preferable to competing with each other.

Building a co-operative working relationship among the BSC students, the University and the Community

One aim of the BSC is to build a relationship among university students and the community, via the BSC. The data, which were gathered from students, staff and non-university members are presented below, under the following sub-headings: community support for the BSC students, and working relationship improvement.

- *Community support for the BSC students*

An effective business simulation course is based on strong partnerships between the local community and the university. These partnerships are essential to broaden and enrich the BSC experience for both students and the community. The BSC not only allows students to work in their subject area at university but also aims to prepare them for successful and rewarding employment after they complete their education. As one student commented:

> *They [villagers] recognised students in the BSC, which is one of the business curriculum subjects at Payap University. Thus, they support and encourage students by purchasing things from the students* (STU # 1).

Two respondents commented that OTOP suppliers support the course by co-operating effectively with the university:

> *OTOP suppliers allow students in the BSC to have a chance to interact, especially with villagers around the university. Moreover, they can join in other activities in our university, such as academic consultations* (STA # 7).

> *Suppliers from villages, who sell community products [OTOP], joined the 'Payap Dummy Company' to demonstrate their support for a close relationship between students, the university and the community* (STU # 2).

- *Working relationship improvement*

The student interview data indicated that the relationship between students and the community was improved via the BSC. A community-building benefit of working in the 'Dummy Company' was that students were able to socialise with suppliers and

customers and learn how to establish and maintain business contacts with relevant people. As one student respondent stated:

> *I think working in the 'Dummy Company' helps improve the relationship with the community because we have to make more contact with society. The 'Dummy Company' provides students with real contact with the community… to go out of the university and present products or goods to sell to people outside* (STU # 4).

The majority of non-university members regarded the working relationship between the university and the community as positive and they felt that it improved when students ran the 'Dummy Company'. Comments from non-university interview respondents on these relationships included the following:

> *Yes, if community refers to suppliers, at least they know about students' activities in the 'Dummy Company'. This relationship is built up between the university and the community when students run the 'Dummy Company'. The community will see what students have done and sometimes students may join the community's activities as well (NUS # 1).*

> *… if they [students in the BSC] go out and use their goods as a point of contact, and also stress that they are part of the BSC at Payap University, this will create a sense of community between university students and the outside world* (NUS # 2).

Students' work with the community

All respondents reported that students' work with the community was an important feature of the BSC. It was considered that the BSC could not function well if students were isolated from the community. These data, concerning how students work with the community, are presented under three sub-headings: value-adding and friendship, reciprocity or 'Win-Win' situations, and communication.

- *Value adding and friendship*

Student respondents were asked about the features of the BSC which allow them to work with the community. Three respondents commented as follows:

> *It is an opportunity to work with the community. For example, villagers supplied products to students from the BSC. This creates a bond of friendship between students and the community* (STU # 1).

> *…door-to-door selling creates a connection between students and the community. Once we went to one village to knock on doors but we could not sell anything. Then, one of the house's owners asked for help to repair electrical equipment and my friend lent a hand* (STU # 2).

> *Last Summer School the BSC joined with other suppliers to exhibit in one of the industrial districts. We initiated a good relationship with traders and other people* (STU # 5).

- *Reciprocal or 'Win-Win' situations*

Many staff commented on the relationship with suppliers who traded with students in the BSC. They considered that this also financially benefited both the university and the community. The following staff comments illustrate this point:

> *Both students and suppliers gain benefits from trading; students have the products to sell and suppliers get more marketing channels* (STA # 1).

> *Villagers, who supply OTOP to the 'Dummy Company', have an opportunity to produce new products. On the other hand, students are seeking new products for their market. Thus, villagers can earn more by trading with students in the BSC* (STA # 2).

- *Communication*

Learning in the BSC involves communication as an important attribute. According to staff respondents, the BSC provided opportunities for students to deal with the community, for example, suppliers, customers and villagers. Students studying in the BSC learn how to communicate with people from different organisations. Students participating in the community not only trade with but also learn from the community. The following staff responses explain how students communicate with community members.

> *…to establish the 'Dummy Company' is to communicate with people who are concerned about their [students in the BSC] job* (STA # 1).

> *Before students seek their suppliers, they survey the market and deal with village leaders and entrepreneurs in the community (STA # 2).*

Summary of the Findings Related to Research Question 1

The major findings of RQ1: '*How do the Stakeholders perceive the Business Simulation Course at Payap University equips students to work in the business world*?' can be summarized as follows:

All survey respondents strongly agreed that the BSC enables students to develop skills in working collaboratively. The respondents indicated that students in the BSC learn how to deal with their colleagues and the community in the real world. Interestingly, non-university members were strongly of the view that students had a

great deal of freedom when planning and running the 'Dummy Company', whereas, staff somewhat disagreed with this viewpoint.

Interview data show that stakeholders consider that when working in the business world, students in the BSC face pressure from the demands of teamwork, reaching sales targets, assessment and time constraints. The study also endeavoured to determine whether stakeholders perceived that the BSC would equip students with important business skills when they ran the 'Dummy Company'. Several important differences were identified, between working in the 'Dummy Company' as part of the BSC and working in 'bona fide' companies. For example, the BSC was able to have more flexible working hours and rules, than many 'bona fide' companies do. The 'Dummy Company', operates in a limited time frame, because the BSC is a short-term course. There also are similarities, however, such as, the BSC emphasises working co-operatively in business and this is required in 'bona fide' companies. A major focus of the BSC is the relationship between the community and the business, and providing students with commercial and personal contacts with other stakeholders also reflects real business practice.

4.1.2 Stakeholders' Perceptions: Applying Theory in Practice

Research Question 2: ***How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their knowledge in practice?***

Questionnaire Data

The data which were gathered from the questionnaires to address RQ2 are presented in this section. These data detail the respondents' views about whether or not the BSC allowed students to combine theory with practice. The data are tabulated under the following four categories:

- *The BSC allows students to develop critical thinking and deal with typical problems in company management (Items 3, 6 and 16);*
- *Higher education needs a practical curriculum which bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and realistic application (Items 10, 12, 32, 33 and 34);*

- *The effectiveness of teaching and learning in the BSC at Payap University aims at achieving the course objectives (Items 11, 14, 15, 17 and 36);*
- *Students in the BSC learn from their practice in the community (Item 20).*

These items sought information on how students in the BSC are able to relate their theoretical knowledge to business practice, see Table 4-2.

Table 4-2: *Items Related to Combining Theory with Practice*

Items	Mean Score		
	Students	Staff	NUS [1]
3. Students develop skills and critical thinking ability to solve problems in the Business Simulation Course.	4.15	4.15	4.33
6. The Business Simulation Course can develop the students' sense of entrepreneurship.	3.97	4.08	3.93
10. Tertiary education effectively bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.	3.82	3.85	3.93
11. * The university provides enough facilities and equipment to meet students' program needs.	2.90	2.88	3.33
12. *An effective way of learning in the Business Simulation Course is to combine theory with practice.	3.95	4.38	4.67
14. * In the Business Simulation Course, curriculum is less structured and therefore more effective than a system which is highly controlled and structured.	3.67	3.80	4.40
15. Supervisors spend sufficient time with students out of class.	3.72	3.68	3.87
16. Students will be better equipped to cope with problems arising from company management.	3.59	3.38	3.47
17. The success of graduates is dependent on their university curriculum.	3.67	3.77	3.86
20. The suppliers provide the students with product knowledge and marketing strategies.	3.69	3.60	3.80
32. *Business students learning from case studies have the same benefits as students learning by implementation.	3.59	2.88	3.07
33. *Students are able to manage the 'simulated company' without theoretical knowledge.	3.20	3.92	3.67
34. *Various theories learned in the Business Simulation Course help students when they manage their 'simulated company'.	3.72	3.96	4.67
36. Supervisors help students who have problems in the practical component of the Business Simulation Course.	4.05	4.08	4.40

Key: * these items are discussed in the following sections
[1] NUS refers to non-university stakeholders

The six items with asterisks are of major interest to this study, in that they show the highest differences between respondents' opinions and /or are linked to the main issues in the Research Questions.

The data show that students and staff agreed that the university did not supply sufficient resources and equipment for the BSC. The close Mean Scores for insider respondents were 2.90 and 2.88, respectively; whereas non-university respondents indicated that resources were adequate, with a Mean Score of 3.33 (Table 4-2, item 11). However, these differences are not statistically significant (staff: non-university respondents $t = 1.54$, $p = .13$; students: non-university respondents $t = 1.63$, $p = .11$).

All respondents reported that the curriculum in the BSC was highly effective. Students and staff agreed that the BSC curriculum was more effective than a highly controlled and structured curriculum. Non-university respondents were even stronger in their support of the BSC curriculum - the Mean Scores for this item were between 3.67- 4.40 (Item 14). This difference in non-university support was significant at the $p< .05$ level (with non-university: staff $t = 2.56$, $p = .02$; non-university: student $t = 2.56$, $p = .01$). All respondents were in favour of giving students a grounding in theoretical knowledge before they began managing the 'Dummy Company'. The Mean Scores (3.92 and 3.67) signified a high level of agreement by staff, and a slightly lower level of agreement by non-university stakeholders. Students had the lowest level of agreement (3.20, Item 33). Any differences in responses to Item 33, however, were not statistically significant.

There was extensive acceptance among the respondents of the belief that the BSC is an effective way to combine theory with practice; the Mean Scores for this item were between 3.95 and 4.67 (Item 12). Furthermore, non-university stakeholders had the most positive opinions about how helpful theoretical knowledge was in assisting students to run their 'Dummy Company' (Mean Score 4.67). Thus, non-university stakeholders valued the combination of theory and practice more than staff (Mean Score 3.96) but not to a statistically significant extent ($t = 1.48$, $p = .15$) or students (Mean Score 3.72) (Item 34). The latter difference was highly significant ($t = 3.70$, $t = .001$). While students strongly agreed that case studies are a good way to learn and thought this method had the same value as implementation (Mean Score 3.59), staff disagreed with this statement (Mean Score 2.88). Non-university respondents were

less in favour of 'case study' learning than students (Mean Score 3.07) (Item 32). Nevertheless, differences here were not statistically significant.

Interview Data

Interview questions specifically sought opinions on how stakeholders perceive students in the BSC combine theory with practice. Respondents were asked two questions that sought information in relation to RQ 2. Data based on the answers of 20 respondents to questions 4 and 5, are presented below, under the following headings:

- *Students' application of theory to practice in the BSC (Interview Question 4)*
- *Strengths and weaknesses of the BSC (Interview Question 5)*

4.1.2.1 Students' Application of Theory to Practice in the BSC

Interview Question 4:

When people say 'students apply their theoretical knowledge to practice', what do you understand by this? Could you give some examples?

Respondents were asked their perceptions on how students applied theory to practice in the BSC. Most interviewees indicated that it was necessary to combine theory and practice in the 'Dummy Company'. They considered that bridging the gap between theory and practice was essential for the students' learning.

Student respondents recognised that they used the theories taught in the Marketing Course in running their 'Dummy Company'. The theories which they applied included: marketing management, sales management, salesmanship and advertising. Staff reported that applying theories to simulated business contexts improves the students' ability to plan, develop teamwork skills and deal with financial risks. The perspectives of non-university respondents were similar.

The comments relating to the integration of theory with practice in the BSC are presented in this section, under the following sub-headings:

- *The importance of combining theory and practice in the BSC*
- *Theory and its role in guiding practice*

The importance of combining theory and practice in the BSC

Bridging theory with practice is embedded in the BSC, as a necessary component of professional development schemes advocated by Payap University. As a stated aim of the course, students are required to apply the professional business skills learnt in the course to run the simulated company. Comments from non-university respondents show their understanding of this aspect:

> *The objective of the 'Dummy Company' course is to correctly apply theory with practice…this is the main objective of the course. If they did not go through this course they might try to run the business by trial and error* (NUS # 1).

> *It's necessary to bridge theory and practice to run their business. It's an educator's way to put theory into practice, whereas people who are untrained in a formal sense may not understand or be aware of the theory. They are self-trained, on the job* (NUS # 7).

> *What students have learned in the classroom are only concepts. Once students take this course [the BSC], they learn how to solve problems, to plan by applying theory to practice and gain real-life experiences…It must be made clear to students that this is the best way to learn, by bridging theory and practice* (NUS # 5).

From the responses, integrated knowledge seemed to be an essential feature of successful business practice.

> *Students can learn sequentially. For example, they learn theory in the classroom, after which they put this into practise. They can also review their practice in follow-up lectures later, by discussing the success, or otherwise, of their attempts to apply theory to the 'real-life' business environment* (NUS # 5).

The Management Team of the 'Dummy Company' conceptualised its role in the BSC as that of a company division, whose job was to analyse the market, discern opportunities, formulate marketing strategies, develop business strategies and determine tactics. As student and staff respondents stated:

> *I used sales techniques in my work, especially to follow up on sales with the customer. In addition, sales management is useful for work with my colleagues as a team* (STU # 1).

> *Students in the BSC gather and combine marketing knowledge from several sources especially for the management team who sets the company's overall business plan. This plan also needs to be adaptable* (STU # 5).

> *Students in the BSC need to have business knowledge. They integrate theory in a practical way by running of their 'Dummy Company'* (STA # 2).

Students in the BSC are able to utilise and apply theory in a practical context. They analyse situations proactively in the 'Dummy Company'. This includes initiative-taking, commitment, problem-solving and creativity.

Theory and its role in guiding practice

The importance of theory lies in its role as a guide to practice. Many respondents commented that theory was extremely useful to inform practice. Respondents from all categories considered that it was difficult to run a business without understanding relevant theory. As staff members stated:

> *Theories are guidelines for them [students in the BSC] to walk on. In conclusion, therefore, if we grasp theories, it is like taking the short-cuts; if we learn by experience, we might have to use a trial-and-error method and that takes a longer time* (STA # 4).

> *To establish the 'Dummy Company', students need to know how to target a market and develop a sales forecast. If they [students in the BSC] don't know any theory, it will be hard for them to manage their company. It is an advantage to have learned the theory previously. This would serve as a firm foundation for practical application in any business venture* (STA # 6).

A staff member expressed her view about the importance of theoretical knowledge prior to practice:

> *No! Practice without theory is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Once students learn the theory they have learned how to solve problems much quicker* (STA # 5).

A non-university respondent also stressed that it was impossible to run a business in the absence of theory:

> *It's true, theory provides the core concepts which are required in real practice. You can't say implementation is possible without theory. It's difficult to run a successful business without a conceptual framework* (NUS # 2).

Another non-university respondent agreed with the above opinions, as stated below:

> *If you use theory as a directional guide it might get you through the problems faster* (NUS # 6).

According to most respondents, the BSC experience gives students an opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge and to gain professional understanding in an actual working business environment.

4.1.2.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the BSC

Interview Question 5:
What are the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning in the Business Simulation Course?

Respondents were asked their opinions of the strengths and weakness of the BSC.

Strengths

The respondents' comments on the positive advantages of the BSC, in relation to teaching and learning, are presented below in two sub-categories: 'bona fide' business experience and positive benefits for students.

- *'Bona Fide' Business Experience*

Students believe that the BSC offers them the opportunity to practise their business skills in a real business situation. A number of student respondents who worked in the BSC commented as follows:

> *Real practice is learnt from real situations! This is an invaluable experience and is most helpful to students. For example, students are able to find solutions in the day to day running of their business, when problems arise and decisions have to be made* (STU # 1).

A student commented about the valuable opportunities to collaborate with others offered by the BSC:

> *I learnt how to work collaboratively, deal with suppliers and communicate with many different people. These are very useful skills for real-life business encounters* (STU # 5).

Staff and non-university respondents commented that the BSC benefits students by allowing them to have direct experiences of business life. As reported:

> *Students learn within real-life contexts in the business world and have first hand experience before they work in a 'bona fide' company. It seems that learning by trial and error helps them adjust to real-life work later* (STA # 4).

> *I can say that this course allows students to have real-life experiences which are suitable for business students…it's better than sitting in the classroom* (NUS # 5).

Another non-university respondent commented that the business experience was short term, so that it was less stressful for students.

> *It is an opportunity for students to have a real business experience while running a business for a short period* (NUS # 8).

- *Positive Benefits of 'bona fide' business experience*

According to a non-university respondent, the BSC provides great benefits for students to train them for their future work in 'bona fide' companies. A non-university respondent reported:

> *Those who have a chance to practise will also have a better chance to develop skills, apply them sooner and see the results faster. When a situation is simulated the mechanics are learned, experience increases. Students who pass these business strategies will need to spend less time on developing this area of expertise. I mean that as soon as they enter the business field, they can start working right way. Also in some cases, we can use this group of students to provide inspiration for others, to build new mechanisms in business while working for us and then help the company learn that they are the group that we need* (NUS # 2).

For students, another important advantage of working in the BSC is that they may run their 'Dummy Company'. They are able to practise business skills as part of a learning experience so that the consequence of failure to perform is less severe than in a genuine employment situation. Thus these students are given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, as they run their simulated company. The BSC emphasises that students work for the experience and not the money. As one non-university respondent commented:

> *…because they are students, if they make a mistake they are excused…The aim of the BSC is not to make a profit, so students are not expected to succeed all the time as in a 'bona fide' business, so they gain the opportunity to learn from their mistakes which is a good point of the BSC* (NUS # 1).

Another positive feature is that the BSC students learn relevant skills and develop their abilities:

> *This course prepares students to be confident in running a business in the real world. They perform better than students who have never practised before. This is an advantage for students* (NUS # 4).

The main strength of the BSC according to most respondents, is that it creates 'bona fide' situations in which students can practise the tasks they have to face later. All respondents were generally positive about the value of the BSC in the provision of 'bona fide' experiences for the students concerned.

Weaknesses

Respondents considered that the BSC provides opportunities for students to gain relevant business experience, in the field of marketing relations. However, there were also several weaknesses identified by respondents. The interviewees' opinions are recorded under the following two sub-headings: time constraints and human resource issues.

- *Time Constraints*

About one-third of respondents commented that the BSC was too time-consuming and the study programme was too arduous for students, as there were too many subjects and it was considered that this might affect their performance and results. Some of their comments were:

> *This course is time consuming when compared with other subjects, I spent most of my day working in the company* (STU # 5)

> *One weakness is that it is time consuming….it's good to study this course but it has affected the students' participation for other subjects* (STA #1).

- *Human Resource Issues*

Respondents commented that human resource management in the BSC presents difficulties; stating that the positions students are assigned in the 'Dummy Company' might affect their performance, as the following respondents commented:

> *When recruiting students to work in the Management Team, often mistakes are made. For example, some students are not put in the right position, which might cause a problem when working as a team* (STU # 2).

> *Students in the 'Dummy Company' hold different positions and perform different tasks. So that the ones who do not work in the Management Team might be disadvantaged* (STA # 4).

> *Students have different levels of motivation when working, so they might work with different levels of commitment to the 'Dummy Company'* (NUS # 1).

Summary of the Findings Related to Research Question 2

The major findings for RQ 2: *How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their knowledge in practice?* can be summarized as follows:

All respondents strongly agreed that the BSC students gain practical experiences from interaction with the 'real' business world and have the opportunity to apply the knowledge, skills, and business concepts acquired in the course. Moreover, non-university respondents thought that the BSC curriculum was more effective than a highly-controlled and structured classroom-based curriculum. Students strongly supported the idea that case studies were a valuable way of learning how to do business whereas staff and non-university respondents did not agree that case studies were as useful as the practical experience gained in such activities as the BSC.

The respondents identified several strengths and weaknesses of the BSC. The strengths were identified as enabling students to develop their commercial practice skills in a simulated business environment by applying theory to practice. This was considered to be useful to students when they enter the full-time job market. These benefits were offset by certain difficulties including time constraints, and human resource issues inherent in the curriculum design of the BSC.

4.1.3 Preparing Students for the World of Work

Research Question 3: ***How effectively does the BSC prepare students to work with the community?***

Questionnaire Data

Stakeholder responses to the questions to do with RQ 3 are grouped under the following headings:

- *Whether graduates are capable of working in the real world (Item 13);*
- *How the university and the community work together (Items 18, 21, 22 and 25);*
- *The role played by students and the university, via the BSC, in the community (Items 19, 23, 24 and 26).*

The findings reflect the students' success in working with the community. The six items marked with an asterisk show the most difference between respondents' viewpoints and are linked to the main issues in Research Question 3, as shown in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: *Items Related to Students' Work with the Community*

Items	Mean Score		
	Students	Staff	NUS [1]
13. * The university is expected to produce graduates who are able to work effectively with the community in the real world.	3.95	4.15	4.73
18. Tertiary education bridges the gap between university and community.	3.59	3.69	3.80
19. Students in the Business Simulation Course are involved with the community, via supply of goods and services.	3.67	3.81	3.93
21. * The University and the students are part of the community.	4.08	4.46	4.73
22. * Both the university and the students should be community oriented.	4.23	4.27	4.87
23. * Students need to provide goods and services to customers from reliable suppliers.	4.41	4.46	4.87
24. *Parents of the students should support student involvement in the community as part of the Business Simulation Course.	3.77	4.08	4.60
25. *The university should be supportive of these students within the context of the community.	4.26	4.42	4.93
26. Students have the opportunity to interact with the community when they work in the Business Simulation Course.	4.10	4.15	4.20

Key: * these items are discussed in the following section

[1] NUS refers to non-university stakeholders

All stakeholders strongly believed that students are community oriented (Table, 4-3, items 21 and 22) and that the university encourages them to contribute to the community (Item 25). The Mean Scores for this item were ranged from 4.26 for students, 4.42 for staff to 4.93 for non-university stakeholders. Non-university respondents and staff agreed that students work effectively with the community. The responses to item 13 showed that all groups of respondents strongly agreed that graduates are expected to work effectively with the community members (Mean Scores between 3.95 and 4.73). All respondents strongly agreed that students must

provide goods and services to their customers from efficient suppliers via the 'Dummy Company', the Mean Scores ranging from 4.41 to 4.87 (Item 23).

The importance of parents supporting student involvement in the community as part of the BSC was not equally stressed by the three stakeholder groups (Item 24). Both staff and non-university respondents believed that parent support of students' involvement in the community was very important, whereas students rated it as less important to a statistically significant extent (with students: non-university respondents $t = 3.26$, $p = .002$; with students: staff $t = 2.29$, $p = .03$)

Interview Data

The interviews sought to expand the researcher's understanding of interviewees' opinions about how the BSC prepares students to work with the community when they ran their company. The data from the interview respondents are presented below, under the following categories:

- *Students in the BSC work with the community (Interview Question 6);*
- *Benefits of students' activities in the BSC to the community (Interview Question 7);*
- *Students have a sense of belonging and commitment to the community (Interview Question 8).*

4.1.3.1 How the BSC Prepares Students to Work with the Community

Interview Question 6:

How does the Business Simulation Course prepare students to work with the community?

The BSC has an important role to play in helping students engage in effective community-based work. Skills associated with meaningful community involvement are all within the domain of the BSC. This section will focus on exploring how and to what degree or level the BSC prepares students to work with the community. Students in the BSC when working with the community, draw on the experience of a wide range of business people. The skills of these mentors broadly include business etiquette for business students, business knowledge and business skills for professional jobs. The interview responses related to the skills, benefits and

advantages derived from working with the business community are reported under two sub-headings:

- *Business etiquette for business students*
- *Business knowledge and business skills for professional jobs*

Business etiquette for business students

Business etiquette is an essential part of successful business practice. In this study business etiquette is defined as the correct way to treat customers to ensure their patronage. A good grasp of business etiquette should enhance students' self-confidence, heighten their communication skills, and help them to 'outshine competition' and constantly improve their performance. One quarter of respondents thought that if students in the BSC possess a good manner it would put their clients and customers at ease, increase customer satisfaction, and positively affect the 'Dummy Company's' performance and the university's image. Respondents' comments included:

> *Relationship! Some students don't make friends with others and use inappropriate language. This manner is not impressive* (STU #1).

> *Students should learn good manners and Thai customs, in order to impress community members with whom they work. If you want to be involved with the community, you should learn how to deal with them* (NUS # 5).

> *Initially, communication and personality are important. If students do not prepare themselves for real situations, they might face problems. For example, when students have to deal with other people who they are not familiar with, they might not be able to think and act in an appropriate way* (STA # 6).

Business knowledge and business skills for professionals

The BSC prepares students with the skills to address the business applications involving business strategies and computer skills, such as: problem-solving, communications, reasoning skills, word processing and internet usage. Regarding the knowledge and skills of the BSC students, a non-university respondent commented:

> *Students learn to use technical office skills such as computer software, internet and facsimile. Then when they work at 'bona fide' companies, they are capable of using these tools with efficiency* (NUS # 3).

Half of the respondents suggested that the BSC facilitates students to gain broad experience in a professional work environment. Staff and non-university respondents commented as follows:

> *For the BSC students, quite clearly…there is selling. …or students working collaboratively and planning…they have to prepare many things…and their attitudes to work as business people is also learned* (STA # 7).

> *Firstly, when a student works with the community as a first job this work will not be a great shock because they have had some previous experience from studying in the BSC. This is a good preparation for students* (NUS # 1).

> *Personally, I feel that students in the BSC have had real experience. When they work for a 'bona fide' company, they will be able to learn business procedures faster* (NUS # 7).

The BSC provides employers with the opportunity to involve students, eager to employ new skills and methodology, in a variety of business contexts. As several respondents stated:

> *In the marketing field, it is preparing students for both trading and working with the community. At present, there are OTOP [community products, which link with other areas such as market research and packaging which provide students with the opportunity to be involved with the community* (STA # 3).

> *Taking the activities we have assigned is automatically a preparation stage. Students know the work order, the steps in working, so they have a chance to work with the community better and faster…. This will also reduce the capital needed to prepare personnel, because these people can work and make money, right from the moment they start their work in the 'Dummy Company'* (NUS # 2).

Overall, interview respondents agreed that students in the BSC are well prepared to work in the 'real' business world.

4.1.3.2 Benefits of Students' Activities in the BSC to the Community

Interview Question 7:

How do the activities of the Business Simulation Course benefit the community?

The respondents reported that the activities of the BSC are beneficial to the University and the community. Community benefits derived from the BSC were

identified as social benefits (promoting altruism and reciprocity) and economic benefits (direct marketing, product standardisation, advice). These are presented under the following sub-headings:

- *The BSC promotes a sense of altruism*
- *The benefits of direct marketing*
- *The BSC promotes and fosters reciprocity*

The BSC promotes a sense of altruism

Altruism is an important focus of Payap University's mission statement which values '*Truth and Service*'. The Business Administration Faculty at PYU applies this statement in practice by using the funds generated by business activities in the 'Dummy Company' to support community charities. Donations from students in the BSC help children with low family incomes to gain scholarships. A number of respondents commented:

> *Funding! Students donated their money for the Thai students' scholarship. …I never realised that there are so many poor children, who lack the opportunity to study… I am very proud that this money is derived from profits of the 'Payap Dummy Company'. I think to give disadvantaged students an educational opportunity is a worthwhile cause* (STU # 1).

> *I think there are two kinds of activities: first, business activities. Secondly, activities that directly benefit the community. I am not sure whether students use the money from the company's profit to donate to social causes. I heard that marketing students donated money to poor students. This is very good. Students shouldn't expect to maximise profit; they have to care for their community as well. They might become responsible business people as a result* (STA # 1).

> *One of the benefits to the community is donations, which are a strong point of the BSC* (STA # 7).

Students in the BSC are encouraged to develop a strong sense of altruism, in order to contribute to community development. A respondent, who held a position as General Manager, gave as an example of altruism, the donation of profits from the BSC to the community. He spoke:

> *…at the end of this course, the 'Payap Dummy Company' policy is to send students out to join community members to develop some poor areas and donate money to the community* (STU # 5).

Students' community feeling is evidenced by donating of money and time, intended to improve poorer students' chances of gaining an education and to improve university facilities. One staff respondent, who is the academic supervisor of the BSC, gave more details about how students in the BSC contribute money to the community. Her comments were as follows:

> … *providing funds for Thai children is one of the university's activities. This includes raising money for children's educational scholarships. The next step is to ask them [students in the BSC] to donate money to help with the construction of the University library, which needs a large amount of money. Each semester, the 'Dummy Company' gives quite a bit – about 50,000 Baht to help with the library. We also have a program of 'elder brother helping younger brother', in which we will help poor students in our own department. We give 10,000 Baht a semester for this item, and we also give 5,000 Baht to help support activities in our Business Administration Faculty…. These things have been continuously done for a long time and we will continue to do this* (STA # 4).

The benefits of direct marketing

Respondents identified several advantages of direct marketing and contact with community members: first, access to a wider variety of products for people who live in remote areas and who may lack personal transport; second, it provided an opportunity for recently released products to the market to be available more quickly than they would in the recent past. Finally, it raises the possibility that the new, wider range of products also may be made available more cheaply. Three responses from students who worked as sales representatives of the BSC reported the benefits of direct marketing, as follows:

> *Sometimes we sell products to those who live in remote areas. This is very convenient for them* (STU # 2).

> *Some community members live in remote areas and transportation is difficult. Thus, the students travel as sales representatives for their company. This is a reciprocal situation; the interaction between students and the community has improved our working relationship* (STU # 3).

> *In my opinion, it is useful to present goods that they may not have known about before, goods that may be useful to them. If it's a product they know about, but they cannot find and buy it at the time they need it, we may be able to sell it to them. That is a benefit for the community* (STU # 4).

The BSC promotes and fosters reciprocity

Business people as well as the community and university students have much to share, and much to gain through the BSC, especially when the 'Dummy Company' works as a business partner. Staff and non-university stakeholders reported:

> *Yes! At least OTOP [community product]… students in the BSC take part in the community by selling these products. Both the BSC and the community members are in a 'Win-Win' situation* (STA # 3).

> *However, if the community meets OTOP suppliers, this might be of benefit to villagers. They know how to produce but don't know how to market, thus students in the BSC help them by selling their products and designing a business plan. The more products, the more benefit. They work together planning and promoting, which is most useful around the community* (NUS # 3).

> *…the BSC is one of the distributors of OTOP [community products]. This is directly beneficial to community members and I think this will satisfy everyone* (STA # 7).

Staff and non-university respondents indicated that the BSC students' activities benefit both students and community. As two respondents commented:

> *The community is very diverse, and we use these activities to support outside institutions. We help make them similar to us – to have a chance to help society. We both profit from this. The other benefit is that this is another channel to distribute goods to the community to reach customers* (STA # 4).

> *…when students have a chance to familiarise themselves with the community, they'll know it well and the community also benefits by student input. Some communities have no chance to learn what's going on outside, which is a pity because they know only about their local environment. Therefore, these activities expand their horizons* (NUS # 2).

All respondents reported that students' activities in the BSC are important to community development. Students who work in the BSC were seen as able to make a significant contribution to the positive climate of the community and the development of business partnerships with local entrepreneurs. Students were seen as enabled to work with campus and community partners to promote community service — collaborations that benefit the community, foster mutual learning, and prepare the students for responsible citizenship.

4.1.3.3 Students Have a Sense of Belonging and Commitment to the Community

Interview Question 8:

Do you think that students have a stronger sense of belonging and commitment (to the community) after completing this course?

More than half of the respondents reported that students in the BSC have a strong and growing sense of commitment to the community.

Sense of belonging and commitment

Students' altruistic activities in the BSC were seen by respondents as producing a sense of belonging and commitment which would outlast the short period of the BSC and be retained by students into the future. Typical comments were as follows:

> *Certainly! There is another activity, which we have not mentioned, and that is to give help to old people at a home for the aged or even orphans at an orphanage. Students will have a chance to see people who are in need of help and they will pay more attention to these activities later on in life* (STA # 4).

> *Sure enough! Students who are involved in the community might work with the community members in the future… this is a community in which students have to care about others and develop their involvement. It's reciprocal* (NUS #4).

An alumnus expressed his sense of belonging and commitment following the BSC, as follows:

> *I think so; when students run the simulated company, they may join the community members to sell products or whatever, and think about what the community needs. When the student understands what is best for the community they might feel a sense of belonging to the community….I am very proud of working in the 'Dummy Company' which was a real-life experience. Since then I've met customers who were former customers, when I worked as a BSC student. I felt that Payap Dummy Company's activities were part of the community* (NUS # 6).

Several respondents commented that former BSC students had a well-developed and growing sense of belonging. This, in the future, may lead to greater contributions to the community:

> *They might understand the community's problems when they deal with community members. Then, students think about how to solve the*

> *problems. Thus, students might have a sense of belonging; they want to help the community* (STA # 2).

> *… they might feel that they are part of the community because they will have a close working relationship with community members. Then students would feel that they have to help or have a sense of belonging to the community* (STA # 7).

The respondents reported that both students and non-university stakeholders involved in the BSC felt attached to the community because they had worked in business together, as partners in a common endeavour, and had shared experience of work. Typical comments were as follows:

> *Yes! I feel like that. We have to trade and deal with clients. They are our prospective customers, so that we have to connect by working and making friends with them as a member of their community* (STU # 5).

> *The BSC's suppliers might know and accept students who work effectively, so that when they graduate these suppliers would let them work in their companies. Especially, when students deal with OTOP suppliers, they might feel a bond of friendship and this could lead to a future business relationship* (NUS # 3)

Some respondents were concerned that students might not have an enduring sense of belonging and commitment to the community. The view was expressed by a non-university respondent that student commitment to the community was really self-motivated and that students were more interested in furthering their own career prospects than being part of the community:

> *It is my belief that I don't think they would because the BSC is a short term course. …These days, for marketing graduates, they want to have work experience from a big city. They do not want to work locally and get 4,000 Baht a month, they can't…this is because our social system is failing…* (NUS # 8).

The same respondent went on to stress that the BSC is a relatively short-term experience; therefore, students would not have time to develop a sense of commitment to the community.

> *Whether students have a sense of belonging or not, depends on the time they have been working with the community… The relationship between students and the community, a sense of belonging to the community…these will take time… Students work with the community should be for four years, not for three months as it is right now…* (NUS # 8).

Generally, however, respondents felt that there was a sense of belonging which was created by working in the community. The BSC students believed in the importance of giving back to the community; having a sense of belonging and commitment to the community. This commitment continued as the BSC prepared students for careers in the professional and business worlds.

Summary of the Findings Related to Research Question 3

The major findings for RQ 3: How effectively does the BSC prepare students to work with the community?

All respondents strongly agreed that students and the university must be community-oriented. In addition, the university was expected to produce graduates who could work effectively in the real world and who promoted themselves as people who contributed to the community. Students also learned that providing good quality products was the best way to gain a good business reputation and acceptance in any community.

Payap University tries to encourage students to work effectively with the community. The BSC prepares students to work in a real business world, by providing them with the opportunity to gain experience in business etiquette, business knowledge and business skills.

Benefits to the community derived from students' activities include: donations, availability of products, fostering reciprocity and student support of the community. Overall, according to more than half of the respondents, students in the BSC were considered to have developed a stronger sense of belonging and commitment to the community. Most respondents agreed that community work was a useful way to increase the students' sense of purpose and to help them find a sense of fulfilment in their work.

4.1.4 Stakeholders' Advice to the University

Research Question 4: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to the university about the Business Simulation Course?***

Questionnaire Data

Data were gathered via questionnaires to address RQ 4, which considered the feedback provided to the university by stakeholders and the need for the university to respond to the stakeholders' feedback. The data are presented in two categories as follows:

- The university needs advice from stakeholders in relation to the BSC (Item 27);
- The university needs to respond to stakeholders' feedback to achieve accreditation (Item 29).

Table 4-4: *Items Related to Providing Advice to University*

Items	Mean Score		
	Student	Staff	NUS [1]
27.* The university seeks feedback from each student regarding the Business Simulation Course	3.95	4.27	4.40
29.* The university should act on feedback from students and outside participants	3.77	3.65	4.27

Key: * these items are discussed in the following section

[1] NUS refers to non-university stakeholders

Table 4-4 shows that all groups of respondents agreed that the university should seek feedback from students regarding the BSC (Item 27). Moreover, the respondents agreed that the university should act on the stakeholders' feedback (Item 29). This is reflected in the Mean Scores for these items of between 3.65 and 4.27. It is interesting to note that staff agreed less with item 29 than the other two groups (statistically significant compared with non-university respondents where $t = 2.28$, $p = .03$), which suggests either that the university may in practice, not respond adequately to the feedback from the stakeholders or, that staff perceive the feedback as intrusive.

Interview Data

The interview questions for RQ 4 sought respondents' views on the advice that the stakeholders provide to the university concerning the BSC. The interview data

presented in this section were provided by students, staff and non-university participants.

4.1.4.1 The advice to administrators of Payap University to support the BSC

Interview Question 9:
How does the university support the Business Simulation Course?

The university is accountable to all its stakeholders for fulfilling its academic mission. It must also account for the quality of teaching and learning, programs and academic performance in all its courses, including the BSC. This section will focus on how the university provides essential resources for the BSC. The responses from the interviewees are reported under the following sub-headings:

- *The BSC needs a suitable location and appropriate equipment to transact business*
- *Respondents' perspectives on the unique demands and requirements of the BSC*
- *The value of the BSC as a subject in the Marketing degree of Payap University*

The BSC needs a suitable location and appropriate equipment to transact business

Resourcing of the BSC is more complex than for a classroom-based course, as it involves external workplaces and a variety of venues and equipment needs. Both student and staff respondents felt strongly that resourcing for the course in regard to these issues was inadequate. Typical comments were:

> *I want the university to co-operate more, when students arrange the markets, we need more areas and suitable location… the university should inform the public about the BSC's activities* (STU # 2).
>
> *…The university should provide a suitable location and enough facilities. Sometimes, we have trouble in the rainy season* (STU # 3).
>
> *The university should support the course by providing alternative venues for the BSC, for example when students manage the BSC's activities and public relations, in the outside community* (STU # 4).
>
> *The university should support the BSC more. For example, public relations encouraging students to work as a Management Team…and financial support* (STU # 5).

Two staff respondents commented that the University should provide a suitable store location with a storefront so that students can trade with the community both on and off campus. Some comments were as follows:

> *Providing a storefront which is open to outside customers… Students should have an opportunity to display their talent. The university should support this with money or lend them the money to run the 'Dummy Company'* (STA # 1).

> *The university should provide a storefront from which students can practise with community members, not only university members (STA # 2).*

A staff member, who is an academic advisor, stated:

> *We would like the executive, or even the top executive of this university, to support this course with tools and better locations. A large budget might not be needed but if tools for use in the business are given to us we will be able to run the business more efficiently and smoothly. We have problems every semester finding an area or location to exhibit goods. I think this should be provided. We have a big problem with this, especially in the rainy season* (STA # 4).

It was asserted that the University should provide more support by supplying facilities such as office equipment, business software, internet access and computers:

> *Students in the BSC might use the Internet or websites to sell their products as a channel of distribution. When they graduate, they might make their business come true via e-commerce. The university should provide enough computers, Internet system and computer software which are accessible to students in the BSC* (NUS # 3).

On the other hand, a staff respondent who holds a senior executive position considered that the University does not hesitate to address these issues:

> *The BSC is a valuable course in the Marketing Department. The university tries to provide a workplace and budget for the business course which reflects real-life practice. For now, the university's plan will provide a course which enables students to practise both on and off-campus…. Moreover, the university will provide the capital for the students' business plan to be implemented. The university committee is still organising the details* (STA # 7).

Respondents' perspectives on the unique demands and requirements of the BSC

Teaching and learning in the BSC is time-consuming and students in the BSC run their 'Dummy Company' under severe time constraints. Staff respondents commented that the study programme should be organised more flexibly to support the BSC better:

> *Study programme! The university should allow students to enrol in Summer School to reduce their course load. When students learn in the BSC in year four they have lots of activities and might be overloaded, especially in view of the practical activities required, which are time consuming* (STA # 3).

> *At the moment we are trying to design a practical business curriculum which provides a more suitable curriculum structure and study programme* (STA # 7).

Most respondents agreed that a more flexible design approach to the BSC curriculum would benefit students and that the university should provide alternative study options for this course.

The staff agreed that the BSC makes unique demands on their time and requires considerable extra work, owing to its practical nature. Therefore, they believed that the university should take this into account when structuring the course timetable. As a staff member commented:

> *Sometimes staff work so hard with students and community members during the week. The university's administrators have to understand this and should realise that courses such as the BSC or service learning, take time. The university's administration should understand the character and structure of the course, because it's more time consuming than face-to-face classes* (STA # 6).

There were many problems consistently identified with the running of the 'Dummy Company'. Feedback was offered as a solution to recurring problems. A non-university respondent commented:

> *Both students and academic advisors must understand the course objectives. They should record all previous problems which recur often in running the 'Dummy Company' then these problems could be solved by pooling the experience of former students and their advisors. Thus, students could prevent some recurring problems* (NUS # 1).

The value of the BSC as a subject in the Marketing degree of Payap University

In comments from the open-ended section of the questionnaire, the students' opinions of the BSC, generally speaking, showed approval of the course. The data in Appendix IV, Table A-4 show that students had a positive attitude towards the BSC, as 97.40 % reported that it was interesting and only 2.60 % (one student) expressed that it was not interesting (Item 7). They regard the BSC as a capstone unit of a marketing subject and 82 percent reported that they understood the course objectives

(Item 8). The BSC requires students to apply their newly acquired theoretical knowledge in a simulated business environment, which allows the students to make realistic business decisions and analyse the results of their work. According to most respondents, the BSC is a vital element of a well designed business course curriculum. As a student pointed out:

> *It's terrific! Once the university provides this course to business students, they develop real-life experience and it seems that students have their own business. They learn from real situations, make real profits and losses as they would in a 'bona fide' company. We have to work co-operatively. …this course should stay in the curriculum of the business school* (STU#3).

Staff and non-university respondents argued that the BSC should be promoted as an important component of the business course which enables students to gain real business experience.

> *We would like to put this course into the curriculum of the required courses for Majors… for marketing students, the practice of business simulation should be retained. Students will benefit from this course I believe (STA # 4).*

> *Payap University executives should consider that Payap will be a leader in this area, because Payap started the BSC long before other institutions in the northern part of Thailand. Payap has already developed strategies for combining theory, study and practice. In some other places I have seen, students learn less than they should, because they have studied only the theories* (NUS # 2).

Summary of the Findings Related to Research Question 4

The major finding in relation to RQ 4: *What advice do stakeholders provide to the University about the Business Simulation Course?* can be summarised as follows.

The data show that all survey respondents agreed that the university sought feedback from stakeholders. Additionally, respondents considered that the university should take further action to obtain feedback from both internal and external participants.

The data from the interviewees suggested that the university should provide more financial support in terms of the areas and locations which are suitable workplaces, including providing more facilities. The data also suggest that more flexible timetabling would be appropriate in the BSC, because of its unique features. The BSC was seen by many respondents as a very useful and significant part of the

marketing degree. They felt that it should be promoted as an integral component of the business curriculum.

4.1.5 Stakeholders' Advice to Policy Makers

Research Questions 5: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to policy-makers who are involved in community development initiatives?***

Questionnaire Data

The following main statement analyses were conducted on the data generated by the questionnaire:

- *The university seeks advice from other stakeholders in relation to the BSC (Item 28);*
- *The university demonstrates a strong commitment to community consultation (Item 30).*

The questionnaire sought information regarding the opinion of all the groups surveyed. It showed that bureaucrats need feedback from the community and that they are, in fact, keen to obtain feedback and consultation from the public, as shown in Table 4-5.

Table 4-5: *Items Related to Providing Advice to Policy-makers in the Community*

Items	Mean Score		
	Students	Staff	NUS [1]
28.* The university should seek feedback from outside participants regarding the Business Simulation Course.	3.90	4.31	4.27
30.* The university demonstrates commitment to public consultation regarding links with the community.	4.03	4.12	4.73

Key: * these items are discussed in the following section

[1] NUS refers to non-university stakeholders

All respondents agreed that the university should seek feedback from outside participants regarding the BSC (Mean Scores between 3.90 and 4.31 for item 28), with the students having a lesser level of agreement about the importance of seeking

feedback from outside participants (Mean Score 3.90). Nevertheless, any differences here were not statistically significant. The Mean Scores from staff and non-university stakeholders were 4.31 and 4.27 respectively (Item 28). The findings for item 30, with the high Mean Scores (4.73 for non-university stakeholders), showed strong agreement that the university has a commitment to community consultation.

Interview Data

The interview questions for RQ 5 sought respondents' views on the advice that stakeholders provide to policy makers concerning the BSC. The interview data presented in this section were provided by students, staff and non-university participants.

4.1.5.1 Advice to Policy Makers to Support the BSC

Interview Question 10:
How do policy makers (i.e., government) support the Business Simulation Course?

The stakeholders provided advice to policy makers who were involved in the community and the university in relation to the BSC. In answering this question, the responses from the interviewees are reported in five sub-categorises as follows:

- *Policy guidelines for government support of practical courses*
- *How the government can facilitate the aims of the BSC*
- *Financial support to the BSC*
- *Standardisation of community products (OTOP)*
- *Support with distributing community products*

Policy guidelines for government support of practical courses

Student and non-university respondents thought that the university should include practical courses specifically designed for business students in the curriculum, which is in agreement with government policy. Students and non-university respondents commented as follows:

> *Every university should have a course like BSC in the Business Administration Faculty…policy makers should encourage students to have a sense of entrepreneurship. This can start at university* (STU # 1).

> *…the policy makers should list all problems that occurred when students were enrolled in the practical courses; then they can design a more appropriate business curriculum. The government should promote practical courses* (NUS # 1).

> *Education Ministers should put practical courses into all curricula; they should not be exclusively for business students. The courses should be designed to suit each institution. The university should support these courses* (NUS # 6).

How the government can facilitate the aims of the BSC

All interviewees agreed that the government sector should offer practical courses to prepare students for careers in both the business and public sectors. In addition, students who have experience in practical courses should have priority in the employee selection process. As one student respondent commented:

> *I think it would be good if the government would let students have a chance to practise working in government offices or in private companies…The government should be able to recruit workers from the 'Dummy Company' according to the results of the students' work…Students who received training should have a better chance of employment. This might be beneficial to the government —providing better qualified officers and making the selection of personnel easier* (STU # 4).

A staff respondent pointed out that local government should encourage students to work with the community in line with government policy:

> *Government should support students by allowing them to work in their corporations [such as OTOP]. This would challenge students in the BSC to work with the community and be in line with government policy as well* (STA # 5).

The government should disseminate information to promote the BSC, according to a non-university respondent:

> *The government should organise meetings with representatives of faculties and student organisations to clarify government policies that involve community products [OTOP] or SMEs, in order to disseminate their policy and receive feedback from the university about how government policies are to be implemented* (NUS# 4).

Financial support to the BSC

Advice on financial support was given by respondents. This involved pointing out how they thought the government should organise the technical details of funding the business component of the course and the BSC itself. As a staff member pointed out,

continuity of production is an important aspect of marketing products in a 'bona fide' company. Capital for production would need to be supplied by the government.

> *The Government should give loans to students in the BSC, likewise to villagers. This would allow students to run their business as a 'bona fide' company with a certain amount of capital; it would also mean that students could pay tax to the government* (STA # 3).

A staff and a non-university respondent pointed out that the government already had a loan scheme in operation at the village level. They considered that this scheme should be extended to students:

> *Actually, the government created a 'village's fund' for villagers, and small and medium business owners included in the OTOP project. These funds were given to them to develop their careers and allow them to have their own job. The investment of this small amount of money also gave them a sense of local entrepreneurship. Thus, government should start with these students* (STA # 6).

> *The government should give loans to the university via the BSC, likewise to the villages. They should evaluate the student projects every year, as is currently done with the villages fund* (NUS # 7).

As one staff member explained, capital for business ventures could not be provided by the local community, as funds were not available.

> *If the local community could give us credit, the goods distribution would go well, including the production system, and the products should last longer too. If the products last only one year, that would ruin the project. … After production, they should have reserves for the next production run. When we contact a small village or a small family, the people cannot give us credit, they need cash and they have to use it as revolving capital* (STA # 4).

The benefit of the BSC to the community was seen as an additional reason for the government to support the BSC. As a staff member explained:

> *The BSC not only benefits students but also the community. Is it possible for the government to provide more money, advice and training to students and university staff* (STA # 2).

Standardisation of community products (OTOP)

Product quality and presentation were identified by most respondents as an important area of marketing requiring advice and support by the government and the university. Several respondents explained that community products need to be standardised for marketing:

> *For community products [OTOP], government officers should set product quality standards and prices. Sometimes product quality is below standard, which then affects marketing and in turn affects the success of the BSC (STU # 2)?*

> *…about community products [OTOP]…I wonder how some products get the FDA from government officials! I think these products don't have the same quality and are not standardised. For example the packaging is often substandard... In fact, the government should provide theoretical knowledge needed by the villagers to present and market their products well. If this is not possible, then it should be provided by the university. When small or medium business owners produce community products, services should also be provided to assist them (STA # 5).*

The product image and pricing structure also was seen as an area of marketing which could by improved. As a non-university respondent pointed out:

> *When the community has a chance to perform its role, it does so without knowing how valuable the product is… how much the price should be; therefore, there is no product vision. Good quality and image should be presented, but this is often seen as 'rustic', 'country style' or 'local'! Local people at the village level have a limited understanding of pricing structure. They don't understand why when other people take the product they can make a lot more money out of it; much more than the producers can* (NUS # 2).

Support with distributing community products

All respondents concurred that the government should encourage the BSC to be a marketing channel for community products, to generate income for local communities all over the country. A typical comment was:

> *The government should encourage the BSC to develop marketing channels for the villagers' products. This can be a part of promoting the students' work with the community* (STU # 5).

Staff and non-university stakeholders pointed out that through OTOP the government was already supporting marketing village products. These respondents felt that more products should be marketed through the BSC as part of OTOP's distribution strategy.

> *The villagers' products, such as OTOP and those of small to medium entrepreneurs are the BSC suppliers…for now, the government supports OTOP and advertises the scheme to every village in the country-side* (STA # 1).

> *OTOP is a government project, in which many organisations are involved. Thus, the government should promote the BSC as one*

> *channel of distribution in OTOP… Moreover, the government should support students' activities with financial help so that they can help villagers to market their products* (NUS # 3).

Summary of the Findings Related to Research Question 5

The major interview findings in relation to RQ 5: *What advice do stakeholders provide to policy-makers, who are involved in community development initiatives,* can be summarised as follows:

The data show that all stakeholders strongly agreed that the university should show more commitment to the community. Additionally, responses from interviewees agreed that the government should increase support to the university and community members via the BSC. Policy-makers should recognise the many benefits of practical courses such as the BSC and include them in the curriculum of every business school. Stakeholders suggested that additional financial support should be given to students of the BSC, by employing graduates in government-run companies. In addition, the government should provide increased funding for the development and marketing of community products (OTOP).

4.2 Data from Open-ended Questions

Three open-ended questions were asked of the 80 questionnaire respondents. As mentioned in chapter 3, open-ended questions allow the respondents to reflect on the richness and complexity of their views. The answers from this section can total more than the numbers of each group of respondents, because individuals gave multiple answers to the separate open-ended questions (see Table 4-6 and Table 4-7).

4.2.1 What are the Three Best Things About the BSC?

This question sought to determine the overall perceived benefits, both theoretical and practical, of the BSC at Payap University. The different responses were grouped as shown below, and then ranked according to popularity. The most valued benefit was 'real-life experience' followed by 'co-operative work experience', and 'self-development' ranked third. It should be noted, however, that 'combined knowledge with practice', 'developing business skills' and 'problem-solving' also were ranked quite highly (see Table 4-6). There were some responses which indicated that the

BSC provided students with a sense of entrepreneurship. A few mentioned a sense of altruism and commitment as valuable aspects of the BSC.

Table 4-6: *Overview of best things about the BSC as ranked by survey respondents*

Categories (in rank order)	Students	Staff	NUS
Real-life experience	36	21	10
Co-operative work experience	27	9	5
Self-development	19	5	2
Combined knowledge with practice	14	7	4
Develop business skills	13	3	8
Problem-solving	12	6	6

Real-life experience

The majority of respondents reported that the BSC provided real-life experience to students by running the 'Dummy Company'. The opinion of student respondents was that 'real-life experience' was invaluable for their future careers. Staff and non-university respondents commented that the benefits that students gain from running the 'Dummy Company' were that they could learn by trial and error. The experience gained included: business skills, problem-solving, delegating responsibility, collaborating with other people and researching needed information.

Co-operative work experience

The second highest-ranking item for respondents was co-operative work experience for students involved with the BSC. Students learn to work together in a co-operative/collaborative way in their 'Dummy Company' to achieve a company goal. The student respondents stated that working co-operatively, especially with their colleagues, was necessary for them to achieve their goal. Staff members asserted that students could work co-operatively with their colleagues, suppliers, community and other organisations, which is an important focus of doing business in the future. Moreover, students who work co-operatively are able to develop and learn positive attitudes, such as: being open-minded about working with others, and working co-operatively as a team. Similarly, non-university respondents stated that teamwork might make students more responsible in their jobs.

Self-development

The third most valued quality identified by respondents in the BSC was 'self-development'. Respondents considered that when students in the BSC ran their 'Dummy Company' they underwent personal development and grew positively in their experience and knowledge. Self-development is facilitated in a working environment that requires the application of business skills and problem-solving.

The responses from the open-ended question, however, showed that respondents thought that combining knowledge with practice, developing business skills and problem-solving skills were equally important and that these qualities were developed equally while studying in the BSC (N= 25, 24 and 24 respectively). Most students saw self-development as one of the most important benefits that they obtained from the BSC. Other respondents reported that students were able to develop their potential for future employment. They also gained the self-confidence needed to create a business vision. Staff members pointed out that self-development enabled students to improve in several areas, including: developing skills in critical thinking, self-discipline, self-confidence and business etiquette. Non-university stakeholders stated that the BSC helped students' self-development towards their growth to maturity.

4.2.2 If You Were Able to Change Anything About the BSC to Improve the Course, What Would You Change?

Respondents to this open-ended question discussed what they would like to change in the BSC to improve the course. Some respondents (N=6) had no comments about what should be changed in the BSC, as they stated that the course presently was already appropriate. Several suggestions from respondents about areas of change are presented below in order of rank, under the following sub-categories:

- *Stakeholders' perceptions of the need for change in the BSC (N=25*
- *Course objectives, teaching and learning methods and assessment should be more focussed on teaching business skills (N=20)*
- *Stakeholders' concerns about the supply and marketing of goods in the 'Dummy Company'* (N=19)
- *Appropriate resources and workplaces necessary to the BSC (N=13)*
- *Curriculum and study programmes should be more appropriate (N=12)*

Stakeholders' perceptions of the need for change in the BSC

The BSC functions are set by the Management Team recruited by the academic advisors from the students who are participating in the course. There were a number of comments (N=25) about this aspect of the course. Most comments (N=17) were from students in the BSC studying in the current semester, i.e., 2/ 2003. Students reported that they wanted to change or adjust factors in their 'Dummy Company' such as improving the performance of administrators who were not efficient or responsible. In addition, students believed that an optimistic attitude towards the BSC was needed from all students to promote the BSC to the public; and more funding was required as an incentive. One staff member wanted students in the BSC to be responsible for the entire 'Dummy Company', including marketing strategies and business activities. Non-university stakeholders recommended that the BSC needed more public media exposure in order to promote the course. More effective communication and better relationships with suppliers were also identified as desirable. It was recommended that credit accounts be opened with small business suppliers.

Course objectives, teaching and learning methods and assessment should be more focussed on teaching business skills

Responses from 70 percent of staff members (14 out of 20) acknowledged that although the course was adequate, there was still a need for improvement. They recommended that the BSC course objectives, teaching and learning methods, and assessment methods should be improved by a greater focus on students' training needs, including the following: ensuring that the students can run a business system; work in real business environments, apply business tactics and strategies effectively. It should be made clear to students that they are not evaluated by the achievement of sales targets but primarily in regard to their ability to develop business skills. As a non-university respondent suggested, the 'Dummy Company' is more than just selling; it must teach other aspects of business better. The company's organisational structure was also seen as needing some adjustment. To this end suggestions from respondents included that the Management Team of the 'Dummy Company' should rotate their positions, and that the 'Dummy Company' should be separated into more than one company, so that all students could gain the experience of working as administrators in more than one team.

Stakeholders' concerns about the supply and marketing of goods in the 'Dummy Company'

Most student respondents (N=12) felt that the 'Dummy Company' needed to ensure that goods and services were provided to clients from reliable suppliers. Students wanted their company to offer new and varied products for sale, in line with customer demands, at a reasonable price. In fact, students in the BSC stated that they need suppliers who allow them to run credit accounts, to negotiate business conditions and generally be more cooperative. Students did not want a supplier monopoly and, if possible, wanted to produce their own goods or have their own trade name. One staff member proposed that the 'Dummy Company' should sell unique products, which are not readily available in the current market. This means students would have to sell limited product lines and the students would pioneer product innovation. One supplier wanted students to work more co-operatively with the business community. Two staff and non-university respondents had a similar reflection about the OTOP distribution, which they considered should be marketed by the 'Dummy Company', in support of government policy.

Appropriate resources and workplaces necessary to the BSC

Most respondents recommended that the university provide more facilities for the BSC. Student respondents complained that their workplace was too small to work effectively and that they required better storefronts and locations when they arrange exhibitions. Staff members recognised the necessity of providing a work environment which is student-centred. According to staff (N=5) the BSC should provide enough equipment for students' needs, including computers and office equipment. Non-university respondents (N=5) suggested the university should provide more Information Technology (IT) resources for the BSC students; for example, computers and business software programmes which were useful for stock control and accounting.

Curriculum and study programme should be more appropriate

The BSC is part of a course designed for senior marketing students as part of the Business Administration curriculum. Twenty respondents commented that there was insufficient time to complete the BSC course. Further, student respondents indicated that students who enrol in the BSC should be required to enrol in fewer subjects because it is a practical course and, therefore, time-consuming. Staff members

reported that the university should encourage and support the advisors who control this course by providing training and seminars and consulting local business organisations in the community in order to provide more business experiences for students. Moreover, the study programme should be geared to the needs of both students and academic advisors. According to a number of students and non-university respondents, the BSC should be given more course weight (that is, more than 3 credits) to acknowledge its importance as a major in the Marketing Course.

4.2.3 What Other Aspects of the BSC Do You Feel Are Important to This Evaluation?

Survey respondents were asked an open-ended question concerning what other aspects they felt were important to the BSC. The different responses were categorised into clusters. In the section below, the responses are presented and ranked under each relevant sub-category. Overall, several comments were repeated from the previous sections. There were six respondents who had no comments and some who did not feel that there were any aspects that were more important than others and who thought the course was adequate (see Table 4-7).

The Table 4-7 shows that self-development and work experience was ranked as most important, and this was strongly supported by the students. Course evaluation and assessment was supported by the staff and ranked second. The other categories were seen as being of lesser significance.

Table 4-7: *Overview of responses to the open-ended questions regarding the most important aspects of the BSC*

Categories (in rank order)	Students	Staff	NUS
Self-development and work experience	19	7	3
Course evaluation and assessment	6	15	5
Preparing students for the BSC	7	2	4
Other issues (advisors, transparency financial, business ethics)	8	2	1
Work with suppliers and community members	6	3	1

Self-development and experience

Most student respondents (N=19) considered that the aspects which were most important to students in the BSC were: self-development and work experience. Self-

development was defined as recognising the need to develop students' skills and attitudes and for them to take responsibility for running their business. The skills identified included working co-operatively, problem-solving skills, responsibility to colleagues customers and community members, integrity regarding business issues, the development of business vision and effective work practices. Staff members commented that students in the BSC should develop their sense of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, students should gain significant work experience. Non-university respondents responded that work experience was invaluable for future employment.

Assessment of students in the BSC

The BSC is a unique practical subject which assesses students' ability to run a 'Dummy Company' in a real business world. Therefore, to assess this course is not as easy as the typical paper-based evaluation. In response to the open-ended question, course evaluation and assessment were the items most commented on by staff members (N=15). A few respondents stated that the BSC should be an optional course (N=3). It was strongly suggested that the BSC should be assessed by allowing more people such as customers and suppliers to participate in the process of evaluation. The respondents reasoned that this evaluation process would also allow these people to express their views on course effectiveness. This assessment would include input from academic advisors who control the course; colleagues who work co-operatively (as teams know more about how team members are performing than their advisors), suppliers, who have a close working relationship with students and customers, who could provide valuable feedback about the quality of the 'Dummy Company's' goods or services.

Some respondents commented that the assessment of the BSC's learning outcomes should be based on criteria concerned with students' performance, for example, the ability to work as a team. The respondents stated that the assessment also should be based on insights into aspects of students' professional development other than the ability to meet sales targets. In addition, it was suggested that the assessment of students who work in the Management Team should be based on different criteria from those used to assess the performance of other students in the BSC.

A number of respondents (N=10) suggested that students who had graduated from the course should be asked to provide feedback by commenting on how the BSC

enabled them to better develop their own careers. They also should be asked how the course provided insight into business skills and the appropriate types of behaviour required by the organisation, to accomplish company goals.

Preparing students for the BSC

Although it is a practical course, the BSC also requires theoretical knowledge, business acumen and personal relationship skills. Therefore, both advisors and students need to acquire up-to-date business concepts and be given prior training by people with expertise in the business field, for example, government officials and business practitioners. Seminars and training sessions using concepts and ideas relevant to the BSC would be a useful adjunct to the course to encourage students before they begin the practical component of the course. Moreover, the students commented that they would benefit from particular activities such as 'Ice-Breaking', 'camping' and 'acquaintanceship' exercises which are important when groups come together to run the 'Dummy Company'. They considered these to be excellent devices to help students feel more comfortable, as well as relieving tension when working as a team.

4.2.4 Other Issues (Advisors, Transparency, Financial and Business Ethics)

A staff member referred to the importance of teachers in the BSC allocating extra time to consulting with the other stakeholders in order to share their business experience.

One student commented that some advisors needed to spend more time with students on an equal basis and to avoid the perception of favouritism given to certain individuals or groups of students. Financial transparency was also seen as an important factor by student respondents. They expressed the view that students in the BSC must all have access to company information, which should be disclosed to all students in the 'Dummy Company'. Staff and non-university respondents considered that important aspects of teaching the BSC were: business ethics, preparing students to conduct business operations with integrity and with an emphasis on commitment to their community.

Work with suppliers and the community

Most student respondents reported that a valuable aspect of the BSC was the requirement to develop close working relationships with suppliers and the community, for example, to be able to offer the quality products which customers demand, at market price or less. Furthermore, a non-university respondent who supplied goods to the 'Dummy Company', suggested that students should work together with their suppliers to plan business strategies in order to develop a target market. Students would benefit from learning in a partnership in a real business environment. Students should promote the course by working with the community in areas that could include sales exhibitions by the private and government sectors, for example.

Summary of Findings from the Open-ended Data

The main benefits of the BSC were ranked as follows: students achieve real-life business experience when they run the 'Dummy Company'; co-operative teamwork was needed to meet company objectives and goals; students' self-development was improved from participate in the BSC and was beneficial to them in their future work when they graduated.

However, student respondents in particular wanted to change some aspects of the BSC, in order to improve the course. Most student respondents reported that they would like to have administrators who were prepared to work with them in a more cooperative manner. Some students also believed that the course objectives and teaching methods in the BSC should be more student-centred. Most students believed that the goods and services should come from more reliable suppliers. In addition, students in the BSC believed that the university should provide more appropriate facilities and workplaces. Additionally it was reported by staff and students that because the course is time consuming, the study programme should be adjusted to better fit the needs of students and faculty staff.

The respondents confirmed that the most valuable aspects of the BSC were the provision it made for students' self-development and real-life work experience. In assessing the course, they felt that students should demonstrate their effective work practice rather than their achievement of sales targets. Students desired to prepare themselves better before starting work in the 'Dummy Company'.

Discussion of these data in the context of the extant literature and conclusions are presented in the next chapter, Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In this final chapter, the results of the study are discussed in relation to each of the five research questions and the relevant literature. Conclusions are then drawn, with recommendations for further research.

The discussion section interprets the main findings based on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, and are then related to the document analysis and results of the surveys and interviews. Although the context of the literature review is Western, with all material in the English language, it effectively describes the principles and outcomes upon which Thai higher education curricula are now focused. To aid analysis and synthesis of these results, the interpretation of the data given here is supported by selected mean scores and percentages (for survey responses), and by selected quoted excerpts from respondents' transcripts from the interviews and quotes from relevant documents.

5.1 Research Questions

In this section, the results pertaining to the themes (as displayed in Chapter Four) can be conveniently discussed under the sub-headings. Thus, this section follows the structure inherent in the literature review chapter, to discuss the issues raised in the literature, in order to answer the research questions.

5.1.1 Stakeholders' Perceptions - Equipping Students for Business

Research Question 1: ***How do stakeholders perceive the Business Simulation Course at Payap University equips students to work in the business world?***

In this section, details are provided about stakeholders' perceptions of how effective the BSC is in facilitating students' work in the 'real' world of business, by running a

'Dummy Company'. In this part of the course, real business practice is combined with classroom-based learning. In addressing RQ 1, the results are discussed for each of two headings and their sub-headings in turn.

5.1.1.1 Simulated Learning

Simulated or experiential learning in adult learners was reviewed in relation to the following aspects: real-life contexts, independent or autonomous learning, problem-based learning, and co-operative learning. Each of these is discussed in turn.

Real-life contexts

The research question is concerned with the stakeholders' perceptions of how well the BSC equips students to work in a 'real' business world. The BSC is an example of simulation learning, following Kolb's Experiential Learning model (1984), and other theories of simulated learning (Cudworth, 1995; Hyland, 1993). The results show that all respondents recognised that students in the BSC were able to develop their business experience and learn from real-life contexts (Table 4-1, showing a high Mean Score 4.33 for item 9; and 4.62 for item 1). In addition, all respondents strongly agreed that students can develop their business skills by co-operative learning in the BSC (Item 4), with Mean Scores 4.10 for students, 4.31 for staff and 4.67 for non-university stakeholders. The results show that two-thirds of staff respondents thought that course objectives and teaching methods in the BSC ensure that students can work in 'real' business systems.

In addition, from the open-ended questionnaire data, the BSC was reported by more than four out of five respondents (84%), as 'real-life' experience. Some respondents reported that the BSC provided opportunities for students to apply their learning to real business contexts. This result is consistent with the general principles of adult learning, which involve a student-centred approach to learning. This is part of a response to the changes required by the global business world and is increasingly part of a new pedagogy for higher education (Barnett & Hallam, 1999; Cudworth, 1995; Jarvis, 1987; Knowles, 1980, 1984, 1990; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Print, 1993; Thompson & Stappenbeck, 1999).

The interview questions asked whether or not BSC students learn from their 'real' world business experiences. The interview responses indicated that most respondents believed the BSC facilitated students' experience of 'real' business practice: '*Although this is a simulated company, they are operating in a real business world: selling, working cooperatively and experiencing stresses*' (NUS # 3). Students reported similarly; for example,

> *I agree that after enrolling in the BSC, I have to sell products. For me, it is not familiar territory. However, I realised that this experience could give me a real world practice* (STU # 1).

These typical data show that participants in the study believe that the BSC, as an example of simulated learning in a business context, assisted students to be prepared better for business in real-life business contexts. This finding is consistent with the literature (see, for example, Brady & Kennedy, 1998, 2003; Schmidt, 1991; Shinawatra, 2003; Stinson & Milter, 1996; Thompson & Stappenbeck, 1999).

Independent or autonomous learning

Ideally, in higher education, teaching methods encourage students to learn autonomously (Boud, 1988). In particular, the benefits of autonomous learning have been demonstrated successfully in practice, and are now implemented in many courses around the world. In relation to adult learning, simulated learning should encourage mastery of the skills of autonomous learning (Boud, 1988; Knowles, 1980).

Autonomous or independent learning involves students in practising solving-problems (Henry, 1989; Kolb, 1984; Pedler, 1991). In the BSC, students in the management team are given great freedom to determine how to organise their teams, determine the company's policies, make sales forecasts, target groups, and decide marketing strategies. In Table 4-1, the data for item 2 show that the students who have held different positions in the company can develop a variety of skills as Mean Scores for this item were between 4.03 and 4.27. This begins early as students are required to present their business plan to the whole class. It is also an opportunity to allow students to devise their own business plan, demonstrating their ability to work with colleagues and the community.

However, it is interesting to note that from the academic staff viewpoint, it appears that when activities involve students directing their own learning, academic staff set the agenda. Staff respondents agreed less than others with this opinion, Mean Scores were 2.92, 3.21 for students and 3.60 for the NUS (significant at $p < .05$) staff: NUS) (Table 4-1, item 31). It may be that staff members are more comfortable with the more traditional type of teaching i.e. didactic, possibly believing that students were not able to make decisions by themselves and that there was a need for academic supervisors to control, or at least direct, the learning program. This perception and approach contrast with the principles of adult learning and autonomous learning which are the basis of simulated learning (Henry, 1989; Knowles, 1980, 1990; Kolb, 1984; Pedler, 1991). However, as indicated earlier autonomous learning is not consistent with the typical type of teaching offered at tertiary level in Thailand, where most teachers in the higher education environment have learned only the skills related to 'traditional teaching' methods (Boud, 1988; Huba & Freed, 2000). It is suggested, therefore, that there is a need for professional development of teaching staff to familiarise them with the new teaching methodology discussed in section 5.1.2.2 (Curriculum construction: Experiential learning/ learning by doing).

Problem-based learning

The BSC is an example of a course in which the learning context emphasises problem-based learning (PBL) and experiential learning, so that the ability to deal with critical business thinking skills or professional skills is developed in students. All respondents reported that PBL was used extensively in teaching the BSC, especially when students ran their 'Dummy Company'. All respondents agree that business skills in the BSC are mostly learned from the real world context (Table 4-1, item 9). However, non-university respondents had the highest Mean Score for this item (4.33) with students (Mean Score 4.10) and staff (Mean Score 4.08) with slightly lower levels of agreement for this item (however, no statistical differences here). This appears to reflect the view of non-university respondents, who, as people with extensive business experience, consider that experiential learning is of higher value than classroom-based learning. Staff and students on the other hand have different views of the value of experiential learning, which may reflect their lower level of contact with the actual business world. Similarly from Table 4-2, Item 3, students develop skills and critical thinking ability to solve problems in the BSC, non-university respondents had a higher Mean Score (4.33) than staff and students

(Mean Score were 4.15 for both respondents), although not to a statistically significant extent. The views of the non-university respondents' for item 3 and item 9 fit with the literature in this area. A number of authors (e.g., Boud, 1985; Brown & Pendlebury, 1997; Mayer, 1996b; Savin-Baden, 2000) state that PBL is a strategy that promotes good learning outcomes by enabling students to learn content and develop critical thinking skills in a practical course. The following respondents' examples refer to problem-solving in the BSC:

> *It [The BSC] uses real-life situations and theory. In some situations we brought them in as guides but, in practice, it did not go as proposed. Therefore, having a dummy company and working in a real situation will help us see results sooner. Students will have a chance to develop themselves better than only being in the classroom all the time* (NUS # 2).
>
> *Although this is a simulated company, they are operating in a real business world: selling, working co-operatively and experiencing stresses. When students graduate they use these experiences in real world contexts. The more problems, the more opportunities there are to solve problems. This will be a valuable experience* (NUS # 3).
>
> *To establish the 'Dummy Company', students need to know how to target a market and develop a sales forecast* (STA # 6).

This result is consistent with other research into the importance of developing critical skills to cope with the complexity of the globalised age (Barnett, 1997; Barnett & Hallam, 1999; Savin-Baden, 2000). PBL is relevant to the Thai educational context in general and to the BSC at Payap University in particular because it is an important strategy for curriculum developers and teachers to adopt in the move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning. PBL changes the role of the teacher to that of an advisor, observer, co-learner and a facilitator of teaching (Brady, 1995).

Also in the literature, it is asserted that in higher education PBL is advantageous for students as it accommodates what they need to learn (Jarvis, 2001; Knowles, 1984, 1990). According to Barnett (1997), when students learn to be critical people they are able to engage with the world and themselves as well as with the specific knowledge. The research outcomes reflect the views presented in the literature review, indicating that PBL is a strategy which promotes good learning outcomes, by enabling students to learn both content and critical thinking skills in a practical course (Boud, 1985; Brookfield, 1996; Brown & Pendlebury, 1997; Mayer, 1996a; Savin-Baden, 2000). For example, student respondents, in particular, reported that

PBL was extensively used in the BSC. To manage their 'Dummy Company' effectively, the BSC students are expected to manage or solve problems in different situations, but they are not expected to obtain a predetermined series of 'right answers'. Rather they are expected to engage with complex situations and decide what information they need to learn and what skills need to be gained (Barnett, 1997; Savin-Baden, 2000).

However, there are difficulties with transferring a PBL model to Asian countries as PBL differs from the traditional teaching methods and requires significant change by administrators, faculty members, and students. Change is needed, for example, in the provision of teacher training in PBL and in allowing time for staff development and restructured teaching loads to facilitate the implementation of more student-centred learning approaches. The transition to the new style of learning in Thailand has proved difficult for both students and teachers because students are accustomed to highly structured learning environments and are unsure of how to meet the demands of PBL, in which there are no predetermined 'right answers'. Staff also need time and support to develop confidence and expertise in using this new approach. According to students and staff in the BSC, extra resources are needed for the BSC to run efficiently; these include, suitable workplaces and venues, transportation, products and office infrastructure (based in data from student and staff interviews). This fits with the literature, particularly Bridges (1992), who stated that while PBL tasks acquaint students with a range of practices and possibilities for independent self-direction (such as simulated learning contexts), some of the major barriers to PBL include lack of time and money. This was also reflected in the staff interview responses, which reported some difficulties with a PBL approach: for example, '*they [students] have to work harder than in other subjects and it is time-consuming*' (STA # 3).

Co-operative learning and teamwork

Co-operative learning was given a high level of acceptance by staff and non-university respondents (see Table 4-1, Item 4). Non-university respondents had the highest Mean Score for this item (4.67) (statistically significantly higher than for students at $p < .05$ level) whereas staff expressed a slightly lower level of agreement (4.31) and students had the lowest level of agreement (4.10). Students' lower level of agreement reflects their personal knowledge of the difficulties of working together in

teams to achieve business goals and being assessed as a group. An additional difficulty is that this type of learning is dissimilar to their normal academic experience of being assessed individually. In the BSC, students are encouraged to demonstrate their ideas and their designated tasks by different assignments. They also work in 'collaborative groups' (Galton & Williamson, 1992), where students have to discuss and solve problems together to produce a joint outcome, and share their collective experience to meet the company's goals. The main strategy for learning in the BSC is to work in a co-operative context, rather than engage in collaborative learning *per se*.

The data from the open-ended questionnaire section show that more than half of the respondents agreed on the importance of co-operative group work when students work in their 'Dummy Company'. This finding is consistent with the literature; for example, Slavin (1995) saw co-operative learning as part of the mainstream of education practice. He regarded it as a key strategy to develop students' skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving and management skills. These findings are consistent with the work of a number of researchers in different contexts (see, for example, Galton & Williamson, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Pedler, 1991; Slavin, 1995). However, student concerns about group assessment and competition need to be addressed and are discussed further below.

Open-ended comments from stakeholders indicated that the teamwork required in the BSC needs to be improved. Such improvement is likely to occur if teamwork is actively taught. This is an important and interesting finding, since students in courses such as the BSC simply cannot achieve well without demonstrating good teamwork. Seventeen student respondents reported that teamwork is an essential aspect of running their business; for example, '*I think, in an organisation like the 'Dummy Company', everybody has to be involved*' (STU # 4). Students want to see improved teamwork, especially in the area of administrators' responsibility, and feel that they can then work co-operatively with high performance. However, it is interesting to note that in the interview data (Interview Question 1), a number of student respondents reported that the lack of teamwork caused them stress. For example, a student who held a position in the Management Team said, '*We have to work co-operatively to meet the company's goals but sometimes it is hard to do that. The stresses in teamwork occur when some people do not work as a team by not pulling*

their weight' (STU # 5). Another said, '*As you know, when people work as a team, there are always problems… the more people the more problems*' (STU # 1).

It seems paradoxical that although students agree that teamwork and co-operation are important, they also report that lack of teamwork produces a higher level of stress than usual. This could perhaps reflect the fact that although Thai society traditionally values co-operation, this has developed in traditional social contexts over centuries and has not been applied in modern business contexts, which are highly competitive. The perception that poor teamwork leads to higher levels of stress than usual, may reflect the dual demands of needing to 'get the job done'; that is, produce solutions quickly in a 'real business' environment, while working with fellow-students who are also inexperienced at working effectively as a team. However, the data also may be interpreted to suggest that if students work together productively, they can cope better with stressors placed on them from the demands of 'real-life' business. The type of co-operative activities reported in the data tended to promote the development of higher-order levels of thinking, essential communication skills, improved motivation, positive self-esteem, tolerance for individuals and social awareness. The importance of these skills is stressed by the findings of research into problem-based learning and co-operative learning (see, for example, Galton & Williamson, 1992; Higgs, 1988; Johnson et al., 1990; Nevin et al., 1994; Slavin, 1990, 1995).

To run the 'Dummy Company' the students are required to work co-operatively in groups to achieve business goals. As explained by a staff respondent: '*…it's a course objective to measure how well students work as a team because this course focuses on teamwork*' (STA # 7). When students work together as a team, they need to develop their abilities in leadership, trust-building, conflict-management, constructive criticism, encouragement, compromise, negotiation, and clarification. However in Thailand, traditionally conflict is managed by deferring to one's superiors rather than arguing the point. Therefore, students may find they need to develop new skills in negotiation, so that all parties can agree on a course of action. Also criticism is avoided in Thai society; therefore, the requirement to criticise the business plan or strategies of other students based on Western models of PBL is a difficult one for Thai students to accommodate. The need for clarification in PBL can also be problematic from a Thai cultural perspective, as in Thai culture the

expectation is that one does not ask for detailed explanations of other people's thinking or requirements, because it would be considered intrusive and rude. These skills are especially important for those students who manage the company (the management team), to help them to create a co-operative environment with their colleagues. The stakeholders interviewed claimed that students working co-operatively would help achieve the company's goals; as a typical staff member said: '*This is true. If students co-operate, follow the rules, or take on a high level of responsibility, that will help a lot in terms of success*' (STA # 4). In the BSC students have to work together to accomplish the group's goals, which are indicators of group success (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Nevin et al., 1994; Slavin, 1990, 1995).

As a final point here, preparation for work is not the only perceived benefit of the BSC. Self-development was also seen as an important aspect of the BSC, by slightly more than one third of respondents (N= 26). Students, although they are part of a team, also work as individuals (self-development) at different responsibility levels to achieve the group's goals. As Johnson et al., (1994) stated: 'The purpose of co-operative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her own right' (p.35). However, Slavin (1995) agued that achievement will only occur when co-operative integrated group goals and individual accountability are used together. According to the literature (for example, Boud, 1988; Cottrell, 2001), autonomous learning can develop students' skills and help them to identify their skill requirements. Other teaching strategies which are keys to self-development include problem-based learning and experiential learning (Henry, 1989; Kolb, 1984; Pedler, 1991). These teaching strategies may contribute further to the effectiveness of the BSC and help to prepare students for the world of work.

5.1.1.2 The Importance of Relevant Curriculum Planning and Evaluation Models in Experiential Learning

In response to changes in global contexts, business educators need to make changes in higher education. For example, business curricula must allow students to learn in 'real-world' contexts. Both staff and non-university respondents strongly agreed that the BSC is a useful way to develop students' ability to do business in real-life contexts (see Table 4-1, Item 1) with Mean Scores of 4.62 for staff and 4.40 for NUS respectively. Students were less strongly in agreement on this point (Mean Score

4.18), which may reflect their difficulties with the hands-on aspects of practical and teamwork issues mentioned earlier in the section on PBL and co-operative learning. As Thompson and Stappenbeck (1999) argued, business strategies offer valuable tools to help students develop business judgment when they are faced with 'real' business environments. This 'literal learning' necessarily involves experience; thus simulated learning is one of the most powerful learning tools, because it duplicates 'real-life' experience (Cudworth, 1995). Curriculum models which include practical content, such as the BSC, provide realistic and detailed perspectives on how to develop and apply business strategies (Marsh & Willis, 2003).

As detailed in the literature review, curriculum models have an impact on the effectiveness of education programs (Madaus et al., 1983). Dynamic interactive curriculum models such as Walker's model (Marsh & Willis, 2003) can be applied in higher education business courses, such as the BSC, which are then changed and developed further as a consequence of encounters with the 'real-world'. In regard to the BSC curriculum, a student respondent reported that:

> *I think it [the BSC] can develop business skills because we first studied various courses and we obtained knowledge of theories, strategies and planning. Then we brought all these things into use when running the 'Dummy Company'. It is something that we have practised, as in a real job so we need to plan and think about which strategy to use, based on the theories studied and practical experience* (STU # 4).

In support of this view, several researchers (see, for example, Marsh and Willis, 2003; Ornstein and Hunkins, 1998), argued that curriculum models can provide knowledge of reality as a dynamic, when students become involved in 'real' world contexts and learn by practising, such as in the BSC.

Curriculum evaluation is necessary to judge programmes, in order to improve teaching methods to meet the needs of students themselves, as well as the needs of society. However, as responses to item 14 (Table 4-2 indicate, there was a wide range of opinion across the groups of stakeholders for this item. Thus students seem to be more in favour of a highly structured curriculum, whereas non-university respondents strongly agreed that a less controlled and structured curriculum was more effective for learning business skills (Mean scores 3.67 for students and 4.40 for non-university respondents). Staff are mid-way between students and NUS on

this item (Mean Score 3.80) which may indicate that they see merit in both approaches: first recognising the value of the new approach, but being more familiar with and confident about implementing the traditional highly structured curriculum. Curriculum evaluation needs to take into account the responses of all groups of stakeholders (Marsh & Willis, 2003), so that necessary training and resourcing of staff and students can be done to facilitate educational innovation in Thailand. The data in this study show that the BSC does not completely meet students' needs. For example, a typical comment was: '*The 'Dummy Company' is a short-term course and allows students to start their business without considering their abilities or state of preparation*' (NUS # 3). However, the results indicate that there are benefits to students from working in courses like the BSC. Students acknowledged the importance of experiential learning and agreed that the course enabled them to do so by providing opportunities to learn from 'real-life' business environment:

> *I agree that after enrolling in the BSC, I have to sell products. For me, it is not familiar territory. However, I realised that this experience could give me a real-world practice* (STU # 1).

> *…students have a chance to work in a 'real' situation. They decide how to sell products in the real market. I think they obtain more than 80 percent of their knowledge from real-life contexts* (NUS # 1).

Business curricula

Several respondents commented on the importance of business curricula which enable students to develop business skills and learn from a 'real' business environment (see Table 4-1, Items 1, 8, and 9), as students cannot gain this experience from classroom-based learning alone:

> *Business students, who have never had experience involving things such as money, profit and loss, and a sense of entrepreneurship, cannot understand real business life. They are only concepts* (NUS # 5).

Students in particular, valued highly the opportunity to engage in business practice in the BSC:

> *It stands to reason that business people should have this knowledge and skill …when I graduate having worked in a 'bona fide' company will give me invaluable experience (STU # 2).*

> *I think it [the BSC] can develop business skills because we first studied various courses and we obtained knowledge of theories, strategies and planning. Then we brought all these things into use when running the 'Dummy Company'. It is something that we have*

> *practised, as in a real job, so we need to plan and think about which strategy to use, based on the theories studied and practical experience* (STU # 4).

These comments fit with the views of a number of researchers (see, for example, Brady & Kennedy, 1998, 2003; Schmidt, 1991; Stinson & Milter, 1996), that practical experience should be part of business curricula, as it is important to prepare students for their future career. The results show accordingly that the BSC familiarises students with a range of business practices; for example, product knowledge and marketing strategies are part of business skills in the BSC (see Table 4-2, Item 20). However, the Mean Scores for this item indicate that none of the respondents is entirely satisfied with this aspect of the course because suppliers are not given enough time or opportunity to provide students with this information. This may indicate that suppliers need to be integrated more strongly into the teaching of the course and provided with financial incentives to do so. Significantly, students and staff were less satisfied with this item than non-university respondents (Mean Score 3.69 for students, 3.60 for staff and 3.80 for NUS).

Authentic assessment

According to Kerka (1995), authentic assessments connect thinking and doing, theory and practice in 'real-world' contexts. Thus, authentic assessment involves students demonstrating knowledge and skills (Fischer & King, 1995). As presented in the literature review, authentic assessment is regarded as an important learning perspective. The process of authentic assessment requires students to apply thinking skills and to understand the nature of high quality performance (Boud, 1995; Huba & Freed, 2000; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Rudner & Boston, 1994). In support of this view, Boud (1995) argued that the meaning of an authentic learning standpoint is that it relates teaching to assessment, which impacts on student learning.

Custer (1994) described authentic assessment as incorporating a wide variety of techniques to correspond closely to students' 'real-world' experiences. He commented that authentic assessment assesses a wider range of skills than traditional assessment methods. Similarly, other researchers (Fischer & King, 1995; Kerka, 1995; Knowles, 1990) argued that authentic assessment involves students in many problem-solving situations, in lieu of drill and worksheet activities. Thus, it is important to assess all steps of students' work, using problem-solving and communication criteria.

Respondents suggested that success should not be evaluated by achievement of sales targets alone. As a staff member commented: '*I think the aim of teaching and learning in the BSC is not profit-oriented. Rather, it is about how students collaborate with others*' (STA # 1). These results indicate the different perspectives of respondents about assessment, for example BSC students emphasise the importance of reaching the sales targets:

> *When I was a student sales representative and before I began studying in the BSC, my sales target was around 20,000 Baht. When I studied in this course, I was quite shocked! The sales target increased 10 times, so that I was worried that I could not reach the sales target* (STU # 1).

However, at the end of the semester the company's sales target was achieved. As a student respondent reported: '*The company sales target was so high! It was 6 million Baht, but at the end of the project, we exceeded the sales target and sold more than 7 million Baht!*' (STU # 5). This student indicated a high level of satisfaction with the students' achievement of the sales target. Although students initially found the course challenging, by the end of the semester they achieved their sales objectives and felt that the learning process had been valuable. This change of opinion by students suggests that although authentic assessment is often perceived by students as more challenging and less predictable, the learning outcomes are recognised as valuable, because assessment is directly related to practice in a realistic business environment.

In line with the suggestion in the literature, the BSC requires students to demonstrate their learning through practical applications in their communities. Following the principles of authentic assessment, the BSC should assess all meaningful aspects of performance and should have equitable standards that apply to all students. The data, as depicted in the sales targets and assessment section of Chapter Four, indicate that the BSC links both learning by doing and theory and practice. In other words, the stakeholders believe assessment in the BSC is authentic. There were, however, difficulties reported with authentic assessment in the BSC, by both staff and students, particularly in regard to psychological stress occurring as a consequence of concern over reaching sales targets. The survey results show that a number of respondents (N= 20), commented on the issue of assessment in the BSC and 75 percent of interview respondents, reported that sales targets were a factor that caused BSC students stress. Some reports made by non-university and staff respondents

mentioned that for example, '*Stress occurred when the BSC assessed students for achievement of sales' targets*' (NUS # 1) and '*when they run the company they want to reach the sales target and this might affect their grades*' (STA # 2).

However, this student concern seems to have arisen as a result of misunderstanding about the weight given to achievement of sales targets. Several comments from the findings, some of which are reported from interviews and the open-ended questions, support the view that increased stress was experienced by the BSC students because they believed that as achievement of sale targets was given greater weight than is in fact the case, when assessing performance in the BSC. In fact, achievement of sales targets is only a minor part of the course assessment, as it is allocated only 10 percent of the total mark, as indicated in the BSC course outline (2003, pp. 2-3). In reality, the course is more concerned with assessing how students demonstrate their competence in dealing with the problems, how well they apply their knowledge in working with their colleagues, and how they deal with suppliers and customers in 'real-world' contexts. For example, staff members reported that: '*I think the aim of teaching and learning in the BSC is not profit-oriented. Rather, it is about how students collaborate with others*' (STA # 1), and, '*I agree, it's a course objective to measure how well students work as a team because this course [the BSC] focuses on teamwork*' (STA # 7). Appendix IV, Figure D, compares attributes of traditional and authentic assessment, as Mueller (2003) described. In authentic assessment students are asked to perform 'real-world' tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills which fit with the aims and assessment methods used in the BSC. What authentic assessment entails should therefore be explained more clearly to students, so that they do not focus so strongly on one relatively unimportant aspect of the total assessment package.

5.1.2 Stakeholders' Perceptions: Applying Theory in Practice

Research Question 2: ***How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their knowledge in practice?***

In this section, the discussion of results provides details of the stakeholders' perceptions of the need of the BSC to bridge theory and practice and the value of

experiential learning. In addressing RQ 2, the results are discussed for each of these outcomes in turn.

5.1.2.1 Bridging Theory with Practice

There is extensive literature indicating that nowadays curriculum models acknowledge the need for integration between theory and practice (Marsh & Willis, 2003; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998). Several authors (Adams, 1973; Barnett & Hallam, 1999; Cudworth, 1995; Knowles, 1990; Kolb, 1984), have also suggested 'transfer' of learning arises when students use their theoretical knowledge to inform their performance, which in the BSC enables them to apply their knowledge to 'real-life' business practice.

The survey data indicate respondents agreed that combining theory with practice is significant and important, as revealed by the mean scores, which reflect the primary focus of this study (see Table 4-2; Item 12 and Item 34). For example, non-university respondents in particular had the most positive opinions about this issue (Mean Scores were 4.67 for both items). Clearly, the results indicate that stakeholders recognise the implications of combining theory with practice. They also see this as a key aim of the BSC. For example, a number of non-university respondents reported that:

> *to apply theory to practice…this is the main objective of the course. If they did not go through this course they might try to run the business by trial and error* (NUS # 1).

> *it's necessary to bridge theory and practice to run their business. It's an educator's way to put theory into practice* (NUS # 7).

> *they [students] learn how to solve problems, to plan by applying theory to practice and gain real-life experiences…It must be made clear to students that this is the best way to learn, by bridging theory and practice* (NUS # 5).

Questionnaire responses show that all respondents agreed that theoretical knowledge is necessary for simulated learning which is a form of experiential learning (Andresen et al., 2000; Kolb, 1984). This result is consistent with the findings of Knowles (1980), who stated that the experience of adult learners fits well with simulated learning. Thus, the results of this study into simulated learning in the BSC are confirmed in the literature on adult learning.

Stakeholders agree that the BSC enables theory to be integrated in a practical way. As a non-university respondent said:

> *Students can learn sequentially…they learn theory in the classroom, after which they put this into practise. They can also review their practice in follow-up lectures later, by discussing the success, or otherwise, of their attempts to apply theory to the 'real-life' business environment. … What students have learned in the classroom are only concepts. Once students take this course [the BSC], they learn how to solve problems, to plan by applying theory to practice and gain real-life experiences…It must be made clear to students that this is the best way to learn, by bridging theory and practice (NUS # 5).*

The questionnaire responses (Table 4-2) also suggested that to understand the business more completely students must apply their theoretical knowledge to practice, and skills they have learned must be used to demonstrate their professional business acumen. Integrating knowledge in business contexts is crucial, in order to develop successful business practice when students run the 'Dummy Company'.

Item 32 of the questionnaire asked respondents to comment on learning from case studies in comparison with learning by doing. Students were more highly (but not to a statistically significant extent) in favour of case studies (Mean Score 3.59) than staff members (Mean Score 2.88) and non-university stakeholders (Mean Score 3.07). Students believed they learned more from case studies than through practice. This result may indicate that the way practice improves the quality of education may not be well-understood by students. On the other hand, it could mean that students find 'real-world' activities time-consuming and stressful.

5.1.2.2 Curriculum Construction: Experiential Learning / Learning by Doing

The interview data and the literature review suggested that 'learning by doing' was an important aspect of the business curriculum in the BSC. For example, Buchanan et al., (2002) suggested that the benefits to students of learning by doing are that when focusing on learning activities students can apply their knowledge in the business field in which they will perform in the real world (Appendix IV, Figure B: Traditional versus New Teaching Methods in Higher Education). The teaching approach in the BSC has been to attempt the development of an 'open' and cohesive teaching team. According to Pedler (1991), 'Changing the 'lecture culture' has

involved a paradigm shift from teaching to learning' (p. 168), an approach which has been attempted to the 'Dummy Company' (Appendix IV, Figure C).

As Andresen et al., (2000) pointed out, experiential learning may have overlooked the fact that all learning involves experiences (e.g., problem-solving, negotiation and autonomy). Nevertheless, an analysis of the survey results revealed respondents' thoughts about the strengths of the BSC, indicating that most were in favour of experiential learning, as shown by a student's statement: '*Real practice is learnt from real situations!*' (STU # 1). In general, all respondents agreed that a significant advantage of learning by doing is that it prepares students for their potential work in 'bona fide' companies. However, some respondents still felt that the BSC experience was not the same as working in a 'bona fide' company, as it was only for a short period of time and therefore could not provide the full range of experiences which occur over time in a 'bona fide' company.

The survey data (Table 4-2, Item 3) indicate that respondents have a high level of agreement that students in the BSC are encouraged to develop skills and critical thinking ability to solve problems in an experiential learning environment (Mean Scores were 4.15 for both students and staff, and 4.33 for NUS), as mentioned in section regarding PBL (pp. 150-151). For example, a typical comment was: '*It is something that we have practised, as in a real job so we need to plan and think about which strategy to use, based on the theories studied and practical experience*' (STU # 4). The Mean Scores for this item support the argument of Kolb (1984) that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. By developing the critical thinking ability to solve actual problems, students are transforming their experience of a problem into the knowledge of how to solve it. They can then apply these techniques to problems which they may encounter in the 'real' world of business. The work of Kolb (1984), and a number of other researchers (Adams, 1973; Barnett & Hallam, 1999; Cudworth, 1995; Knowles, 1990; Paul, 1996), also suggests that by the transfer of learning students use their theoretical knowledge to inform their performance.

It was noted in the literature review there has been a strong trend towards 'learning by doing', and these are the principles situated at the heart of experiential learning (Andresen et al., 2000). A focus on experiential learning is evident in the BSC as it

relates students' work to their knowledge, which is derived from and demonstrated by the practical experience of students in a 'bona fide' workplace (Kolb, 1984). This view was consistently expressed by several interviewees, who reported that:

> *Students learn within real-life contexts in the business world and have first hand experience before they work in a 'bona fide' company. It seems that learning by trial and error helps them adjust to real-life work later* (STA # 4).

> *I can say that this course allows students to have real-life experiences which are suitable for business students…it's better than sitting in the classroom* (NUS # 5).

The data indicate that BSC supervisors encourage and facilitate students' operation of their 'Dummy Company' within the realities and uncertainties of an organisation and its situation, by integrating theory (which is taught in lecture format earlier in the courses) and practice.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Payap University courses are based on the belief that higher education systems should co-operate to improve and assess the curriculum and learning processes to provide students with learning opportunities, particularly in regard to integrating theory and training on the job. Thus, learning by 'doing' in higher education is an appropriate pedagogy for developing students' business skills (Henry, 1989; Kolb cited in Peterson, 1989). Further, a number of authors (e.g., Boud, 1989; Cottrell, 2001; Foley, 2000; McGill & Weil, 1989) indicate the importance of experiential learning as a way of facilitating students' learning through relevant curricula and practical experiences.

However, some constraints were perceived by respondents to occur with experiential learning in the BSC, including the time-consuming nature of this type of learning (Gilley, 1990), and the possible inappropriateness of students' work positions in the 'Dummy Company'. As a non-university respondent reported: '*…the BSC is a short-term course, designed for students to learn from real companies, in a real business situation. It is not meant to keep going continuously like a real business*' (NUS # 5). This was seen also by some student respondents as a possible cause of students lacking a sense of responsibility because students were aware that the course was only for a semester and therefore they may not have taken it as seriously as on-going business activities. On the other hand, a student respondent who worked in the

Management Team argued: '*Actually, students who run the 'Dummy Company' take their positions very seriously; they feel a responsibility to do their best*' (STU # 5). Experiential learning in the context of adult learning cannot be seen as restrictive, because adults bring a wealth of life experience to their learning. Overall, the respondents' perspectives indicate that the benefits of experiential learning in the BSC are greater than the possible challenges.

5.1.3 Preparing Students for the World of Work

Research Question 3: ***How effectively does the BSC prepare students to work with the community?***

In this section, the discussion of results provides details of the effectiveness of the BSC in preparing students to work with the community.

5.1.3.1 Community Contexts and Students' Contribution to Community

The study revealed that students in the BSC are expected to work effectively with the community (Table 4-3, Item 13, Mean Score between 3.95 for students and 4.73 for non-university stakeholders) and respondents expected that the University should encourage students to be community-oriented. The survey data from Table 4-3 indicated that all respondents strongly agree that students are community oriented. For example, the university and the students are part of community (Item 21, Mean Scores of 4.08 for students and 4.73 for non-university respondents); both the university and students should be community-oriented (Item 22, Mean Scores of 4.23 for students and 4.87 for non-university respondents) and the university should be supportive of these students' activities within the community context (Item 25, Mean Score of 4.26 for students and 4.93 for non-university respondents). It is significant that in every item students' responses were lower than those of the non-university respondents. One explanation for this discrepancy is the fundamental difference in stakeholders' motives. Non-university stakeholders and their businesses are directed at long-term goals and their continued success depends on their contributions to the community in which they operate. Students on the other hand are short term participants whose goals are to get passing grades and work according to the university's expectations and requirements. These results concur with the findings of

several researchers (see, for example: Boud & Solomon, 2001; Jacoby, 1996; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Owens & Wang, 1996).

Additionally, a non-university respondent who is an alumnus confirmed this view point: '*… when I worked as a BSC student I felt that 'Payap Dummy Company's activities were part of the community*' (NUS # 6). Respondents defined the community as the society in which they are conducting their business and indicated their agreement that students should pay more attention to social aspects of business and show more commitment to their community. Similarly, a number of scholars (see for example, Barab & Duffy, 2000; Grossman et al., 2000; McGill & Beaty, 1995; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998) argue that educators and policy-makers are advocating a move towards more 'community-based' learning. This fits with Knowles' (1980) assertion that maturity education involves the capacity for contribution to the community. It should be noted the BSC students contribute money to poor students and the University library.

The data also show that students feel that when they work for the 'Dummy Company' they are associated with other community members as partners in a common endeavour, and they have the opportunity to share their knowledge, donate profits and develop business relationships with community members. For example, '*When students deal with OTOP [community products] suppliers, they feel a bond of friendship and this could lead to a future business relationship*' (NUS # 3). One staff respondent described a strength of this course as: '*One of the benefits to the community is donations, which are a strong point of the BSC*' (STA # 7). In support of strong relationships between universities and their communities, Jacoby (1996) and Owens and Wang (1996), stressed the value of more effective community-based learning, arguing that it encourages students to deal with community members. Boud and Solomon (2001) also suggested that it is important for universities to reward relationships between their institution and the 'real' world.

In regard to a 'sense of commitment' to the community more than half of the interviewees reported that students in the BSC have a strong and growing sense of commitment. However, a few respondents reported that it could not be said that students in the BSC were initially totally committed to their community. For example, a non-university respondent said: '*Whether students have a sense of*

belonging or not, depends on the time they have been working with the community' (NUS # 8).

Similarly, other non-university respondents argued that a growing sense of belonging and commitment cannot be created in such a short period of time. Although Obst and White (2004) considered that a 'sense of community' is hard to measure, as it depends on whether or not members expect to stay a community member for a long time. This does not mean that a sense of community cannot exist in the short term.

The BSC promotes a sense of contribution to community

Contribution to community refers to the financial support and working help students bring to members of the community. 'An attitude of service' is an intrinsic part of Payap University's mission, particularly given its status as a Christian education institution where 'doing unto others…' is an underlying ethical principle.

The interview responses suggest that the development of a sense of community is encouraged in business students. For example, a staff respondent who was a BSC supervisor, reported that the BSC students contribute money to several organisations and that these activities would be ongoing:

> *… providing funds for Thai children is one of the university's activities. This includes raising money for children's educational scholarships. The next step is to ask them [students in the BSC] to donate money to help with the construction of the University library, which needs a large amount of money. Each semester, the 'Dummy Company' gives quite a bit – about 50,000 Baht to help with the library. We also have a program of 'elder brother helping younger brother', in which we will help poor students in our own department. We give 10,000 Baht a semester for this item, and we also give 5,000 Baht to help support activities in our Business Administration Faculty…. These things have been continuously done for a long time and we will continue to do this* (STA # 4).

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of a number of researchers (see for example, Berman, 1997; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Schroeder, 2003), who considered that in this century, the development of a sense of community has become increasingly important in the context of community-based learning. It is their view that institutions encourage students to develop social consciences and social responsibility in educational practice, both at the university and as members of the

community.

The literature reviewed on adult learning theory – particularly Knowles (1980) - describes the ideal way to educate mature people as a process which moves from selfishness toward support of the community. In the BSC, the students generate funds to support the university's activities and community charities. In fact, a number of respondents revealed their pride in their achievements. For example, a student reported: '*… I am very proud that this money is derived from profits of the 'Payap Dummy Company'. I think to give disadvantaged students an educational opportunity is a worthwhile cause*' (STU # 1).

This awareness of the importance of contribution to community is however tempered by the need to succeed financially in the business context. As responses to Item 37 (Table 4-1) suggest that profitability is extremely important in the 'simulated company'. In addition it can be seen that non-university stakeholders regard profitability more highly than staff and students (Mean Scores were 4.07, 3.96 and 3.90 respectively). This reality is further reflected in the responses to Item 35 which indicate that all stakeholders are aware of the importance of dealing with the 'real-world' of business (Mean Scores of 3.95 for students and 4.33 for non-university respondents).

5.1.3.2 The BSC Promotes and Fosters Reciprocity

Ten respondents to the open-ended questions suggested that it is an invaluable experience for students in the BSC to work with community members in a business partnership. It also was suggested that students have an opportunity to learn from others, for example, to plan business strategies together and that students should work with private and government sectors learning from 'real' business environments. This is consistent with other research into the outcomes of reciprocal gain from work-based learning (Boud et al., 2001). These gains include: attaining knowledge and skills to enable students to participate in the world of work (Brady & Kennedy, 2003), and curriculum which includes involvement with external stakeholders (Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Marsh & Willis, 2003). As indicated in Table 4-3, all stakeholders agree on the importance of being part of the community (Item 21, Mean Scores of 4.08 for students and 4.73 for non-university respondents),

having family support for students' involvement with the community as part of the BSC (Item 24, Mean Scores of 3.77 for students and 4.60 for non-university respondents) and providing opportunities to work with the community in the curriculum (Item 26, Mean Scores of 4.10 for students and 4.20 for non-university respondents). Obviously, the Mean Scores for NUS in Table 4-3 were higher than those of the student and staff respondents in every item. The high NUS scores on these items indicate that these respondents feel strongly about the continued participation of students in their community in the future. These views may reflect the NUS who intend to employ these students in the future when they will be expected to work with community members in the 'real world'.

The respondents also stated that when they worked in the 'Dummy Company' as business partners with community members this promoted and fostered reciprocity. For example; a staff member commented:

> *Villagers, who supply OTOP to the 'Dummy Company', have an opportunity to produce new products, while students are seeking new products for their market. Thus, villagers can earn more by trading with students in the BSC* (STA # 2).

Thus selling to remote areas also provides an additional client base for the students who are trying to achieve sales targets and it allows them to experience doing business in rural markets. One student respondent said, '*Sometimes we sell products to those who live in remote areas. This is very convenient for them*' (STU # 2). A staff respondent noted that these activities benefit both students and the community:

> *At least OTOP [community product]…students in the BSC take part in the community by selling these products. Both the BSC and the community members are in a 'Win-Win' situation* (STA # 3).

A non-university respondent further acknowledged the reciprocal nature of business partnerships and knowledge sharing, whereby students gain experience and villagers are able to make a living:

> *If the community meets OTOP suppliers, this benefits the villagers. They know how to produce but don't know how to market, thus students in the BSC help them by selling their products and they work together planning and promoting, which is most useful around the community* (NUS # 3).

Comments from the open-ended data indicated that stakeholders expressed the view that business partnerships in the BSC need improvement. Nineteen respondents

commented that suppliers of goods and services should be given more attention. Most student respondents stressed that business partnerships were important for them to run the 'Dummy Company' successfully. The students expressed the desire to be allowed to negotiate business conditions more and to have a greater variety of product lines and goods and services from reliable suppliers. These recommendations support the idea of reciprocal gains for all participants in the BSC, as espoused in the literature by Boud et al., (2001).

Similarly, Boud et al., (2001) asserted that partnerships between community members and an educational institution should be established to foster mutual learning. The university encourages close co-operative relationships between higher education and the 'real' world to prepare students for responsible citizenship.

To achieve Payap University's mission of providing 'Truth and Service', social responsibility has emerged as an important element of the curriculum intended to develop students' social skills and encouraging students to have a sense of responsibility to their community. This occurs in the BSC. For example, a student respondent argued that to make charitable donations to improve their community will make them feel good:

> *Students donated their money for the Thai students' scholarship. …I never realised that there are so many poor children, who lack the opportunity to study… I am very proud that this money is derived from profits of the 'Payap Dummy Company'. I think to give disadvantaged students an educational opportunity is a worthwhile cause* (STU # 1).

The value of social responsibility in the curriculum has been stressed by a number of scholars (see, for example, Berman, 1997; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Schroeder, 2003). Regardless of the characteristics of adult learning, this type of learning also generates a sense of commitment to community (Knowles, 1980).

5.1.3.3 Curriculum to Achieve the Goals and Purpose of Community Stakeholders

It was acknowledged by survey respondents that preparing BSC students to work with their community and the development of business knowledge and business skills were crucial for them as productive workers. According to Brady and Kennedy (2003) business schools should design business curricula to prepare graduates for the

workplace. Such curricula include a wide range of business skills and incorporate business etiquette, business knowledge and business skills for professional job markets. This viewpoint is supported by the respondents in this study, especially non-university respondents who relied on the university to provide relevant practice (Table 4-3, Item 13, with Mean Scores ranging from 3.95 to 4.73). Brady and Kennedy (2003) argued that the essential mission of the vocational curriculum in academic settings is to provide students with effective practice, to enable them to work actively in the 'real' business world. Thus, it is appropriate that the examination of business curricula should give priority to practice, by emphasising students' capacity to work with community members.

The interview data also indicated that the BSC curriculum focussed on students developing a positive image in the community context. As a non-university respondent said:

> *Students learn good manners and Thai customs, in order to impress community members with whom they work. If you want to be involved with the community, you should learn how to deal with them* (NUS # 5).

The BSC is involved, therefore, in both business contexts and community-based learning. One staff member stated, '*In the marketing field, it is preparing students for both trading and working with the community*' (STA # 3). Thus, students' learning activities in the BSC are valuable because they enable students to learn how to deal with the economic, social and educational demands of the community. This type of learning is highly beneficial to students and accords with a number of studies (Bottery, 1992; Boud & Solomon, 2001; Jacoby, 1996; Owens & Wang, 1996).

In fact, educational institutions cannot separate themselves from the community and must be responsive to community demands. An essential role of educational institutions is to examine and introduce new curricula in response to community demand. According to the literature (for example, Marsh and Willis, 2003), the process of curriculum planning and development needs '*external facilitators*' to explain university practices to the community.

The questionnaire data show that the non-university respondents strongly agreed that students' parents, as stakeholders, support the BSC students' involvement in the

community (the Mean Score was 4.60 for NUS and 3.77 for students, see Table 4-3 Item 24), but a substantial and statistically significant difference was noted between student and NUS responses. A significant number of students, accordingly do not believe that 'parents should support student involvement'. Although it is not clear from the data what students think on this matter one likely explanation is that, as adults, students want to be independent from parental involvement in their work with the BSC. The non-university respondents strongly agree the university should support students' involvement in their community (as reflected by a Mean Score of 4.93, Item 25). There is a statistically significant ($p < .001$) discrepancy between the students' scores (4.26) and the NUS scores, on this item. A number of students do not think the university should be supportive of the students in the context of community and, this may suggest that these students do not want the university's involvement in their work with the community.

This view may reflect their understanding of the importance of family support of students in Thai society, and a business person's perspective on students working in community-based practice. In addition, involvement of stakeholders through feedback has brought about better understanding between institutions and external communities. Students are made more aware of their roles and importance and achieve a sense of belonging (commitment), while learning to contribute to the community. These data are in agreement with Fullan (1999), who argued that stakeholders can provide guidelines for integration of curricula into the life of the community. For example, universities and other stakeholders may wish to see a business community share much of governments' economic interests, while the university curriculum may contribute to these objectives (Brady & Kennedy, 1998).

Thai education curricula should teach appropriate professional skills as used in the relevant field (in this case, business), to more effectively prepare students for the workforce in response to the demands of trading in a global era (Schmidt, 1991; Shinawatra, 2003; Stinson & Milter, 1996). The BSC extends business from the local community level, to the export level, supported by the government OTOP project, which aims to export village product in a highly organised way. To this end, preparing business students to work effectively with the community is certainly a key aspect of the BSC curriculum. In fact, increased community involvement was exactly what the Payap University faculty and administrators had in mind when they

instituted more courses linking 'theory and practice' to help students broaden their personal and professional outlook while working to improve their community (Payap University, 2004).

5.1.4 Stakeholders' Advice to the University

Research Question 4: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to the university about the Business Simulation Course?***

This research question was concerned with finding out stakeholders' views about the BSC, so that advice could be provided to the university's administrators. Although the data show that all groups of respondents agreed that the university seeks feedback from stakeholders who are involved in the BSC (see Table 4.4, Item 27), especially the non-university stakeholders (Mean Score 4.40), student scores (3.95) were much lower than that of the NUS (with $t = 2.04$, $p = .04$, thus significant at $p < .05$ level of confidence). These students apparently were stating that the university does not seek feedback from each student and this is puzzling. If student perceptions are accurate then there is a question whether the staff actually seek such feedback from the students. This issue needs to be investigated. The non-university respondents also were convinced that the university does act on feedback from students and outside participants (Mean Score was 4.27, Item 29). However, it should be noted that staff were in less agreement on the issue of 'acting' on feedback than the other two groups (Mean Score was 3.65 for staff and 3.77 for students).The non-university stakeholders, who were people working in the 'real world' of business, most likely believed that feedback is a practical way of relating study to actual business practice, so that the two approaches to learning fit together and function well. This supposition is supported by the UNESCO Asia and the Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok (2002).

The data strongly indicate that feedback from stakeholders is necessary as part of a dynamic approach to curriculum development, particularly in subjects dealing with aspects of the socio-cultural, political and economic milieu related to 'real-life' contexts. In these subjects as a result of such advice, the university is able to refine courses in ways which make them more 'realistic' and more 'relevant' to students, as they engage in 'real-life' learning. The non-university respondents further stressed

the importance of the university responding to this advice in regard to maintaining the quality of the curriculum.

Respondents' perspectives on the BSC from the interview responses

In this section, the interview data provided a number of comments and suggestions to the university from all stakeholders in regard to the BSC. The respondents' advice can be separated into three areas:

- infrastructure appropriate equipment to transact the business component of the course
- Time-table and staff work load
- improvements to the organisation and structure of the BSC, and
- the importance of the BSC.

The advice on infrastructure provided by stakeholders expressed concern about the adequacy of the equipment used to transact the business component of the course. Organisational features also were of concern, including time-tabling, course weight and assessment. Advice given in regard to the importance of the BSC to Payap University curriculum issues and pedagogy for higher education is discussed below.

- *Infrastructure appropriate equipment to transact the business component of the course*

The questionnaire (Table 4-2, Item 11) asked the respondents whether or not the university provides enough facilities and equipment to meet students' programme needs. Responses to this item are the lowest for the category of combining theory with practice. Most student and staff respondents do not believe the university provides enough facilities and equipment for the programme, as reflected by Mean Scores ranging from 2.88 to 3.33 and a lower score for staff respondents. The NUS score of 3.33 is not much higher.

Students' views concerning these issues were reflected by the following comments: '*…the university provides a suitable location and enough facilities. Sometimes, we have trouble in the rainy season*' (STU # 3), and '*The university supports the course by providing alternative venues for the BSC, for example when students manage the BSC's activities and public relations, in the outside community*' (STU # 4).

A non-university respondent also agreed that the university should provide better support:

> *Students in the BSC might use the Internet or websites to sell their products as a channel of distribution. When they graduate, they might make their business come true via e-commerce. The university should provide enough computers, Internet system and computer software which are accessible to students in the BSC* (NUS # 3).

These are important and interesting findings because the responses are based on the actual experience of stakeholders involved in the BSC, including current and former students (alumni), who have had firsthand experience of working in the 'Dummy Company'. In addition students' opinions are supported by those of a non-university respondent who indicate that experience in using modern technology is required for future employment.

The staff responses generally concurred with those of the other stakeholders that the course is under-resourced. For example, '*The university should provide a storefront from which students can practise with community members, not only university members*' (STA # 2). Another staff respondent who supervises the BSC commented:

> *We would like the executive, or even the top executive of this university, to support this course with tools, and better locations. A large budget might not be needed but if tools for use in the business are given to us we will be able to run the business more efficiently and smoothly. We have problems every semester finding an area or location to exhibit goods. I think this should be provided. We have a big problem with this, especially in the rainy season* (STA # 4).

Suggestions from 13 respondents on this issue included the wish to see the university provide sufficient and appropriate resources for the BSC, including smaller workplaces, better storefronts and locations, more computers and office equipment. This is an important finding, because the respondents identified a need for improvement of standard facilities. In general, broader support from the university is necessary to help students' learning and to facilitate the course.

Respondents who are involved in the BSC were dissatisfied with the facilities and the space allocated for the 'Dummy Company'. For example, they found that the small spaces allocated for them to work in and the lack of facilities and equipment adversely influenced their capacity to run their business effectively. Moreover, all

respondents agreed that the 'Dummy Company' was run in poor locations and they wanted the university to provide more public relations support for the BSC.

The results for this issue align with Yibing's (2001) report, from the World Conference on Higher Education, regarding the issue of quality in higher education. This report mentions that effective practice may rely on several aspects, whereby institutions need to support the academic milieu, including buildings, facilities, equipment and other services to the education system. In view of the financial constraints peculiar to their institution, administrators manage their budget and allocate funds based on what they view as 'reasonable decisions'. Thus, it is clear from the results that Payap University is trying to provide what stakeholders see as necessary. However there is a balance of competing priorities. Are discussed below:

- *Time-table and staff work load*

From the interviews some staff and student respondents felt that the BSC was seen as time-consuming and therefore in need of a more flexible time-table. Nevertheless, most respondents agreed that the BSC is unique and this very difference demands more flexible timetabling than other courses. For example, a staff respondent suggested:

> *The university should allow students to enrol in Summer School to reduce their course load. When students learn in the BSC in year 4 they have lots of activities and might be overloaded, especially in view of the practical activities required, which are time consuming* (STA # 3).

Another staff member referred specifically to the university administration

> *Sometimes staff work very hard with students and community members during the week. The university's administrators have to understand this and should realise that courses such as the BSC or service learning, take time. The university's administration should understand the character and structure of the course, because it's more time consuming than face-to-face classes* (STA # 6).

From the comments above, it can be seen that the BSC demands extensive infrastructure resources and is also time-intensive. Students need time to run their business project and company activities outside the classroom, in addition to the time needed for learning within the classroom. The senior administrator of Payap University agreed with this viewpoint and offered a solution to this problem stating: '*At the moment we are designing a practical business curriculum which provides a*

more suitable curriculum structure and study programme' (STA # 7). Her statement indicated that the university should consider the unique demands of the BSC when designing the course and plan a suitable study programme. This view is supported in the literature by Marsh and Willis (2003) who argued that stakeholders' needs should be considered in curriculum development. For example, pressures of time could be alleviated if students were allowed to enrol in Summer School, which would allow them more time to complete the BSC. Further, the University could advise and assist students about how to structure their study programmes to fit their particular circumstances and needs.

- *Improvements to the organisation and structure of the BSC*

It will be recalled from the earlier section entitled 'co-operative learning', that learning in a team was important. All three groups considered this to be an important aspect of the BSC, especially students who felt that teamwork needed improvements (RQ 1). For example, a student respondent working in the 'Dummy Company' organisation reported:

> *Any management system which is complicated requires organisation, which means that someone needs to take responsibility for this. Besides, there are many co-operating parties when we work together; therefore, if there are problems or disagreements, there are objections from the organisation or the outsiders, mostly about the process of work, because it has to do with people* (STU # 4).

In response to the survey questions the respondents advised that the university should give greater emphasis to teamwork in the Bachelor of Business Administration Faculty Marketing major. This could occur as a module at the commencement of the BSC, or preferably, in another unit earlier in the course. Given that teamwork is important in other specialisations as well, it may be advisable for it to be taught as part of a core unit in business courses. Improvements to teamwork therefore would be facilitated by actively teaching the skills involved. Mulford et al., (2004) demonstrated how this may be done for school principals and those teachers who aspire to leadership positions and this approach is likely to be useful for Payap staff as they try to help their students work better in a team situation.

Preliminary activities to prepare students for the BSC were seen as a desirable improvement to the course by stakeholders. A number of respondents (N= 13) indicated that it would be very useful for students to be able to prepare themselves

for the course by gaining practise in some relevant activities before they run their 'Dummy Company'. The data indicate that activities such as 'Ice-Breaking', 'camping', and 'acquaintanceship' retreats may be helpful and attractive to students. These activities involve mutual dealings among students in order to form a working relationship through role-play, which would be useful when running the 'Dummy Company' and in their working lives. The fact that the BSC is a practical course makes it essential that the group functions effectively, requiring students to work co-operatively for a period of time to meet the company's goals. These suggestions accord with those of Nevin et al., (1994), who argued that skills such as trust-building, communicating, negotiating conflict, and leadership should be explicitly addressed in curricula such as the BSC.

Thus, it was suggested that the study programme should be especially designed for students who enrol in the BSC and they should be required to enrol in fewer subjects. In recognition of the extra time and effort required to study the BSC, it was suggested that the BSC should have a weight of more than 3 credits. These findings are supported by curriculum design theory based on 'learning by practice' (see, for example, Buchanan et al., 2002; Colwill & Birchall, 1992; Fullan, 2001; McGill & Beaty, 1995).

- *The importance of the BSC*

In this section the importance of the BSC is discussed, firstly to business students, and then to Payap University, and Thai higher education.

In regard to the importance of the BSC to business students, the questionnaire data showed that all groups of respondents strongly believed the BSC is a capstone subject which benefits students by providing knowledge about the 'real' business world, as detailed in RQ 1.

The interviewees acknowledged the course's importance and argued that the BSC should be promoted as an important element of the business curriculum and it should be offered to other business schools. This view was supported by a student respondent who was pleased with aspects of the BSC:

> *It's terrific! Once the university provides this course to business students, they develop real-life experience and it seems that students*

> *have their own business. They learn from real situations, make real profits and losses as they would in a 'bona fide' company. We have to work co-operatively. …this course should stay in the curriculum of the business school* (STU # 3).

A number of respondents agreed about the usefulness of the BSC, not only to business students but also to other students. They said the university should provide the BSC to students who are interested in enrolling in it as an optional course. This may reflect a view that business simulation learning enhances students' ability to apply theories to practice in preparation for their future jobs, regardless of their nature.

When considering the importance of the BSC to Payap University and Thai higher education, a non-university respondent stressed the value of the BSC to higher education in Thailand as follows:

> *Payap University executives should consider that Payap will be a leader in this area, because Payap started the BSC long before other institutions in the northern part of Thailand. Payap has already developed strategies for combining theory, study and practice. In some other places I have seen, students learn less than they should, because they have studied only the theories* (NUS # 2).

Comments from this non-university respondent indicate that Payap University offers a business curriculum more directly relevant to the business world than curricula offered by many other universities in Northern Thailand. It can be argued this is because the mission of Payap University focuses on student self-development and graduates are expected to integrate theory with practice in their courses. In addition, a whole-of-university approach to curricula design and development ensures that staff react more quickly in response to community feedback and government higher education policy, in order to offer improved courses to students. Therefore courses such as the BSC make Payap University a leader in course development in the north of Thailand in higher education.

This finding is supported by the views expressed at the UNESCO Education World Conference (2001), which stressed that higher education institutions must seek to educate qualified graduates who are able to function at a high level in the world of work. Actually, simulated learning or 'learning by doing' is a useful way to prepare graduates for the job market, which is central to the aim of Payap University. In

addition, this is consistent with other research into graduate employability and the production of graduates capable of meeting the economic needs of society. It is now widely considered that it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to place emphasis on critical thinking, technological literacy, and exposure to 'real-world' circumstances in teaching and learning (Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Ensor, 2004; Miralao, 2000; Schmidt, 1991; Shinawatra, 2003; Stinson & Milter, 1996).

Pedagogy and curriculum issues for higher education

Over the last three decades in Western countries, as discussed in the literature review chapter, a new pedagogy for higher education has been developing, which has given increasing emphasis to autonomous learning and 'learning by doing'. In this study, stakeholder responses indicate staff awareness of and commitment to the new pedagogy. However, although enthusiastic about the benefits of experiential learning, students find that it also produces difficulties for them. For example, Item 1 in Table 4-1 asked respondents to comment on the statement, 'The BSC is the way to develop students to do business in real-life contexts'. Respondents agreed strongly, with Mean Scores of 4.18 for students, 4.62 for staff and 4.40 for non-university stakeholders. Also, all groups of respondents agreed that students in the BSC learned mostly from 'real-world' contexts (Item 9, Mean Scores ranging from 4.08 for staff to 4.33 for non-university respondents). The respondents reported that when running a business, theory is important, and it should then be applied in practice: '*Students in the BSC need to have business knowledge. They integrate theory in a practical way by running their 'dummy company*" (STA # 2). A non-university respondent further stated: '*theory provides the core concepts which are required in real practice*' (NUS #2). These findings support the use of new pedagogy and curriculum design based on 'learning by practice' (see, for example, Buchanan et al., 2002; Colwill & Birchall, 1992; Fullan, 2001; McGill & Beaty, 1995). Brady and Kennedy (2003), also argued that curricula must be structured to deliver outcomes which are relevant to the job market and enable students to learn from 'real world' contexts, allowing students to '*…gain the requisite knowledge and skills to make them productive workers*' (p. 4).

It was recognised by the stakeholders in the BSC that the course aims to promote a higher level of knowledge and business skills compared to more conventional courses. This aim is especially important in enhancing students' ability to apply

theories to practice to meet the needs of the future job market and to contribute to national development in economic, cultural and social spheres.

Curriculum content in many areas of higher education is becoming more vocational, in response to the demands of the workplace and employers (Brady & Kennedy, 1998, 2003; Kaewdang, 2001; McGill & Beaty, 1995; Miralao & Gregorio, 2000; Shinawatra, 2003; UNESCO Education, 2001; Young, 1998). As mentioned earlier, the BSC curriculum contains several types of learning, including experiential learning, independent learning, community or work-based learning, problem-based learning and co-operative learning. These areas are foci of instruction in the new pedagogy for higher education in the 'complex' world of the twenty-first century, referred to as a world of 'supercomplexity' by Barnett and Hallam (1999). Therefore, a goal of curriculum improvement is to expose students to a business with all its complexity so that through a business simulation the students can, in part, experience some of the dynamics of a 'real' business world as they integrate their knowledge into practice. For example, business ethics is recognised by staff and non-university respondents as an important element of the BSC.

The results from the open-ended questionnaire section show that a number of respondents (N= 11) considered that business ethics and financial transparency are important aspects of curriculum in the BSC. According to Ewin (1992) and Bottery (1992) business ethics are an essential part of a business curriculum. However, how ethics is taught and how actual business practice works are often at odds. Business simulation is an ideal way for students to experience the difficulties and realities of applying ethics in the real world of business. In view of the importance of this area of the curriculum as perceived by stakeholders and in the literature, the design of the business ethics component of the curriculum should start with a school-wide dialogue about goals and implementation (Ewin, 1992).

The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok (2002) claimed that curriculum content should be based on local needs and should be relevant to the learners' needs. In this regard, most countries have placed increased emphasis on local curricula to be developed by teachers and local authorities, which is the best level at which to perceive and integrate the realities of the communities (Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Marsh & Willis, 2003; Prawat, 1992; Print, 1993).

Overall, the results suggest that Thai education curricula should teach appropriate professional skills as used in the relevant field, such as business, to more effectively ready students for the workforce.

5.1.5 Stakeholders' Advice to Policy Makers

Research Questions 5: ***What advice do stakeholders provide to policy-makers who are involved in community development initiatives?***

Below, findings from RQ 5 are discussed and linkages made to the literature reviewed concerning the advice which stakeholders can provide to government policy makers in higher education contexts. This literature is then related to the BSC, in particular regarding stakeholders' input into government policy guidelines for higher education to support community development and practical courses. In this section, findings from the interviews regarding government commitment to support practical courses in higher education are discussed.

The results from the questionnaire data show that all groups of respondents agreed that the university needs to seek advice from outside stakeholders in regard to the teaching and learning aspects of the BSC, as reflected by Mean Scores ranging from 3.90 to 4.31 (Table 4-5, Item 28). This was especially the view of staff members and non-university respondents, who had Mean Scores for this Item of 4.31 and 4.27, respectively. This advice from staff members who have worked at Payap University for more than five years (see Chapter 3; staff demographic data) may possibly be due to their in-depth understanding of the unique and different problems associated with the BSC's teaching methodology, compared to previous business courses at Payap University.

The data also show that the university need for commitment to public consultation was supported strongly by respondents. However, data from Table 4-5 indicate that non-university respondents supported public consultation more strongly (Mean Score was 4.73, Item 30) than either students (Mean Score 4.03) or staff respondents (Mean Score 4.12). Students and staff were less committed to the process, possibly because their emphasis is more on formal study and assessment than that of non-university respondents, who are engaged primarily in business and therefore have a more direct

immediate interest in the outcome. These findings are consistent with those of other scholars, for example, Brady and King (2003), Fullan (1999), and Marsh and Willis (2003).

Policy guidelines for government support of practical courses

The interview data show that respondents agreed that the Thai higher education sector should promote practical courses (in higher education) to prepare students for employment and to this end courses such as the BSC should be included in the business curriculum. Respondents pointed out the importance of reflective practice in improving practical courses such as the BSC. They suggested that feedback from stakeholders should be given to the relevant government departments. Typical comments from a non-university and student respondent were:

> *…the policy makers should list all problems that occurred when students were enrolled in the practical courses; then they can design a more appropriate business curriculum. The government should promote practical courses* (NUS # 1).

> *Every university should have a course like BSC in the Business Administration Faculty…policy makers should encourage students to have a sense of entrepreneurship. This can start at university* (STU # 1).

The literature reported some challenges, such as the demands on government policy to cope with the national economic crisis and the need to establish a consultation process with stakeholders, to help government understand the issues (Bridgman & Davis, 2000; Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993).

The literature supports respondents' views that higher education curricula should be designed to prepare graduates to contribute effectively to the economic prosperity of the country (see, for example, Coleman, 1997; Honeybone et al., 2002; Milter & Stinson, 1995; Schmidt, 1991; the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, 1998).

Overall, the data suggest that government policy should proactively encourage students to work in corporations in their community. As reported by a staff respondent: '*Government should support students by allowing them to work in their corporations [such as OTOP]. This would challenge students in the BSC to work with the community and is in line with government policy as well*' (STA # 5).

These responses fit with Harman's view (2002) that higher education is moving toward broader societal participation. The data also suggest that the government should arrange meetings or seminars between the public and private sectors with the involvement of students. It was suggested that topics for these seminars could include issues such as community products [OTOP] and small-medium enterprises [SMEs]. According to a non-university respondent:

> *The government should organise meetings with representatives of faculties and student organisations to clarify government policies that involve community products [OTOP] or SMEs…* (NUS # 4).

It was suggested also by a staff member that Human Resource Development should be supported by the government as: '*The BSC not only benefits students but also the community. Is it possible for the government to provide money, advice and training to students and university staff?*' (STA # 2).

Interviewees suggested that the government should further support the BSC by providing loans to students to run their business, and also to villagers to produce community products. One staff member said:

> *The Government should give loans to students in the BSC, likewise to villagers. This would allow students to run their business as a 'bona fide' company with a certain amount of capital; it would also mean that students could pay tax to the government* (STA # 3).

Therefore, in addition to supplying infrastructure for the course, the respondents reported that increased financial resourcing is needed to provide capital to run the 'Dummy Company'. Respondents' views are supported by Yibing (2001), who argued that quality higher education includes the provision of adequate financial support. This is seen as good governance which helps both the community and the academic environment.

An issue that emerged during the study through the interviews was that respondents suggested that it is the government's responsibility to provide villagers with advice. The government, it was asserted, should provide the production and management knowledge needed for them to run their business, including assisting producers to standardise their community products [OTOP], which would help them to be more competitive in the emerging global export environment. This point was explained further by a student respondent who reported:

> *For community products [OTOP], government officers should set product quality standards and prices. Sometimes product quality is below standard, which then affects marketing and in turn affects the success of the BSC* (STU # 2).

In this section, the need for extensive government support of the BSC and courses of this type is flagged. This support should be extended to infrastructure and financial support. As vocational education becomes more highly regarded in Thailand, practice-based courses are being given increased emphasis. It is important that governments are made aware by stakeholders that the resourcing needs of these courses are often different from those of traditional classroom based education, as explained in Chapter One.

Therefore, teaching strategies need to be appropriate to learners and relevant to stakeholders' needs and should encourage students to take part more in their community (Knowles, 1980; Owens & Wang, 1996). Above all, government administrators and policy makers in higher education need to encourage students to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies. The government focus will be on the achievement of national targets. The initial support and guidance of higher education to promote students' learning from 'real' life contexts are vitally important. The BSC is one type of learning which allows students to gain experience within a business learning environment (see RQ 1).

Suggestions for Further Research

This study involved an extensive examination of a single case regarding stakeholders' perceptions of teaching and learning in the BSC at Payap University and its effectiveness. It provided valuable information for future planning of practice-based courses in business schools. However, this study should be regarded as a preliminary investigation and further research is needed to extend the generalisability of the findings.

First, the research base of the study could be extended to include other business simulation courses, in other Thai universities. Such further study could examine several different institutions, including both public and private universities, to see whether the principles and practices typified in the BSC are also being implemented in other similar Thai higher education contexts.

Second, further research could be conducted using a larger sample size and more refined research instruments, to increase the statistical power of the data. The sample could include more outside participants, such as policy-makers, villagers and parents. Alternatively, the sample could include former students (alumni) and employers, both in public and private sectors, who have employed students from the BSC programme. A more extensive sample could provide better feedback and a deeper reflection of 'real' life contexts. This richer information would be useful to the business curriculum developers in the BSC, to help them develop more effective applications to prepare students for the world of work.

Finally, this study has described the valuable contribution of simulated learning to higher education in a business curriculum in Thailand and reported stakeholders' perceptions about the benefits to students of 'learning by doing' in a 'bona fide' business context. However, it is paradoxical that students reported a preference for conventional learning in the classroom, rather than learning by doing in a 'bona fide' business context. This finding demonstrates a significant gap between the perceptions of the three groups of respondents, which merits further investigation. It would be useful to extend the study to find out whether better course design might alleviate the stress perceived by students as being related to practice-based learning. As suggested by the results of this study, it may be useful to trial a redesigned programme which addresses some of the sources of stress for students which have been identified in this study. Thus, it is suggested that exploration of students' preferred learning approaches could be considered, as part of this extended research.

However, there are serious implications resulting from the staff view that it is less important to act on feedback. This may mean that although adequate feedback is provided, there is a tendency for it to not produce meaningful change, if the feedback is ignored.

Conclusion

Thai higher education currently is in the process of responding to developments in the global economy. A significant aspect of this is that it is necessary to consider that Thai universities today exist in a global context which requires different responsibilities and high level graduates for the expanding job market. Academics

need to find their own place in the new global order and the challenge is to try to influence the changes. Thai universities are attempting to meet these challenges.

This study is unique, in that it has considered a particular course and used it as a case study to examine the effectiveness of attempts to combine theory with practice by allowing business students to run a 'Dummy Company' in the BSC at Payap University. The findings of the study provide insight into the stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the BSC. Typical reports from various stakeholders assert the value of the BSC and its integrated curriculum design.

The data indicate that practical aspects of the course, such as simulated business learning, are valuable and useful for today's business environment. While all stakeholders reported positive benefits from this course, paradoxically, they also said it is too time-consuming. The BCS learning experience links theory with practice, in an autonomous learning environment. It promotes the development of important business skills, networking and communication. This aligns the course with the government's policy to prepare students for the world of work. It also was reported that there were limited facilities (i.e., physical and financial) to support productive learning in the BSC. It is unlikely the outcomes of the study will impact directly or formally on local government policy-makers. This is because of the centralised nature of Thai policy-setting. Nevertheless, this should provide opportunities for informal/ indirect input at local SMEs, seminars and so on, which may allow some small changes to be made during implementation. In looking at the outcomes of learning by doing in the BSC, this study found that involvement with the community by higher education institutions was given a high priority by most respondents.

This experiment in learning by doing may well serve as a model in higher education in Thailand and a valuable asset for curriculum development and university-community partnerships.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL
AND
INFORMATION SHEET

Application Approval

Tasmania
DEPARTMENT of HEALTH and HUMAN SERVICES

Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Northern Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee APPLICATION APPROVAL

To:	Prof J Williamson Education Box 1307
From:	Amanda McAully Executive Officer
Date:	26th June 2003
Subject:	H7450 An Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Business Simulation Course at Payap University

The Northern Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee on **25th June 2003** recommended approval of this project.

You are required to report immediately anything which might affect ethical acceptance of the project, including:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants;
- proposed changes in the protocol;
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

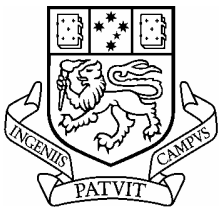
You are also required to inform the Committee if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion, giving the reasons for discontinuation.

Please Note:
Approval is subject to annual review. You will be asked to submit your first report on this project by **25th June 2004.**

Yours Sincerely
Amanda McAully

Contact: University of Tasmania
Research and Development Office
GPO Box 252-01
Hobart Tas 7001
Phone: 62 262763
Fax: 62267148
Email: Amanda.McAully@utas.edu.au

Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

School of Education

Title of Investigation

An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Business Simulation Course at Payap University.

Name of Investigator

The Chief Researcher is Professor John Williamson, Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania.

The field Researcher is Srisuda SaeLee, EdD candidate, University of Tasmania.

Purpose of the Study

This research is being undertaken as part of the requirements for Srisuda SaeLee's EdD course in this particular discipline. The study aims to investigate the nature of the Business Simulation Course in Payap University and its effectiveness in preparing students for the business world. An important goal of the new curriculum is to enable Payap University students to work with the community in student-managed business companies.

Criteria of Inclusion/Exclusion

The participants in this study will be administrators, faculty staff and students at Payap University. This includes suppliers, parents and customers, villagers and relevant government officers. The participants will be recruited based upon their availability to participate and their willingness to participate.

Study Processes

The research procedures will be conducted as follows:

- Instrument preparation, the instruments in this study will be documents, questionnaire and interview.
- The sample in this research will be: (i) administrators, staff and students in Payap University. (ii) Suppliers, villagers and government officers.
- The investigator will request permission from the University of Tasmania Ethics Committee, the president of Payap University, government and community agencies to administer questionnaire and conduct interviews with selected participants.
- Data gathering and data analysis strategies. The strategies will be

(a) Documents will focus on educational policy documents or official material such as: course outlines, letters to participants, articles in newspapers, policy documents and textbooks. The study of documents will be done in conjunction with other methods and analysis of a range of documents will often be done in a case study in conjunction with interviews, or questionnaires.

(b) Questionnaires will be given personally to the participants. They will be asked questions to express their opinions about teaching, learning and students' activities in the Business Simulation Course at Payap University. Answering a questionnaire requires time about 25 minutes. The questions will be written in Thai, which has been translated from the original English version. The questionnaires will be analysed and further clarification will be analysed and further clarification will be sought in the interviews, where necessary.

(c) Interviews will be conducted with participants on the basic of purposive, random and opportunity sampling. They will be invited to participate individually for 45 minutes. The interviews will be audio tape-recorded for later transcription. The content of the interviews deals with information about the effectiveness of the Business Simulation Course at Payap University.

Payment to subjects

No payment will be paid to subjects.

Possible risks or Discomforts

This study takes minimal risks with the participants because the purpose of the study is to attempt to strengthen a curriculum by analysing achieved students performance to enhance educational standards of teaching and learning in the business field and also in response to community needs. The information will be collected from the participants themselves and all information will be treated strictly confidential. If any discomfort should arise during the study, participants will be informed of their right to cease the activity.

Confidentiality

Research data will be confidential. To ensure that no one suffers as a result of participation, investigator will avoid disclosing the identities of those involved. Careful treatment will be given to ensure that there is no specific information which could be used to identify people mentioned in the study. Coding will be used to refer to the subjects overall. All data and information will be stored securely and kept confidential. The raw data will be destroyed by shredding after 5 years. Access to the information, including documents gathered, tape recording and transcripts will be controlled and used to construct a final report result, examining what has been learned through the research project.

Freedom to refuse or withdraw

The participants will be given information about the purpose of the study and the procedures by which a session is conducted. The participants will be clearly advised that their participation is entirely voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time, for any reason, without prejudice.

Contact Persons

The Chief Investigator, Professor John Williamson, Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, can be contacted for questions relating to the study.

Contact: Telephone: +61 3 6324 3339
Email: John.Williamson@utas.edu.au

Concerns or Complaints

Professor Roger Fay, the chair of the Northern Tasmania Social Sciences HREC can be contacted on 6226 2763 for concerns of an ethical nature or complaints about the manner in which the study is conducted.

Results of investigation

The finding of this study will be sent to Payap University and the participants or the agencies involved in this study if requested.

Professor John Williamson
Chief Investigator

Ms. Srisuda Sae Lee
Student

APPENDIX II

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A (1): Biographical Data

Section A (2): Students' Opinions of the Business Simulation Course

Sections B-F: Attitude Questions

Section G: Open-ended Questions

STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A: Biographical Data

Sections B-F: Attitude Questions

Section G: Open-ended Questions

NON-UNIVERSITY STAKEHOLDER QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A: Biographical Data

Sections B-F: Attitude Questions

Section G: Open-ended Questions

AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BUSINESS SIMULATION COURSE AT PAYAP UNIVERSITY

****

This questionnaire is designed to be answered by:

Administrators, faculty members, staff and students in Payap University.

Suppliers, parents, customers, villagers /village leaders and government officers.

The questions are in the following order:

- Section A: Respondent's Biographical Data/ Background and Responses of students to the Business Simulation Course (Only student questionnaire)

Please tick (/) the statement representing the correct response and/or write the response in the appropriate spaces

- Section B- F: Attitude Questions

Please tick (/) one and only one answer for each statement, corresponding to the extent to which you agree or disagree. There is no right or wrong answers to these questions. Just give your opinion. The five alternatives are:

SA----------	Strongly Agree ----------	(5)
A----------	Agree----------	(4)
U----------	Uncertain----------	(3)
D	Disagree----------	(2)
SD----------	Strongly Disagree ----------	(1)

- Section G: Open-ended Questions

Please give your opinion and/or examples

Thank you for taking time to fill in this survey. It is greatly appreciated.

ALL INFORMATION WILL BE TREATED AS STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Student Questionnaire

Section A (1): Biographical Data

Direction: Please tick (/) the statement representing the correct response and/or write the response in the appropriate spaces.

1. Gender

- □ Male
- □ Female

2. In what year are you studying _____

3. Are you a local resident/ inhabitant?

- □ Yes
- □ No

4. What was high/ secondary school did you attend?

- □ Government school
- □ Private school

5. Father's occupation

- □ Government Officers
- □ Private employee
- □ Business owner
- □ Other_____

6. Mother's occupation

- □ Housewife
- □ Government Officers
- □ Private employee
- □ Business owner
- □ Other_____

Section A (2): Students' Opinions of the Business Simulation Course

7. How interesting do you think the Business Simulation Course would be?

- ☐ Extremely interesting
- ☐ Very interesting
- ☐ Somewhat interesting
- ☐ Not at all interesting

8. Do you understand the course objectives of the Business Simulation Course?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

9. Have you ever been a sales representative in the Business Simulation Course before?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. Do you work as part of a management team in the Business Simulation Course?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. How confident are you of succeeding in the company's goals?

- ☐ Extremely confident
- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Not at all confident

12. How confident are you of succeeding in your sales target?

- ☐ Extremely confident
- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Not at all confident

Staff Questionnaire

Section A: Biographical Data

Directions: Please tick (/) the statement representing the correct response and/or write the response in the appropriate spaces.

1. Gender
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female
2. Age
   - ☐ Less than 25 years
   - ☐ 26-30 years
   - ☐ 31-40 years
   - ☐ 41-50 years
   - ☐ More than 50 years
3. Present position
   - ☐ Administrator
   - ☐ Faculty member
   - ☐ Staff
4. Worked at Payap University
   - ☐ Less than 5 years
   - ☐ 6-10 years
   - ☐ 11-15 years
   - ☐ 16-20 years
   - ☐ More than 20 years
5. Worked in another university with a Business Simulation Course.
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No
6. Highest academic qualification
   - ☐ Doctorate (PhD, EdD, DBA)
   - ☐ Masters
   - ☐ Bachelor
   - ☐ Diploma
   - ☐ Certificate
   - ☐ Other_____

Non-University Questionnaire

Section A: Biographical Data

Directions: Please tick (/) the statement representing the correct response and/or write the response in the appropriate spaces.

1. Gender
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female

2. Age
   - ☐ Less than 25 years
   - ☐ 26-30 years
   - ☐ 31-40 years
   - ☐ 41-50 years
   - ☐ More than 50 years

3. You are a local resident/ inhabitant
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

4. Occupation
   - ☐ Housewife
   - ☐ Government Officer
   - ☐ Private employee
   - ☐ Business owner
   - ☐ Other_____

5. Highest academic qualification
   - ☐ Certificate
   - ☐ Diploma
   - ☐ Bachelor
   - ☐ Masters
   - ☐ Doctorate (PhD, EdD, DBA)
   - ☐ Other_____

Section B: Development of Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes

Questions	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
1. The Business Simulation Course is the way to develop students to do business in real-life contexts.					
2. The students who manage the 'dummy company' (i.e. management team members) can gain more experience than the other students from the Business Simulation Course.					
3. Students develop skills and critical thinking ability to solve problems in the Business Simulation Course.					
4. Students develop their skills in co-operative learning, while working with colleagues and the community.					
5. Students develop in professional expertise in the commercial world as a result of the Business Simulation Course.					
6. The Business Simulation Course can develop the students' sense of entrepreneurship.					
7. Students learn to adapt and adjust to different situations as they go through the Business Simulation Course.					
8. The Business Simulation Course improves students' grasp of business skills.					
9. Business skills in the Business Simulation Course are mostly learned from the real world context.					

Section C: The Application of Theory to Practice/ Transfer of Knowledge and Skills

Questions	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
10. Tertiary education effectively bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.					
11. The university provides enough facilities and equipment to meet students' program needs.					
12. An effective way of learning in the Business Simulation Course is to combine theory with practice					
13. The university is expected to produce graduates who are able to work effectively with the community in the real world.					
14. In the Business Simulation Course, curriculum is less structured and therefore more effective than a system which is highly controlled and structured.					
15. Supervisors spend sufficient time with students out of class.					
16. Students will be equipped to cope with typical problems arising from company management.					

Section D: Links between the University/Students and Community

Questions	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
17. The quality of graduates is dependent on the university curriculum.					
18. Tertiary education bridges the gap between university and community.					
19. The Business Simulation Course is involved with the community via supply of goods and services.					
20. The suppliers provide the students with product knowledge and marketing strategies.					
21. The University and the students are part of the community.					
22. Both the university and the students have to be community oriented.					
23. Students need to provide the goods and services to customers from reliable suppliers.					
24. Parents of the students should support student involvement in the community as part of the Business Simulation Course.					
25. The university has to be supportive of these students within the context of community.					
26. Students have the opportunity of interacting with the community when they work in the Business Simulation Course.					

Section E: Feedback from Stakeholders to Payap University

Questions	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
27. The university should seek feedback from each student regarding the Business Simulation Course					
28. The university should seek feedback from outside participants regarding the Business Simulation Course.					
29. The university acts on feedback from students and outside participants					
30. The university demonstrates commitment to public consultation regarding links with the community.					

Section F: General Questions

Questions	SA 5	A 4	U 3	D 2	SD 1
31. The students were given freedom to develop the company plan and to manage it.					
32. Business students learning from case studies, have the same benefits as students learning by implementation.					
33. Students are able to manage the 'simulated company' without theoretical knowledge.					
34. Various theories learned in the Business Simulation Course help students when they manage their 'simulated company'.					
36. Supervisors help students who have problems in the practical component of the Business Simulation Course.					
37. The 'simulated company' is a profitable business- as profitable as other enterprises.					

Section G: Open-ended Questions

1. What are the three best things about the Business Simulation Course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. If you were able to change anything about the BSC to improve the course, what would you change? Please give examples.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What other aspects of the Business Simulation Course do you feel are important to this evaluation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you

APPENDIX III

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTIONS

- Student
- Staff
- Non-university Stakeholder

Interview Guide

Opening

- Greet the interviewee, introduce the interviewer, explain purpose of the interview and give an overview of the main topics to be discussed.
- Indicate how long the interview will take.
- Inform the participant about confidentiality and the use of data.
- Ask permission to use a tape recorder.
- Wait for agreement.
- Insert a new cassette into the recorder.
- Switch on, begin recording.

Conducting the interview

Ask questions from the interview guide (see attached).

Closure

- Thank the interviewee for his/her time for in contributing to the study.
- Tell them that the interview will be transcribed over the next few weeks.
- At that time, 'insider' participants, will have a chance to make additions, deletions or other make changes to the text of transcript.
- Confirm that research results will be useful for teaching and learning in the business field, in particular in the Business Simulation Course at Payap University.
- Make sure that the audiotape and this interview schedule are placed in an envelope labeled with the interviewee's name, and date of interview.
- Repeat thanks for his/her contribution.

Interview Questions

AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BUSINESS SIMULATION COURSE AT PAYAP UNIVERSITY

Interview questions for students, staff members, suppliers, villagers and government officers.

Research Question 1: *How do the stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course equips students to work in the business world?*

Interview Questions:

1. Students may experience a lot of stress when they enrol in the Business Simulation Course. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? Why not?
2. A description of the Business Simulation Course is, 'An opportunity to apply theories and knowledge in real situations, through a dummy company controlled by an advisor'. Do you think that when students run their company they will develop the skills as outlined in the course description? How?
3. Can you identify the following of these main features of the Business Simulation Course, and compare them with the simulation in 'bona fide' companies?
    - 3.1. Simulated company/real-life contexts?
    - 3.2. Students working together to co-operate towards a goal?
    - 3.3. Relationship building between the university and the community?
    - 3.4. Students working with the community?

Research Question 2: *How do stakeholders perceive that the Business Simulation Course at Payap University allows students to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice?*

Interview Questions:

4. When people say 'students apply their theoretical knowledge to practice', what do you understand by this? Could you please give some examples?
5. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and learning processes of the Business Simulation Course?

Research Question 3: *How effectively do students work with the community?*

Interview Questions:

6. How does the Business Simulation Course prepare students to work with the community?
7. How do the activities of the Business Simulation Course benefit the community?
8. Do you think that students have a stronger sense of belonging and commitment to the community after completing this course?

Research Question 4: *What advice do stakeholders provide to the university about the Business Simulation Course?*

Interview Question:

9. How does the university further support the Business Simulation Course?

Research Question 5: *What advice do stakeholders provide to policy makers who are involved in community development initiatives?*

Interview Question:

10. How do policy makers (i.e. government) support the Business Simulation Course?

Sample of Interview Transcripts

Appendix III contains the transcripts from three interviews (out of a total of 20). These sample interview transcripts are presented to illustrate how they were analysed. For space reasons one interviewee from each group of respondents is shown, i.e., a student who studied in the BSC; a staff member who worked as a supervisor and, and a non-university respondent is given a non-academic perspective.

Student

Q1: Do you agree that students studying the Business Simulation Courses might develop higher stress than usual? Why?

S: I agree because it is like training for a career and it is like the first time running a real business, which we have never done before. It is the work which I experience with outsiders apart from the teacher and other students; we don't know them and have never done this business before. We have a chance to learn from this. It is quite difficult to contact outsiders asking them to be our suppliers. Any management system which is complicated requires organisation, which means that someone needs to take responsibility for this. Besides, there are many cooperating parties when we work together; therefore, if there are problems or disagreements, there are objections from the organisation or the outsiders, mostly about the process of work, because it has to do with people. If we talk about other factors, like the working steps or the work system, that depends on which people we involve. One other thing which might occur is that this kind of course works affects students' grades. However, if students really focus on their work, grade and points will be something that they worry less about because their main aim will be to work better.

In conclusion, for me, I consider that grade and points are not the most important things which I will have to be worried about.

Q2: According to the course description of the Business Simulation Course, 'To carry out a study training session and to give students chances to be able to bring knowledge gained into use in real-life situations by having the dummy company with its business being run by students under the teachers' supervision. 'Do you think that this course can help develop students as proposed in the description? How?

S: I think it can develop business, skills because we first studied various courses and we obtained knowledge of theories, strategies and planning. Then we brought all these into use when running the 'Dummy Company'. It is something that we have practised, as in a real job so we need to plan and think about which strategy to use, based on the theories studied and in practical experience.

Q: *Have the advisors taken care of you, as mentioned in the course description? How?*

S: Teachers give us advice, but when it comes to the decisions, we use a vote from the student meeting. Teachers give us freedom to make decisions, but they keep an eye on us to h*elp us avoid m*aking mistakes and needing to make corrections later.

Q: *After studying this course, in what way do you think you have improved?*

S: I think in the area of responsibility, that is, when we work on the dummy company, actually doing the business, we have to be responsible for ourselves and also for our colleagues.

Q: *Do you think you got anything you can use to develop yourself and have more responsibility?*

S: Besides being more responsible, I think that now I am more enthusiastic, gaining more experience from planning, making contact with outsiders, deciding what strategy to use, writing letters or making business appointments.

Q3: Can you identify the following main features of the Business Simulation Course, and compare them with the simulation in 'bona fide' companies?

Q 3.1 *What is the difference between simulated company and real-life contexts?*

S: The 'Dummy Company' is different from a common company. I think the 'Dummy Company' is still developing the students' vision. It is not real work experience. There is still right or wrong to learn. If we are not ready yet, it means we have our boss, while the 'Dummy Company' is run by students and sometimes they do the job using trial and error methods since it is their first time working. Therefore, they can correct or improve themselves, while in our real working; we can hardly correct our mistakes when we've gone wrong.

Apart from working, taking care of each other is another thing. When running a real business, there should not be any mistakes because if you make one, you must deal

with its result. One more thing which I think is different is that in running the dummy company, when we have problems or make mistakes, it is easier to solve the problem or correct the mistake and we still have someone who can give us a hand or advice, which is usually the advisor. In our real-life, we ourselves will have to solve the problems on our own.

Q 3.2 *Will students' cooperation help bring the company's target through to a successful conclusion?*

S: I think, in an organisation like the 'Dummy Company', everybody has to be involved. If anyone is missing; for example, if any position in the management team is not represented, there will be an obstacle in the work system because each position or each function has its own unique and important role to play. For example, if the accounting is not done carefully, there will be effects on some other things, or if the salesmen cannot do their job well, burdens will fall onto other sections and finally the company will fail because the plan that we set will have failed.

Q: *So, do you agree that everyone has to be involved?*

S: Certainly.

Q 3.3 *In the BSC, do you think the relationship between the university and the community will be increased?*

S: I think working in the 'Dummy Company' helps improve the relationships with the community because we have to make more contact with society. The 'Dummy Company' provides students with real contact with the community… to go out of the university and present products or goods to sell to people outside. This is good for both students and people because if there are any kinds of goods that are unknown to the public, then on this occasion, we might show that those goods might be useful to them.

Q: *After studying this course, are there any visits between students and the public?*

S: Yes, there are some. It seems that they have become our customers and we also don't know that maybe in the future we might have to go to them asking for help.

Q: *When we have the dummy company, what effects do you think the vision of the university towards the community will be?*

S: I think it is one way to make the university better known because whenever we go out working in our uniforms, we go in Payap's name.

Q 3.4 *How do students have a chance to work with community?*

S: I think it is to work with them or to help with their work. But to tell you the truth, I don't think we have really helped touching the work or working with them. We work with them in presenting goods to them or making products known to them. Sometimes, we try to help them, make a profit, but that is only a little because our 'Dummy Company' will mostly focus on development by supporting the development of the university more by bringing in money more than developing the outside.

Q: *Do you feel that you really have a chance to have work training with the community?*

S: Working with the community, I think is to use my knowledge to present goods for selling to people in the community.

Q4: When someone says, 'Students have applied theories to practice,' what do you think about this? Please explain.

S: I think that it is really practical as we put knowledge gained in class into use and use it in helping to make decisions; for example, when working for the 'Dummy Company', we use theories we learned in marketing plan or knowledge from Sales Management courses in planning and managing.

Q: *So, are you persuaded that you use those theories in practice?*

S: Yes, I do. I think I can work at this point and I have to think about strategies to be used, or how to make situations better, but mostly it is the thought about strategies used and how to follow the plan.

Q: *Suppose we do the practice without studying those theories, what do you consider will be the result?*

S: I think that is also possible, comparing it with those who have never learned any business before and they are still successful. Therefore, it depends on the person. However, if we have no knowledge, no plans, no strategies and no experiences, it will be difficult to know whether it will be successful. This is because if we have not learned anything about business, but we are interested in any goods and think that they can be sold, then they will be sold. In fact, from what I have studied, we should do the analysis. We should not only consider the product itself but also some other factors: customers and competitors as well.

Q5: What are the weak or strong points of studying the Business Simulation Course?

S: About the weak points, I think this course still sticks to the previous course outline. I think there are too few changes. In the present situation, I think there are rapid changes in the world; therefore, the course outline should be changed and adapted to keep up with the world.

Q: *Can you give me some examples of this?*

S: For example, at present, the world is changing. Prices are coming down. We have more competitors. Our previous Dummy Company was able to sell a large amount of some kinds of goods because, at that time, we did not have many competitors, that is, not many shops or supermarkets. Nowadays, too many of them are our competitors. Talking about buying goods for the company, we get them from wholesalers and that causes the price to go up. Buying at cheap prices can be done easily at stores or supermarkets now.

Q: *How can we solve this problem?*

S: I think that what we should do to help solve the problem is to try to find a source which can lower the capital. For example, we should contact the producers directly instead of the wholesalers like we are doing at the moment. Contacting producers directly might help us get a cheaper price. Then the prices we get from the sold products might be the same as Carrfour or other similar stores. At present, we can say that prices at our company are a little bit higher than the mentioned stores or supermarket.

Q: *Now coming to the topic of management or planning, the teachers or the students which you mentioned before and are not practical today. Who made the outline, and how? Do students have freedom in thinking or planning and can they do what they want concerning production source?*

S: It depends on the students, I think. Like I said in the beginning, students made decisions by themselves, so they should try to find production sources. However, what we did was referring to the previous supply.

Q: *How would you like to make changes?*

S: I believe the form should be changed. For example, in dealing with suppliers, instead of contacting the previous-years' suppliers, we should try to contact new suppliers who are also producers. At present, if we sell it to local people in a door to door campaign, we'll go in to town to sell and it is hard to do that. I think we should go out to remote places to sell our goods or to places where shops are rare. Then we will have more chance to sell what we have.

Q: *You think the company's strategy will change, is that right?*

S: I believe this can be done and it depends on our colleagues whether they are willing to do it or not. The way I think we should do it will require more finance. The strong point, I think is the way we can train students, give them experience and knowledge in doing business before they do the real thing, and I believe that it is really useful for students to correct any mistakes before they step into the 'real world' of work.

Q: *About yourself, do you think that this course can help you develop you or could you develop any strong points after studying this course?*

S: I think it should be possible. Apart from having a chance to practice working, we will have another chance to work with other people: our student friends or colleagues and the outsiders whom we have never known before.

Q6: How does the Business Simulation Course prepare students for working with the community?

S: To me, I think the work is to sell things, so we have to have a preparation stage. We have to prepare our goods, prepare ourselves to be ready to work, having knowledge in doing the business to present goods to sell to customers.

Q: *Are there any other things which help prepare students to go out into the world?*

S: This course helps prepare us to be more responsible, enthusiastic, and open-minded in working with people and also develops confidence.

Q7: How do activities done in Business Simulation Course useful to the community?

S: Being useful to the community, in my opinion, it is useful to present goods that they may not have known about before, goods that may be useful to them. If it's a product they know about, but they cannot find and buy it at the time they need it, we may be able to sell it to them. That is a benefit for the community.

Q: *That's one way of being useful to customers in their time of need. Is there anything else which the Business Simulation Course brings to the customer?*

S: I think the other thing is to make them know more about us and also know that our 'Dummy Company' belongs to Payap students; therefore, people will know Payap and the 'Dummy Company' more and more.

Q: *Suppose the community means the co-trading companies. Do you think this course is useful to them?*

S: Besides the usefulness which the co-trading companies will get from doing business with us, and working with us, they might get to know other kinds of goods or know more people through us.

Q8: Do you think that students studying the Business Simulation Course feel that they belong to the community more than before?

S: I feel that as we go to the public to present goods to sell to them, mostly they welcome us very well. They sympathise with us, are interested in our goods and understand us. Therefore, when we go presenting goods to sell to them, they will be interested in us, making them feel kinder to us. After that, when we go presenting goods the next time, it will be easier. Sometimes, some customers keep contacting us to help buying things from us.

Q: *How about you as a student? Do you think that students feel that they are part of Chiang Mai or the community they live in? How?*

S: In terms of relationship, I think I have a relationship with them. It seems that they are my supporters, so I care for them. When they buy things from me, I feel I am concerned whether they find my product useful, or not.

Q: *Now, are you from Chiang Mai?*

S: Oh, no, I'm not.

Q: *So, when you finish studying this course, what do you think you can do for your hometown, and do you feel that you are a part of Chiang Mai when you practice working on the business simulation course?*

S: I'm not from Chiang Mai; I was born in Lamphun, so when I want to sell goods or get new kinds of goods for sale, the first thing I think about is to bring those goods to sell in my hometown and to let my people get help from the goods. It means that I

want Lamphun people to have a chance to use those particular goods which are still unavailable in their area and to give them a chance to use quality goods or to give them a better life.

Q9: If you could give the university advice, what kind of advice would you give concerning the Business Simulation Course?

S: I would like to ask the university for more facilities and conveniences and some other little things since we are a company working under and for our university as a whole.

Q: *In what specific field would you like to get help from the university?*

S: Something like - the area for having the 'Dummy Company', or other facilities, tools and conveniences when we are having the grand opening, the goods show. The university should support the course by providing alternative venues for the BSC for example when students manage the BSC's activities and public relations, in the outside community.

Q: *Anything else?*

S: I would like the university to give the students in other faculties the chance for training too. I feel that at the moment student in only a few faculties have this chance.

Q: *You mean that you want it as the university's policy in the curriculum. Is that right? And do you want the university to assign this as a requirement?*

S: That would be good and it should be a requirement of every single department.

Q10: What advice would you like to give to those who set the policy (University Affairs or other concerned governmental departments; for instance, the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives, Village fund, SME and OTOP) about the Business Simulation Course?

S: I would like to say that they should realise that giving students a chance in business training will help prepare the graduates to work in the real world and this is very important. Increasing employment and is one way to help develop our country. Therefore, having relevant training is useful and also helps teach students how to make decisions. They will learn how to do a real job from the training and also how to evaluate there performance. When they find a job in the future, they should be able to do it really well.

Q: *How to prepare students for future work… what policy would you like the government to set?*

S: Establish standard grades!

Q: *Do you mean that the government should determine the range of points that corresponds to a specific grade, or which raw score is equal to what passing grade?*

S: Yes, I mean the students must pass the course. Then whatever topic needs further training, teachers will have to evaluate them immediately after that training. And the evaluation should be standardized at a pass or fail standard.

Q: *At what level, do you want this to happen?*

S: I think for the Bachelor's Degree. However, for the level of Matayom Six, there should be more practical training rather than only theory study.

Q: *You mean you want the government to set a policy of having more practical training than theory study to prepare students for future work?*

S: Yes, of course. And I think the training should not be given only to the final year students. In their second and third years of study, there should be some, but not too much training, as well.

Q: *Now, another thing about the policy. What kind of wish do you have to get support for the business simulation course from the government?*

S: I think it would be good if the government would let students have a chance to practice working in government offices or in private companies.

Q: *Then, do you mean that students' work training is the same as business simulation? Or that inside training is the same as outside training?*

S: I think they are the same or very similar. However, outside training is individual work. It's not team work, but inside training is to work in a team.

Q: *So, there are two options the same, or not the same. Now, if it's not the same, what do you want the government to do to help when they or the private companies accept the students for training in their office, something like the budget, the co-operation this is the outside training. And then, for inside training, which is a business simulation or the 'Dummy Company' which is in the university curriculum or is taught in the university, what do you want the government to do to help or to take part in the business simulation?*

S: I think there should be a supporting budget because in having training for students, money is used for expenses coming from the students' fees. Both kinds of training need to have some money for management and it should be a lot to cover all expenses.

Q: *Would you say that you would like the government to support you by giving money to the university and to recommend that the university put this money towards operating the Business Simulation Course?*

S: I think that's right. The government should be able to recruit workers from the 'Dummy Company' according to the results of the students' work.

Q: Do you mean that consideration should be given to people who have gone through the business training and use this as one criteria for applying for jobs?

S: Yes, that's right. Students who received training should have a better chance of employment. This might be beneficial to the government-providing better- qualified officers and making the selection personnel easier.

Q: *All in all, you mean that you still want this course in your curriculum but there must be some changes in learning strategies. Is that right?*

S: Absolutely right

Staff

Q1: Do you agree that students studying the Business Simulation Course might develop a great deal of stress? Why?

STA: They might have some stress but not too much and not all of them [students in the BSC]. I believe only some of them do. We know this from discussing the issue with the students. This type of stress comes from the students themselves. They are afraid that they might be unable to do the practice, or fail to sell the amount fixed by the company. Therefore, students will feel stress and, after that, the stress they have is like the power pushing them to a higher level of responsibility and duty. As a result, in the end, they can do it and their stress vanishes. At the beginning, students might not know where to go to be successful, or to reach the goal as assigned for team work. This is how stress is developed, but it disappears after students have been successful in studying this course.

Q2: The course description of the Business Simulation Course is, 'To carry out the study training session and to give students chances to be able to bring knowledge gained into use in real-life situations, by having the dummy company with its business run by students, under the teachers' supervision'. Do you think that this course can help develop students as proposed in the description? How?

STA: Yes, I think this course helps develop students as mentioned in the course description. For example, students have to establish marketing strategies or other functions in the 'Dummy Company' by themselves. Then, in each function, there will be an assigned description which students have to follow. When considering the marketing strategy, students have brought the theories they have studied into use. Then, after that, they have to make it practical, by going out to meet customers and use the assigned plan in their work and activities in the community according to the business plan description.

Q3: Can you identify the following main features of the Business Simulation Course, and compare them with the simulation in 'bona fide' companies?

Q3.1 *The Dummy Company is different from a Common Company.*

STA: This is rather obvious because the 'Dummy Company' has so much flexibility. Regulations and rules are often flexible. However, there will be some factors which will make students feel it is difficult to follow the rules; therefore, the teacher will have to help soften some rules as they observe the students and then consider them individually, including the evaluation made of the sale companies. Students have much less bargaining power than the companies; therefore, we sometimes have to yield to the trade-partner companies-depending on the situation.

Q: *Then you mean if it was a real job at a common company, it would be stricter.*

STA: Yes, that's right. They have to observe or follow the rules strictly. For instance, observe the Labour Law and we also consider business negotiations.

Q3.2 *Will students' cooperation help achieve the company's target?*

STA: This is true. If students cooperate, follow the rules, or take on a higher level of responsibility, that will help a lot in terms of success. Mostly, students who have problems are those who do not accept what we have assigned. When problems occur, we have to talk in class.

Q: *Can you give us some examples of students' cooperation leading to the Company's success?*

STA: Work at following the company's rules. For example, students should be on time, responsible and if they are, there will surely be fewer problems. However, for those who are not and always have arguments, there will be problems that the company executives cannot manage.

Q3.3 *How will the relationship between the university and the community will be improved?*

STA: Relationship between the university and the community will be improved. Community here means that we also consider the supplier as a part of it, and the environment is the surrounding community including students' families. This is to help them understand more about the university, know that there is real training

available in the university, and that there are also real trade-partner companies. They will also know about the university's policy for students majoring in business.

Q3.4 *How do students have a chance to work with the community?*

STA: Students do have a chance to work with the community. At present, we allow our students to contact the trade-partner company which is operated by local people. This is in the form of an activity or SMEs business. Students will contact local people to obtain from them goods to be sold. We consider that we also help increase business channels for them.

Q: *How long have you had products from local people in the company?*

STA: For about 2-3 years and the products are mostly homemade. We cannot arrange credit as we have to pay them in cash. The Company has no reserves and that's a problem. Another problem is that damaged goods are not returnable.

Q: *What is the consequence of managing OTOP goods?*

STA: OTOP goods are gradually getting better. The main reason is that it has the government's support, so more people know about it. Once they use or see any of the products, they use them or buy them, even if they don't have any encouragement or explanation. They will want them more and more and they realise these themselves.

Q4: When someone says, 'Students, have applied theories into practice,' what do you think? Would you please explain? What you understand by this?

STA: We consider that theories are knowledge that we teach, but training is an Art. Therefore, these two things should be combined. When theory study is finished, it means we have a framework for the students. When students do the training, they have to base it on theories. After that, they have to apply the theories and training for use in society, using means that we believe will work in that particular society and not stick to theories too much. They should know when to adapt themselves to society when working.

Q: *How often do you think they have to use theories in practice? And for what do they use them?*

STA: In every thing – in conversation, their talk, bargaining, selling, how to reach targets. So, then, how can they talk? The sentence that they use is an art. How much a person will listen to them depends on how well or nicely they can say it. It's an art.

Q: *Do you think that some students will practise without studying any theories?*

STA: They can do that, I think, but it will take them a longer time than those who study theories before practicing. They can go on working on their own slowly and they will just know that this is how they can do their job and it takes a longer time than for those who have theories first. Theories are guidelines for them to walk on. In conclusion; therefore, if we grasp theories, it is like taking short-cuts. If we learn by experience, we might have to use a trial-and-error method and that takes a longer time.

Q5: What are some weak or strong points of studying the Business Simulation Course?

STA: Our weak points are, from the students' points of view, in the 'Dummy Company' itself. Students in the 'Dummy Company' hold different positions and perform different tasks. So that the ones who do not work in the Management Team might be disadvantaged. And in some functions, there will be very few problems occurring, so students who take that function will learn less. We consider that these are our weak points. To tell the truth, we also want our students to practise a variety of roles but it depends on time, which is limited.

Talking about the strong points, this course gives students a chance for factual learning, having an opportunity to be in the real business situations and make real presentations. These are their direct experiences, students learn within real-life contexts in the business world and have first hand experience before they work in a 'bona fide' company. It seems that learning by trial and error helps them adjust to real-life work later.

Q: *In solving the problem mentioned above, do you think it is possible to have the students take turns in the roles in the company each semester, or open more than one company for students to manage?*

STA: To take turns each semester, I don't think that's possible, but the second alternative sounds all right – to open more than one company. I think to have more company executives is a better way out.

Q6: How does the Business Simulation Course prepare students for working with the community?

STA: We prepare them by choosing students first. To work with the community, we choose students who have high leadership ability, know how to solve problems and know how to talk about business. We have to prepare students like this: - before they go out to work with the community or just talk to local people or customers, they have to be ready and mature.

Q7: How are the activities done in the Business Simulation Course useful to the community?

STA: The community is very diverse, and, through these activities, we use them to support outside institutions in terms of help. We help make them similar to us – to have a chance to help society. We both profit from this. The other benefit is that this is another channel to distribute goods to the community, to reach customers.

Q: *Can you give me examples of other activities besides trading examples which are useful to the community?*

STA: Now we let students have a chance to donate some money to society and the public by asking them to join in donations inside the university departments; for instance, an activity for providing funds for Thai children is one of the university's activities. This includes raising some money for children's educational scholarships. The next step is to ask them to donate money to help with the construction of the University library, which needs a large amount of money. Each semester, the 'Dummy Company' gives quite a bit – about 50,000 baht to help with the library. We

also have a program of elder brother helping younger brother, in which we will help poor students in our own department. We give 10,000 baht a semester for this item, and we also give 5,000 baht to help support activities in our Business Administration Faculty. We think we should take care of our home – inside the university and department- first. If money for students' activities in the departments is asked for, we also give them some. These things have been continuously done for a long time and we will continue to do this.

Q: *Do you think you have problems with students who are asked to donate?*

STA: Mostly, when it comes to money, or asking for financial support, we will tell students the reasons why we ask for it, even to the executive team who made a plan, and after that, we will have a meeting for all the students to gain a better understanding. If there is anyone who still does not understand, we will explain again until he does. It's one kind of marketing activity which will go with him when he goes out to live in the real world. We have good feedback, no problems, so we can do it.

Q8: Do you think that students studying the Business Simulation Course feel that they belong to the community more than before?

STA: Students can meet customers outside. We think that they become stronger by doing this type of activity; for example, for a door-to-door activity, because students have no practice doing this, when they go out to sell goods or do something for the community, they will feel shy or embarrassed. When they have completed this course, they have more confidence. It is like we have put the strong spirit of a seller into them and they have to do this, so that when they do the real job, they will be less scared.

Q: *Now, when students donate money or do something useful for the public, do you think that doing so makes them know more about the community and consider that they have responsibility to take care of the public, because they have a sense of belonging.*

STA: Certainly. There is another activity which we have not mentioned, and that is to give help to old people at a home for the aged or even orphans at an orphanage. Students will have a chance to see people who are in need of help and they will pay more attention to these activities later on in life. We really believe that in the future, when they graduate and own a business or work for any company, these activities will still stay in their heart. Their memory will remind them that when doing business, helping take care of disabled, inferior or unlucky people is very important.

Q9: If you could give the university advice, what kind of advice would you give concerning the Business Simulation Course?

STA: We would like the executive or even the top executive of this university to support this course with tools and better location. A large budget might not be needed. But if the tools for use in business are given to us, we will be able to do business more efficiently and smoothly. We have problems every semester finding an area or location to exhibit goods. I think, this should be provided. We have a big problem with this, especially in the rainy season. This might cause a decrease in the students' enthusiasm for business training. Sometimes students have to hire or borrow tents to use for these occasions from other places and we have some expenses for this which we agree to. If the university cannot support us with this, we will still do it. Anyway, we would like the university to support us more adequately.

Q: *So, it means nowadays you still have some problems.*

STA: We have problems every semester, if the university has any special ceremonies, we have to go for some necessary things to a temple and we have to rent them from the temple, which means more expenses. Sometimes at the temple, we can't rent anything because there is a ceremony on at that temple too. In that case, we have to go to a place that hires out what we need, and, indeed, in that place we can rent things but at a high price. So, after paying for rental, our profits are less and less because of these unexpected expenses and the budget for some items might be in the red.

Q: *Apart from tools and facilities needed, what else do you think the university should support?*

STA: We have problems about personnel. We have financial problems. We need computers, programmers and accounting programs to support our goods stocking system, our accounting system, or even suggestions on doing the accounting. We need all of this. We used to consult head of the Accounting Department and she would try to help, but we also need a formal letter of approval to let her come to help us.

Q: *Do you mean that the university should support this course by offering a location for the 'Dummy Company's office, office appliances, computers and experts or teachers who can teach how to operate those machines as well?*

STA: Yes.

Q: *What about the curriculum?*

STA: We would like to put this course into the curriculum one of the required courses for Majors. Like in other majors, if they study the SMEs course, there should be training in the business of SMEs for them to practice. Therefore, for marketing students, the practice of business simulation should be retained. Students will benefit from this course, I believe.

Q: Talking about students from other departments who still do not have this kind of Business Simulation Course of their own, do you think that they should be allowed to take this course?

STA: This is possible I believe, we can work on this and we need supervisors or teachers who would like to dedicate themselves to working with this. They should know how to solve problems, manage difficult situations, or help students in all matters. We have to spend rather a lot of time on this course. This is possible and I believe we should do it.

Q10: What advice would you like to give to those who set the policy (University Affair or other concerned government departments; for instance, The Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives, Village Fund, SME and OTOP) for the Business Simulation Course?

STA: We would like to make this type of course available across a number of subject areas a requirement from the University Affairs. Students will benefit from this course I believe. However, there is one problem and that is Cooperative Education which has been put in the curriculum. The problem was that some of the outside business groups were not ready to cooperate. It means there are no supervisors to help take care of students and there are expenses which some companies cannot accept. So, if we have our own course, we can take care of our own students without asking for help from other places. We would put it in the curriculum and when it is open, students can take the course and start studying at once.

Q: When will the Cooperative Education be practical?

STA: We have used it since 2003 - in the new curriculum. If students want to take it, they can do so. It's an elective major course.

Q: *Do you think students from every department?*

STA: Yes, all of them. And it means that if any students choose to study this course, there should be a company supporting them and the company must take care of those particular students.

Q: *Who finds the company, the student or the University?*

STA: The University does and then sends the details to the University Affairs Office to consider and make an announcement that that particular company is approved.

Q: *And do you think that some students will not get training since there are not enough companies for them?*

STA: Right. And some students may not choose to take the course, and when they don't, they will avoid training. If we cannot go along with team-work, students will have to quit and they'll get 'W' from this course and it is 9 credits - 40 hours per week.

Q: *And it means students have to work full time and they don't have any subjects to study that semester.*

STA: Absolutely right!

Q: *So, is the number of credits fewer?*

STA: No, but students will have to spend more time in school, maybe more than 4 years. The course is not provided during summer because summer is only 3 months – too short. They have to register to study it during the regular term.

Q: *So it means that if students choose to study Cooperative Education, they have to stay at least 4 1/2 years.*

STA: Yes, of course. Students have to take some courses in the summer if they want to finish on time. New programs should be specially arranged to help support this Cooperative Education.

Q: *Now, talking about the curriculum, you said you should have rules for setting the policy of having the study in….*

STA: required course major.

Q: *And you mean, in every institution that has a Business Administration course, is that right?*

STA: We have talked about his with teachers from other universities, and they said they could not do this because they did not have teachers for this specific course who could really take care of it. So it depends!

Q: *If it is required in the curriculum, The University will have to provide teachers for the course.*

STA: Right! And there will be students too.

Q: *What is the other side of this? How can the government help support this course when talking about OTOP, the budget or something like that?*

STA: I'm not sure if the government budget will reach local people because we have not done the project ourselves. We are outsiders, so we cannot be sure of what to do to get them a loan. We are not sure that to loan the money is to produce the goods and then give credit to others. If the local community could give us credit, the goods distribution would go well, including the production system, and the products should last longer too. If the products last only one year, that would ruin the project.

Q: *Now, a few minutes ago you talked about the fund - do you mean that the government has a fund for local people so that students …*

STA: After production, they should have reserves for the next production run. When we contact a small village or a small family, the people cannot give us credit, they need cash and they have to use it as revolving capital.

Q: *The government has introduced the project of Village Fund, but maybe the fund is not big enough to give credit to students. Now, another question, what is your opinion about students working outside the university, as part apprenticeship, and how does this compare with learning by case study?*

STA: Let me say something about training outside first. Though our department does not let students practice outside yet, we have talked to other universities who have and they said the problem was, they did not have a chance to practice working in the position they wanted. For example, if students were asked to do the Xerox thing, the business owner would tell them that that was good experience and if they did it well, they would learn it well. This makes us feel good and we think that if the students practice, they'll learn something. In contrast, if they take the Business Simulation Course, but do not try to do business practice, they won't get or learn anything. Students should try to do the business practice, make business decisions or even address the customers. If customers feel interested in a person, then they might want to have further conversation, and then selling of the goods will follow.

However, if they do not achieve what they hoped, they might have to go back and consult their adviser and help each other solve the problem. Students practising outside won't have a chance to refuse their boss. They cannot step back and re-enter the company - no.

Q: *How about the case study?*

STA: The case study is something in which we are the outsiders who sit and watch. We are not really involved in the matter or the events which is really different. We might get the other side of the idea and when we solve the problem, we do not really know if it works. Nobody can tell if it is right or wrong. We have to try to find information to support the theory. We bring theory into the case study on how we will solve the problem we are facing. We have ideas and theories and knowledge but no opportunity to put them into practice. So we don't know whether the things we recommend in a case study are really effective, because we don't have any periodic assessment of our solutions.

Non-University Stakeholder

Q1: Do you agree that students studying the Business Simulation Course might develop intense stress? Why?

NUS: I absolutely agree. The Business Simulation study makes the students who take this course different from those who do not and sometimes it causes them stress because business has its own mechanisms which are different and difficult. Some product items, we think can be done, but when it comes to real practice, there might be some impediment. We can also say that if it is the management of a small shop, problems can be solved easily. However, if it is a big company, steps or strategies set cannot be skipped over; or sometimes, if theories are applied, we will have to carefully solve the problems and keep that information for future use. Therefore, students will have stress from working. Knowledge gained from learning the theories and practice is not 100% the same. Students who study both theories and training will get more advantages than those who study only theories. We can see that after studying theories, real practice is a tool to help generally in doing a job.

Q: *How would you help solve the student stress problem?*

NUS: One way to help solve this problem is to cooperate or to work in the business simulation. We will provide the company assistant as a mentor or a tutor, to help consider if the theory is practical, or if there must be some other factors to help.

Q: *If we allow students who used to work for Sahapanit Company or other trade partner companies to help train their younger year students, will it be easier for them to work with the company?*

NUS: I think it will be easier because we will know how to work with them and know how they work. Students won't feel lonely working. It will be a guideline for the next-year students to follow, so I believe this is really important.

Q2: According to the course description the Business Simulation Course provides the following: 'To carry out the study training session and to give students chances to be able to bring knowledge gained into use in real-life situations, by having the

dummy company with its business being run by students under the teachers' supervision,' Do you think that this course can help develop students as proposed in the description? How?

NUS: I believe it can. It uses real-life situations and theory. In some situations we brought them in as guides, but in practice it did not go as proposed. Therefore, having a dummy company and working in a real situation will help us see results sooner. Students will have a chance to develop themselves better than only being in the classroom all the time.

Q3: Can you identify the following main features of the Business Simulation Course, and compare them with the simulation in 'bona fide' companies?

Q3.1: *A Dummy Company is different from common company.*

NUS: I think the process of thinking is not different, because in judging the policy and planning the business, it is the same. But in the form of a company, we will know about problems over a longer time and will have to try to find the solution or work with trial and error all the time. However, in the Dummy Company, we know that if we work, we will try to avoid mistakes as much as we can. Then when students do the work, there will be a higher level of correctness.

Q3.2: *Will student cooperation help achieve the company's target successfully?*

NUS: Talking about cooperation within the 'Dummy Company', it is successful. This also helps to achieve sales targets. Anyway, cooperation helps make plans proceed successfully and for the company it is necessary. We divide students into 2 groups and the management team will have more advantages. Anyone who has been trained in this field will hit the right target and will be able to really help with the business. Other groups will get different results. However, cooperation is very important to team-work.

Q3.3: *How will the relationships between the university and the community will be improved?*

NUS: On the whole, not many people in the community have studied at university so they are unfamiliar with what university study entails. If students cooperate with the community in doing activities, the community will have a better understanding of what they are doing or studying at university. Parents who have many children will understand what's going on in the university better, how interesting it is and they will have more confidence and learn more about how the university functions. The purpose of working with the community is not just for students to focus on selling goods, this is only half of the story. However, if they go out and use their goods as a point of contact, and also stress that they are part of the BSC at Payap University; this will create a sense of community between university students and the outside world.

Q3.4: *How do students have a chance to work with the community?*

NUS: Students can present themselves to the community, which is better than only sitting in the classroom. When they have a chance to do this, students are also able to cooperate with the community: to work, to present their product, to present their ideas, which can be shared with other students later. Students also have a chance to find out what's going on in the world outside, which might be different from the things they have learned in the classroom.

Q4: When someone says, 'Students have applied theories to practice,' what do you think about this? Would you please explain?

NUS: It's true, theory provides the core concepts which are required in real practice. You can't say implementation is possible without theory, it's difficult to run a successful business without a conceptual framework. Therefore, all the main principles of thinking come from theories and how they are applied or expanded, which will indicate how much help is needed. Anyway, considering both theories and real situations, neither theory nor practice can operate in a vacuum. They are interdependent.

Q: *Suppose students practice without studying theories, what do you think about that?*

NUS: That's impossible, really impossible. Though they say that they have not taken this into consideration directly, theories will automatically to be considered. They might not have learned 100% directly from class, but their information comes from various sources. To compare the students who have learnt theories with those who have learnt by experience, it appears that the former will make, faster and deeper progress than the latter. Those who have learnt by themselves or from the outside, cannot be compared with the former, as they will be slower and have more difficulty figuring things out.

Q5: What do you think the weak or strong points of studying the Business Simulation Course are?

NUS: Studying this course, there will be different misunderstandings in business simulation. In some practice, the answers might not be 100% correct or the analysis has not been 100% completed yet, but we know that we have taken the right direction. However because it is not 100% correct, we have to consider different solutions and try to make it all correct.

In working or in practice, dealing with real situations is a big help. When facing problems, they should know what to do and of course those who have learned the theory will have a better chance to solve the problems. Besides, in doing problem analysis, if they have not learned the theories, they won't know how to do the analysis.

Students are ready to run the Dummy Company, but in some situations when students work, they may make a decision quickly and see no reason to make a correction. I would like to say that in the professional world, it's not that way. You might find the correct answer at straight away, but usually not, if we jump to conclusions too soon, and use ourselves as the standard for correction, the solution may be incorrect, because with some problems, it is preferable to have a group analysis and consider how to solve the problem. In real business we cannot make a snap decision on our own, but we have to consult with the team, and come up with a group decision.

Q: *What are the strong points of the BSC?*

NUS: Strong points. Those who have a chance to practice will also have a better chance to develop skills, apply them sooner and see the results faster. When a situation is simulated and also the mechanics are learned, experience increases. Students who pass these business strategies will need to spend less time on developing this area of expertise. I mean that as soon as they enter the business field, they can start working right away. Also in some cases, we can use this group of students to provide inspiration for others, to build new mechanisms in business while working for us and then help the company learn that they are the group that we need.

Q6: How does the Business Simulation Course prepare students for working with the community?

NUS: Taking the activities we have assigned, is automatically a preparation stage. Students know the work order, the steps in working, so they have a chance to work with the community better and faster. They have no need to start at the very beginning. They have already learnt how to plan and how to practice; therefore, forming a student team will be easier. Students will learn more easily and faster. This will also reduce the capital needed to prepare personnel, because these people can work and make money, right from the moment they start their work in the 'Dummy Company'.

Q7: How are activities done in the Business Simulation Course useful to the community?

NUS: I think they are really useful. Students will have a chance to learn, to exchange these points of view and to know what's going on in the community. The classroom is too narrow for them. In the future, these activities will be the guidelines leading them to know how to do business. When students have a chance to familiarise themselves with the community, they'll know it well and the community also benefit by student input. Some communities have no chance to learn what's going on outside, which is a pity because they know only about their local environment. Therefore, these activities expand their horizons.

Q8: Do you think that students studying the Business Simulation Course feel that they belong to the community more than before?

NUS: Definitely they do, because they are aware of the needs of the community and how it functions…
(The first interview tape ended here and another was introduced to record the following).

Q9: If you could give the university advice, what kind of advice would you give concerning the Business Simulation Course?

NUS: In terms of the company, I think this course, compared with other institutions, is different. We can consider that Payap University has a business mechanism which we should really support. They also should be encouraged to keep this course, since it is very useful to students. They learn many different business skills and when compared with other institutions, so Payap students will have an advantage, and have a chance to practice more. Therefore study and practice will help build the students ability to work with both theories and practice to apply them faster and better. These students will be able to develop themselves better than those studying with theories only.

My suggestion is that this activity should be supported, the number of students taking the course should be increased, because in the past we had only one team from one group of students. It was a small percentage of students who enrolled in this course, so we should allow more of the executive groups to participate which means there will be more than one company. The students could then learn how to compete in business with other companies. At the same time, with the same product, the same target and the same source, students will learn how to manage this kind of situation better than others. If we have only one group, the job operation will be on the same path.

Q10: What advice would you like to give to those who set the policy (University Affairs or other concerned governmental departments; for instance, The Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operation, Village Fund, SME and OTOP) about the Business Simulation Course?

NUS: When students have a chance to contact the community, to share policy making ideas, we have found that, they get on together well. However, if asking

whether this is correct, the answer is, not 100% correct. When asking about people who set the policy and project, if they are good at production, they may not be good at planning, at doing business or their vision may be limited. We can say that when making policy, we should include more study by practice. To learn effectively, it is not necessary to just sit in the classroom. Students should have a chance to go out to the community and participate. One point of view is that their view becomes wider. An evaluation of their success indicates that, their achievement is better. In the past, I admit that teachers only drew a line for students to follow. Was it correct or not? You can think about it yourself. One other thing is that when the community has a chance to perform its role, it does so without knowing how valuable the product is, how much the price should be; therefore, there is no product vision. The good quality and image positive of these village products should be presented, but they often seen as 'rustic', 'country style', so local! Also local people at the village level have a limited understanding of pricing structure. For example, they don't understand why when other people take the product they can make a lot more money out of it; much more than the producers can. So the students are also educating the community about how to promote their products, and how to improve their business.

The ratio between theory and practice should be 70: 30 respectively or 80: 20 and it should be part of the policy that students should be able to have ideas of their own, not just take them from teachers. The PYU executives should consider that Payap will be a leader in this area, because Payap started the BSC long before other institutions in the northern part of Thailand. Payap has already developed strategies for combining theory, study and practice. In some other places I have seen, students learn less than they should, because they have studied only the theories. Finally, when we consider the last thing and analyse the previous results, we can see that we have prepared our students for their future careers better than many other institutions. They can improve and develop themselves faster and better, which is useful for both the community and students themselves. We can say that many students probably will work back in their community, so their community will have a chance to be more prosperous, because of these students and their expertise.

In terms of the company, I can say that it is like sharing with each other. The university tries to learn from the outside, so we both get advantages and we also can learn from our students. Even the teachers can learn from them both and bring back

the knowledge gained to improve the company or the university directly and this can be used to help in developing both organisations.

APPENDIX IV

TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

Table A-1: *Students' Demographic Background*

Items	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
1. Gender		
Male	21	53.80
Female	18	46.20
2. Year of study		
Year 3	2	5.10
Year 4	37	94.90
3. Residential		
Residing locally	10	25.60
Residing elsewhere	29	74.40
4. High/ secondary school		
Government school	35	89.70
Private school	4	10.30
5. Father's occupation		
Government Officers	8	20.50
Private employee	1	2.60
Business owner	27	69.20
Others	3	7.70
6. Mother's occupation		
Housewife	12	30.80
Government Officers	5	12.80
Business owner	20	51.30
Other	2	5.10

Table A-2: *Staff's Demographic Background*

Items	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
1. Gender		
Male	9	34.60
Female	17	65.40
2. Age		
25 – 30 Years	3	11.50
31 – 40 Years	12	46.2
41 – 50 Years	8	30.80
More than 50 Years	3	11.50
3. Present position		
Administrator	9	34.60
Faculty member	14	53.80
Staff	3	11.60
4. Length of employment at Payap University		
Less than 5 Years	3	11.50
5 –10 Years	7	26.90
11 – 15 Years	6	23.10
16 – 20 Years	6	23.10
More than 20 Years	4	15.40
5. Worked in another university with a Business Simulation Course		
Yes	5	19.20
No	21	80.80
6. Highest academic qualification		
Bachelor	3	11.50
Master	22	84.60
Doctorate (PhD, EdD, DBA)	1	3.90

Table A-3: *Non-University Stakeholders' Demographic Background*

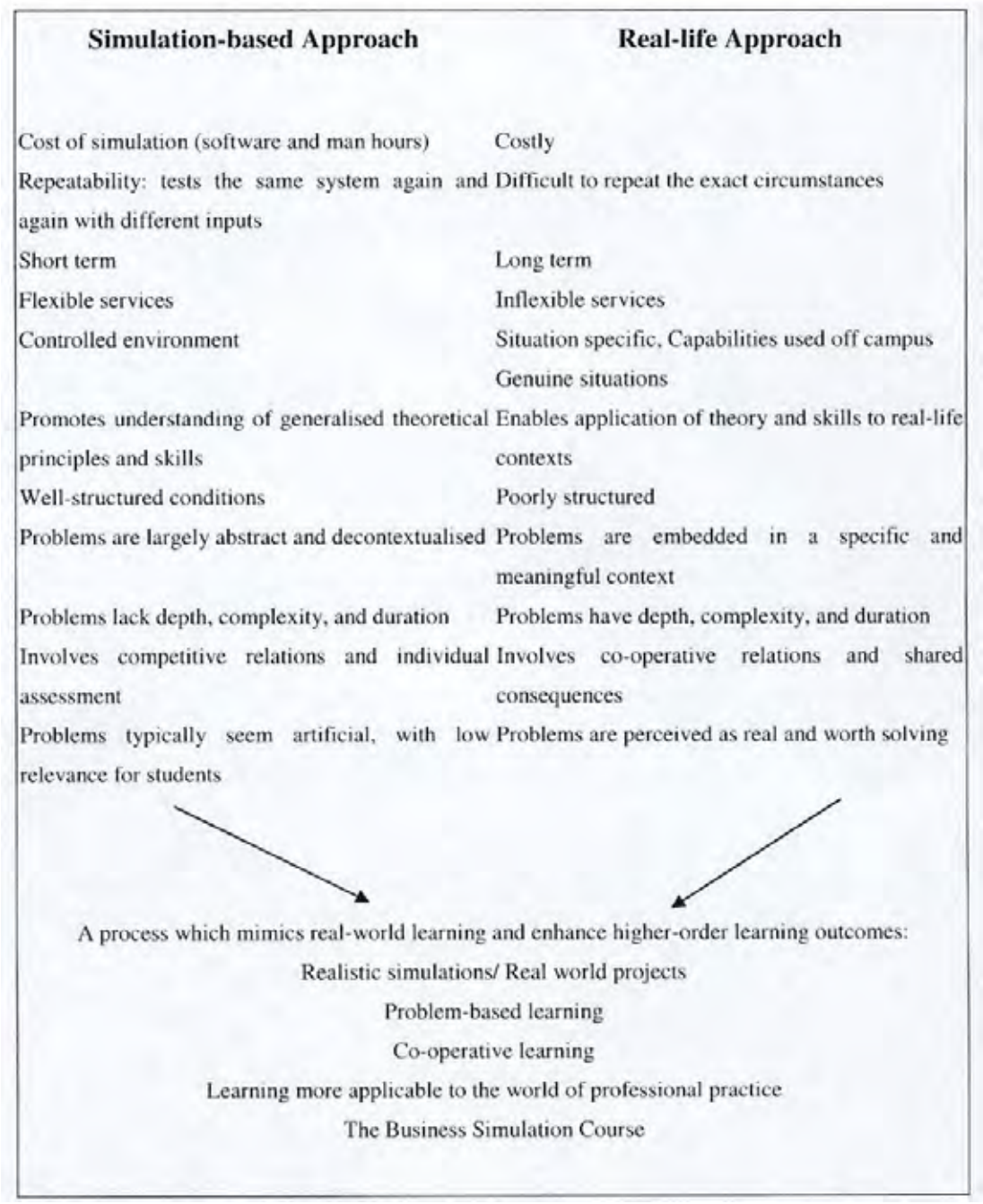
Items	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender		
Male	5	33.33
Female	10	66.67
2. Age		
Less than 25 Years	2	13.30
25 – 30 Years	7	46.70
31 – 40 Years	2	13.30
41 – 50 Years	3	20.00
More than 50 Years	1	6.70
3. Local resident/ inhabitant		
Yes	8	53.30
No	7	46.70
4. Occupation		
Government Officer	1	6.70
Private employee	6	40.00
Business Owner	6	40.00
Other	2	13.30
5. Highest academic qualification		
Diploma	1	6.66
Bachelor	8	53.35
Master	5	33.33
Doctorate (PhD, EdD, DBA)	1	6.66

Table A-4: *Students' Opinion of the Business Simulation Course*

Items	Frequency	Percentage
7. Level of interest in the BSC		
Extremely interesting	8	20.50
Very interesting	17	43.60
Somewhat interesting	13	33.30
Not at all interesting	1	2.60
8. Understanding of the course objectives of the BSC		
Yes	32	82.05
No	3	7.70
Not sure	4	10.25
9. Previous experience as a sales representative in the BSC		
Yes	31	79.50
No	8	20.50
10. Previous experience working as part of a management team in the BSC		
Yes	19	48.70
No	20	51.30
11. Level of confidence in succeeding in the company's goals?		
Extremely confident	8	20.50
Very confident	17	43.60
Somewhat confident	14	35.90
12. Level of confidence in succeeding in sales targets		
Extremely confident	11	28.20
Very confident	15	38.50
Somewhat confident	11	28.20
Not at all confident	2	5.10

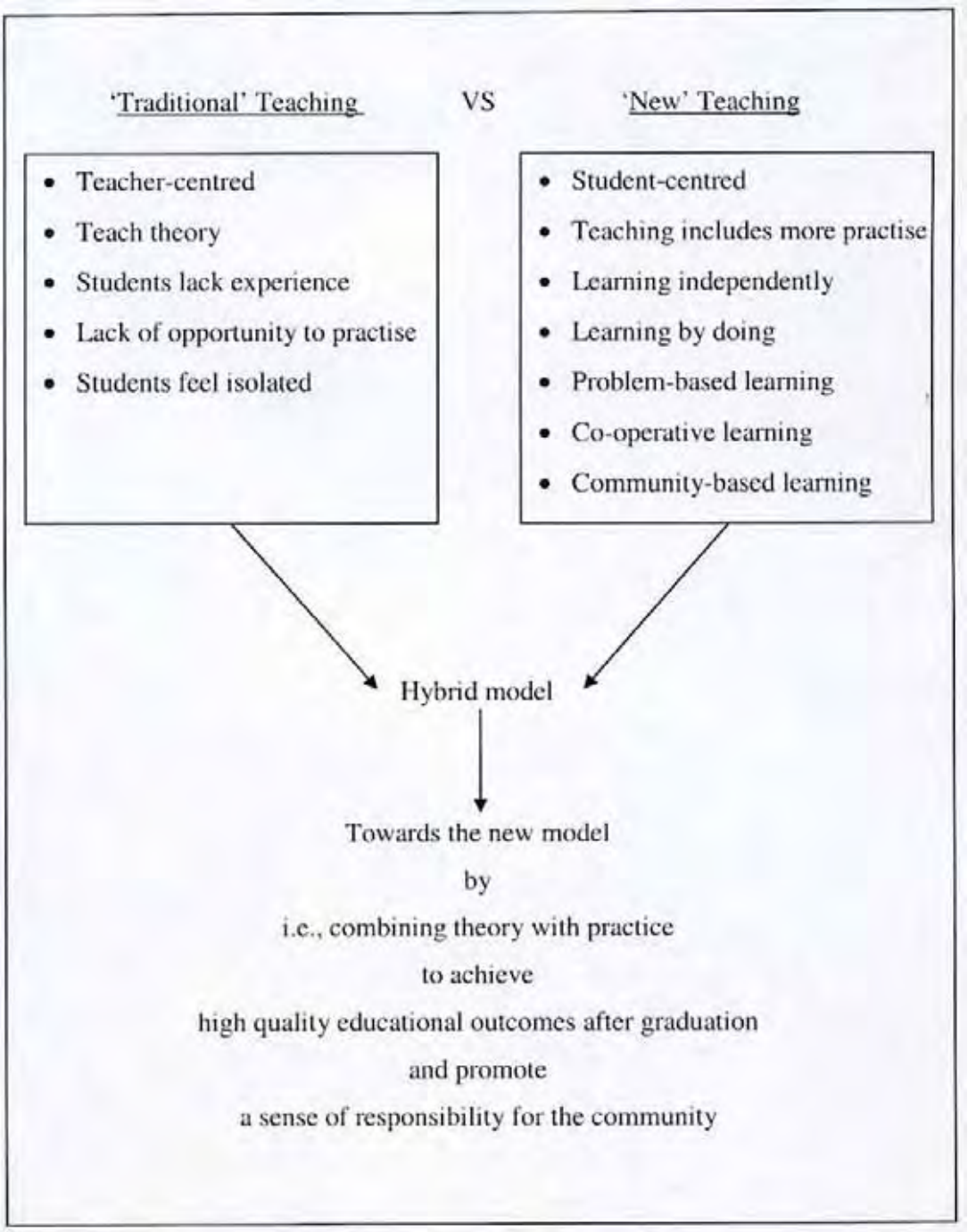
Figures

Figure A: Simulations-Based Approach Versus Real-Life Approach



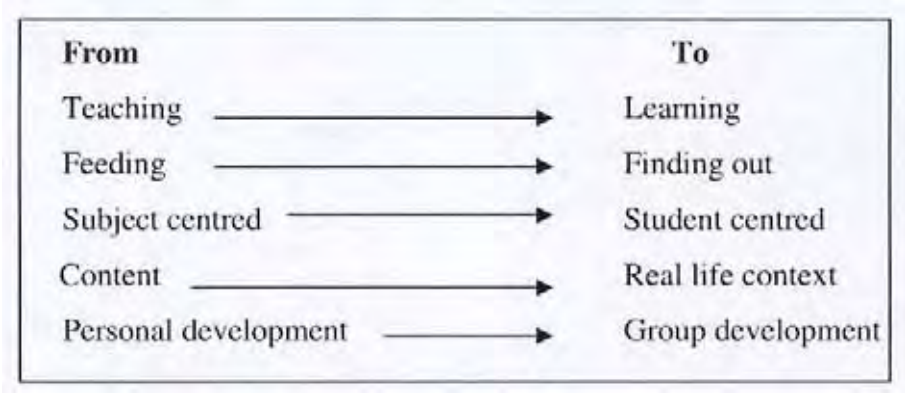
(Adapted from Lebow and Wager, 1994)

Figure B: Traditional Versus New Teaching Methods in Higher Education



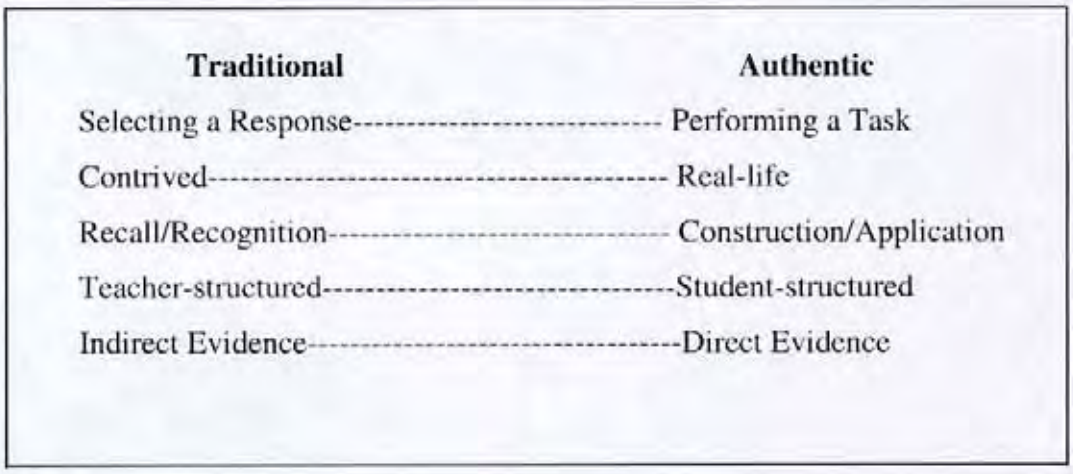
Adapted from: Buchanan et al., (2002)

Figure C: A Paradigm Shift from Teaching to Learning



(Adapted from: Pedler, 1991)

Figure D: The Attributes of Traditional and Authentic Assessment



(Source: Mueller, 2003)

Figure E: The Constant Comparative Method