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Part 1 New SME curricula

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1.1 Introduction

Dr Bernard Obeng and Dr Richard Blundel

This theme was led by Dr Bernard Obeng (GIMPA) in conjunction with colleagues from the other business schools. The core team comprised the following, with additional support from other ABLE-Ghana participants:

♦ Dr Bernard Obeng, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (Group Leader)

♦ Dr Richard Blundel, The Open University Business School

♦ Mr George Tackie, University of Cape Coast Business School

♦ Mr Ibrahim Bedi, University of Ghana Business School

♦ Mr Gordon N. Asamoah, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Business School

♦ Mr Ahmed Agyapong, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Business School

♦ Mrs Abigail Opoku Mensah, University of Cape Coast Business School

We began our work at the first residential meeting in Accra (January 2010) by discussing the nature of SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and entrepreneurship in a Ghanaian context, clarifying our understanding of the informal sector, and identifying priority areas for curriculum development. At an early stage, we recognised that there was a need to develop more appropriate courses to support enterprise education within our universities and also entrepreneurial learning beyond the campus, particularly in relation to the informal sector. This work informed the first phase, in which we began to engage with SMEs and their associations and to establish their various requirements through dialogue and knowledge sharing. This information was brought back to the second residential meeting in Kumasi (July 2010) as the basis for designing new types of provision. At Kumasi, we worked on two projects that are reported in more detail in the following sections:

♦ A problem-based design for the informal sector: the Sokoban Wood Village Project (Section 1.2)

♦ Strategies for curriculum review and course design in Ghanaian universities (Section 1.3)

Our initial discussions were based around curriculum review and development and its implications for SME and enterprise education in Ghanaian business schools. George Tackie outlined an approach that he had applied recently at UCC. The team looked at how this approach might be adapted in order to enhance the SME and enterprise curriculum. As part of this discussion, we also conducted an initial mapping exercise on existing approaches to learning and teaching in Ghana to identify current patterns of provision in Ghana and possible areas for further development. For example, we noted that informal tuition (i.e., acquiring knowledge and skills through friends, relatives and business associates) is widely used and can be effective in reproducing well-established practices. By contrast, approaches such as mentoring and placements are less common, and may have potential applications for students and others. There is also scope to explore other channels, such as television programmes. (For example, 'Masem' is a popular TV3 programme in which successful Ghanaian entrepreneurs tell their stories

and discuss challenges. The Nigerian version of 'Dragons' Den' also attracts large audiences in Ghana.) SME and enterprise education has become an important issue for policymakers and practitioners in developed and developing countries. Across Africa, governments have recognised the need for universities to teach students how to be entrepreneurial, seize opportunities, and turn ideas into action (Cloete et al., 2010). There has also been a growth in scholarly research on entrepreneurial learning in the past decade. By gaining a better understanding of the different ways that entrepreneurs learn, we have the potential to advance our academic understanding while also informing policy and practice. More informed interventions are particularly important in relation to the informal sector both in Ghana and more widely:

> As important as the African informal sector undoubtedly is in terms of providing a cushion against unemployment, political insecurity, and encroaching poverty in the context of dwindling resources, it has rarely enabled entrepreneurs to make the leap necessary to graduate from microenterprises to small- and medium-scale and large enterprises. Instead, most microenterprises and SMEs in the sector remain confined to traditional market niches and fail to grow in terms of capital, structure, scale, products, and markets. (Dia, 1996, p. 155)

We developed this theme at Kumasi through field visits to 'the Magazine', a large cluster of metalworkers and associated trades, and to Sokoban Wood Village, a similar cluster of artisans that had recently been relocated to a new, purpose-built site. We heard at first hand about the achievements of Ghanaian informal sector enterprises and the issues involved in running them (and in doing so we also recognised that informal field visits were a much more effective way of engaging with enterprises than inviting them to a more formal meeting). We also conducted a small semi-structured questionnaire survey of woodworkers at Sokoban. Having analysed the responses, the team began to devise a new, more problem-centred approach that was geared to the needs of an informal sector audience, and planned how to trial this material at Sokoban.

In December 2010, two members of the team (Bernard Obeng and George Tackie) also took part in a two-week study visit to The Open University's Milton Keynes campus in the UK, where they had an opportunity to develop their own open educational resources (OERs) and to learn about current large-scale OER projects in Africa, including TESSA and HEAT (see Part 4). We all learned an enormous amount from this experience, and became increasingly convinced of the potential value of OER-based business and enterprise education initiatives with partner organisations in Ghana and elsewhere. Bernard Obeng's draft OER materials were further developed at the Cape Coast meeting (January 2011), and have formed the basis for our first pilot project at Sokoban Wood Village (see Section 1.2).

We also returned to the theme of university-based enterprise education at the Cape Coast meeting, with discussion of a possible new project led by Abigail Opoku Mensah and colleagues. This would examine the views not only of students and faculties but also those of alumni, to discover which of the ideas they found most useful in their jobs or in starting up businesses. We hope ways can be found to carry through this project in the near future.

References

Cloete, N., Bailey, T. and Maassen, P. (2010) *Universities and Economic Development in Africa: Pact, Academic Core and Coordination* (synthesis report), Wynberg, South Africa, Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET).

Dia, M. (1996) *Africa's Management in the 1990s and Beyond: Reconciling Indigenous and Transplanted Institutions*, Washington, DC, World Bank.

1.2 A problem-based design for SME and enterprise education in the informal sector

Dr Bernard Obeng and Dr Richard Blundel

One of the main issues arising from our discussions is the challenge of developing learning experiences that are capable of meeting the needs of smaller enterprises. How can educational programmes help to address challenges such as translating informal sector enterprises on to a more formal basis, making smaller low-growth enterprises in the formal sector more resilient (i.e., encouraging innovation and diversification to pursue new opportunities or counter downturns), and creating *new* growth-oriented ventures? We drew on a wide-ranging supporting literature that included Bernard Obeng's doctoral and post-doctoral research on business support in Ghana; Ahmed Ayapong's recent (Paris) conference paper on resource-based perspectives on SME development; research conducted by colleagues from the University of Ghana at Legon; Richard Blundel's work on the growth of firms and networks; and recent work by entrepreneurial learning specialists. We also took into account Mamadou Dia's (1996) examples of African enterprises that have successfully managed the growth process without abandoning traditional values:

> To varying degrees, these cases attest to the possibility of coming of age in the formal sector while resolutely clinging to, *and indeed capitalizing on*, hardy traditional values that have, through the years, been the vital cement holding together indigenous society. (Dia, 1996, p. 156, emphasis added)

In this project, we are acknowledging this insight as we consider the potential for combining traditional practices and more innovative learning approaches.

Background to the training project

This project aims at developing training modules for micro and small businesses in the informal sector based on the problem-based approach to teaching management. To do this, the curriculum design project team developed a training module in marketing. To test its suitability, we undertook a pilot study with artisans from Sokoban Wood Village (formerly Anloga Wood Village): see the box below.

The Sokoban Wood Village Education Project: pilot study overview

Title of training: Marketing of Products and Services in the Informal Sector

Date and time: 4 March 2011, 10.30am to 1.30pm

Location: Sokoban Wood Village Conference Room

Participants: 35 participants from five associations: Anloga South Association, Anloga North Association, Anloga Carpenters Association, Israel Lumber Association and Kyirapatra Lumber Association

Trainers: Dr Bernard Obeng, Mr Gordon Asamoah, Mr Ahmed Agyapong, Miss Abigail Appiah (teaching assistant)

Training materials: Training manual, overhead projector, file, notebooks, pens

Medium of instruction: Twi (the local language) and English

The main aim of the initial pilot study was to introduce participants to the basic principles and concepts of marketing and the applications of these principles and

concepts in the marketing of goods and services to achieve customer satisfaction and profit. Module 1 comprised the following topics:

♦ What is marketing?

♦ Organisational philosophy/business core values

♦ Defining the market and understanding customer needs and wants

♦ Marketing research

♦ Understanding consumer behaviour.

We identified the following formal learning outcomes. At the end of the presentation, participants were expected to:

♦ understand the term 'marketing' and how it relates to the management of their businesses

♦ define the term 'marketing' based on what each participant does

♦ appreciate the importance of business core values and how they guide the formulation of marketing strategies

♦ identify customers for their products and services and the needs and wants that they are seeking to satisfy

♦ use marketing research to gather information about customers, competitors and the various stakeholders.

Teaching methods and materials

Taking into consideration the age of the target audience (average 40 years) and their educational background (the majority have no formal education), the problem-based approach to teaching management methodology was used. This method of learning combines academic understanding with practical application. The module was designed from materials that were obtained from sources such as an Open University module on marketing available in the OER LabSpace, and marketing textbooks such as *Principles of Marketing* (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010) and *Marketing Management* (Winer, 2007) were consulted. Newspapers advertisement pages were also used. Pictures were taken of carpenters displaying their products on their various premises. The team also used a short video made by Bernard and colleagues, and visited The Open University, as described in Section 1.1.

The workshop used a problem-based approach to teaching and as a result there were many activities during the session. Pictures and video were used for demonstration purposes. For example, the participants were introduced to the term 'marketing' by the use of pictures such as carpenters showing their finish products along the roadside to attract customers, a typical market setting where sellers and buyers were transacting business, and pictures from newspaper advertisements. Then participants were asked to provide their personal view of marketing. The video clip was used to help the participants appreciate the importance of understanding customer needs and wants. Participants were asked to discuss the video in terms of the key problems that emerged and the solutions to the problems. The pictures and the video helped participants to connect their previous experience to the issues being discussed and some were able to provide practical examples to support the discussion of concepts. However, there were instances where the participants found it difficult to connect to the issues under discussion, in situations where we found it difficult to find the appropriate Twi word for the relevant terms. Participants gave examples of when their lack of marketing skills affected their ability to attract new jobs. They also mentioned that their inability to meet deadlines or work according to customer specifications sometimes led to conflict with customers. Initially, they did not see that as a major problem, but after extensive discussion they realised that they had lost customers as a result.

At the beginning of the session, Bernard, Gordon and Ahmed introduced themselves as trainers. They also explained the aims of the ABLE-Ghana project and its participating institutions. After this, they explained the objectives of the Informal Sector Training Project and of the pilot module ('Marketing of Products and Services in the Informal Sector'). In all cases, the trainers tried to use the Twi language because the majority of the participants could not communicate well in English. Bernard, with support from Gordon and Ahmed, started the training with the 'Get-to-know-you' exercise, where the participants introduced themselves and their expectations of the training. An unedited summary of the participants' expectations is presented below (in most cases, these are direct translations from Twi). We have left them in this 'raw' form in order to give a more direct impression of the woodworkers' perspectives:

> **Participant expectations:** How to improve finishing, Increase sales, How to understand customers, Want to be able to help others, How to add value and understanding of marketing and management practices, How to attract customers, Why sales have been up and down, How to manage work, How to help and handle customers, How to improve relationship with customers through communication skills.

Bernard introduced participants to the basic marketing concepts and principles and their application to the marketing of products and services in their businesses. The medium of instruction was mainly Twi, although the training manual was written in English. The use of Twi helped to enhance participants' understanding of the concepts and the principles and also enabled the majority of them to contribute to the class discussions. The key challenge during the classroom discussion was finding the appropriate Twi words to explain some of the marketing terms. However, Gordon and Ahmed were on hand to clarify some of the concepts and the principles that Bernard found difficult to get across in Twi.

The problem-based approach to teaching management methodology also helped to ensure that participants were actively involved in the classroom discussion. Practical examples that related to the participants' business operations and activities were introduced to explain the marketing concepts and principles. The use of other teaching materials such as pictures and video also helped to connect participants' personal experiences to issues that were being discussed. One problem we did not anticipate during the module preparation was that the exercises introduced as part of the classroom activities would be undermined by the poor English language skills (both oral and written) of the majority of the participants. These class exercises had to be abandoned, and were not able to serve the intended purpose of increasing participant involvement. Notwithstanding the above challenge, participants were fully engaged throughout the training session and were able to relate their personal experiences to the issues being discussed and to provided practical examples orally using the Twi language. At the end of the training, participants were given the evaluation form to complete and lunch was provided. Certificates of Participation were to be presented to the participants at a later date.

Participants' evaluation of the training

The list below is a record of the participants' evaluation of the training. These verbatim comments represent immediate reactions to the pilot training module that can be compared with the initial expectations summarised above.

> **Reasons why the course is good:** An insight into work conditions, Knowledge about customer care, Helps to improve business, Personal development and enhancement, Inspires creativity, Customer satisfaction and retention, Training of apprentice, Customer appreciation, To improve working environment and

conditions, Improve market share, Self-branding/personal branding, Very simple and explanatory, To know the way forward for our businesses.

Ways to improve the course: Government interventions, Increase the number of days of the seminar, The lecturer should be patient enough when lecturing, Course must be in a dialogue way, Use local [Twi] dialect, Expand facilities, More topics should be treated, More training, Visit workshops to study trends on the ground, Repeating training course, Bring in other trainers, Regular update of market trends, All mobile phones should be off during such sessions, There should be a specific duration for the course, There should be more publicity next time, Demonstration in the shop [i.e. the carpentry workshop], An expert in the industry should be in the team, Respect reporting time and closing time.

Overall assessments: Course is timely, Good response, Good start, Good, It is good in that, formerly we were ignorant of many things that are a hindrance to the progress of our business in general, We now know how to deal with our customers, Ensure continuity, Best thing that ever happened to the wood village and very educative, We have benefited so much, Very helpful and must be repeated in other aspects of SMEs, Educative, I find the course very useful, It has exposed us to basic issues of managing our business, Excellent programme for the wood village, Is nice, I want to continue – it is very good, Excellent programme, should be introduced to market women and cover other aspects of SMEs, Excellent presentation and participation is quite good, Thank you, Thanks for your investment in woodworkers, Continue training.

Concluding reflections

This proved to be a very popular intervention with the artisans at Sokoban. There was an enthusiastic response to the pilot programme in marketing and many constructive suggestions as to how the learning experience might be improved in future presentations. The team were aware that participants might be interested in other kinds of training. During the feedback session, the participants requested further programmes in the following areas:

♦ Product development

♦ Working capital management

♦ Bookkeeping

♦ Identifying your customer market segmentation and positioning.

The team also gained a great deal from the experience, and has identified a number of modifications that can be made to improve the effectiveness of future interventions. For example, on reflection, we will organise around a smaller class size and fewer topics. We will also group participants according to the nature of their business activity. This will help to ensure that the module is designed to meet a specific need; separate seminars can then be organised for each group. In addition, the classroom activities such as exercises will involve more pictures with participants identifying good and bad marketing practices instead of the current writing exercises, which proved less useful. A reading manual containing examples of good and bad marketing practices using pictures will also be designed. Lastly, we think it is important to establish a system for monitoring participants on regular basis to ensure practical implementation of the issues discussed during the training. Our intention is that all these modifications will be factored into the design of future modules.

References

Dia, M. (1996) *Africa's Management in the 1990s and Beyond: Reconciling Indigenous and Transplanted Institutions*, Washington, DC, World Bank.

Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. (2010) *Principles of Marketing* (global edn), Upper Saddle River, NJ, Pearson Education.

Winer, R. (2007) *Marketing Management* (3rd edn), Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall.