

**Title:** Maximizing organizational performance and goal-achievement through competency-based education

**Author:** King Costa (PhD)

**Affiliation:** Global Centre for Academic Research, 385 Boundary Road, Akasia, Pretoria, South Africa. [www.researchglobal.net](http://www.researchglobal.net)

**Email:** [costak@researchglobal.net](mailto:costak@researchglobal.net)

**Orcid ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9132-9132>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents a brief account and rationale for implementation of competency based learning in any form of management and leadership development programmes in South Africa. The fact that competency-based learning (CBL) , also known as outcomes-based learning has been scrapped from the schooling system in South Africa is unfortunate as this method enhances critical thinking skills and practical problem solving skills. This paper presents CBL as a model of meta-cognitive approach to learning that integrates both theory and practice into experiential learning through six dimensions, namely, active learning, constructive learning, cumulative learning, goal-oriented learning, learner-centered and curriculum design strategies. In the advent of the fast-paced global economy, managers and leaders need to seek those business schools that value real-time practical approach to curriculum for relevance and to maximize shareholder value through human resource development. This brief presentation ends by recommending an approach through CBL that fosters three critical pillars of leadership development, namely: intellectual, behavioral and emotional agenda.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Current global practices in learning across all disciplines and in particular Organisational Leadership & Management have proved to be inefficient and non-responsive to real world needs in that they are underpinned by too much theoretical foundations devoid of practical constructs and dictates of business (Mahomed,2004). In trying to find a perfect way, Australia and New Zealand have been leaders in implementing Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) system, followed by other countries of the world including UK, South Africa and even the US. Many countries of have since adopted outcomes based learning in their educational policies.

Whereas in South Africa the OBE model has since been phased out in public schools (Krishna, 2013), it is still used in all occupational/vocational and learning programmes. In this presentation, the author briefly discusses OBE as a model of instruction that is central to learning delivery and teaching maximises contribution at workplaces. Those institutions who employ principles of OBE will see more impactful results than those which do not use OBE, sometimes called Competency Based Learning.

Competency Based Learning (CBL) builds a framework for the role of competency modeling in both undergraduate and postgraduate Organisational Leadership & Management education which dove-tails seamlessly into practical workplace scenarios. On its own it clearly creates a role for Business & Leadership School that is consistent with practices helping to prepare learners for the real business world after graduation.

As a basis of this proposal, the author's hypothesis is that, "If properly implemented, CBL/OBE as a conceptual model of Organisational Leadership & Management education and training will transform the African learners into **entrepreneurial thought leaders** and authentic venture creators who will revive and restore African economies and livelihoods." It should therefore be noted that the key words in this presentation are ***proper implementation***.

Below is an abridged summary of how the author define CBL/OBE and what its implementation should comprise. The conclusion remarks of this presentation makes suggestions of what curriculum designers at business schools should look out for when designing a learning programme (Mokhaba, 2005).

## 2. DEFINING CBL/OBE

There are many definitions of CBL that can be found in many publications and information portals like google etc, but here the author will be providing a perspective on interpretation based on his own practical experience in business facilitation/teaching and also evidenced by research on the topic, as emphasised by Boyatzis (2008). CBL is a model of meta-cognitive approach to learning that integrates both theory and practice into experiential learning that is founded on the following six (6) key learning paradigms (Boyatzis, 2002):

- a) **Active learning** – From day one learners are encouraged to participate in the learning process and teaching practices that includes in-class participation, peer-to-peer engagements, group work, learning expeditions and independent research.
- b) **Constructive learning** – creative thinking and entrepreneurial trait-building is facilitated and innovation encouraged to allow learners to produce authentic and practical ideas and models of business applications
- c) **Cumulative learning** – learning content and facilitation methods build on existing knowledge and experience, merging the two aspects of learning to form new value and thinking.
- d) **Goal oriented learning** – Learners are introduced to engage in tasks and projects that are goal oriented towards measurable outcomes.
- e) **Learner- centered approach** – Learning programmes in Organisational Leadership & Management should stimulate learners and “push” them beyond what is known (concrete) to what is not yet known (abstract) in order to help them craft meaningful visions of their future entities. This practice on its own will develop the student’s self-awareness, social intelligence and leadership readiness skills to run an enterprise.
- f) **The Design -characteristic:** Curriculum design, aims and objectives contain three characteristics :
  - **Cognitive** – foundational competence translated in linguistics (knowing);
  - Demonstrated through the **Psychomotor** – practical competence (doing) and;
  - Manifested **intrinsically** through reflexive competence (**feeling**).

### 3. RATIONALE FOR IMPLEMENTING CBL IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT TRAINING.

In preparation of a 21st Organisational Leadership & Management degree programme both at undergraduate and postgraduate, the focus and emphasis should be totally androgogical and problem-field centred as opposed to content focus, putting the learner as the champion of their own development towards mastery of the outcomes, in a very meta-cognitive approach. Focus in facilitation and teaching should be on building business acumen and competency as fundamental in both *curriculum design, instruction* and *assessment*.

A business school's choice of OBE/CBL model should be based on the premise that business and organisational leadership education in tertiary schools should involve learners in the planning and instruction of their learning while at the same time giving them a practise of the real business world through syndications and simulations.

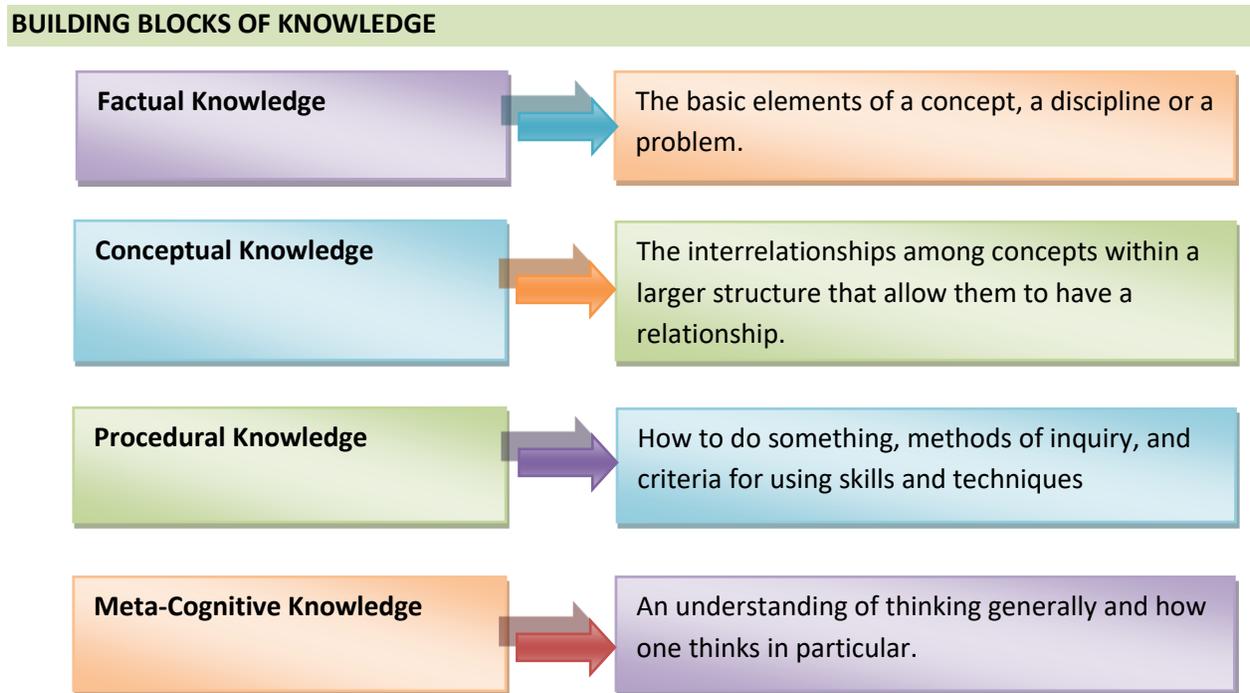
The dynamic nature and dictates of the real business world demands employees who can adapt and apply themselves to learn new knowledge and capabilities in order to compete. Learning design should be underpinned by strong belief that Organisational Leadership & Management programmes need to foster OBE or CBL philosophical constructs as a response to business environment needs, where graduates will ultimately be released to practice. Demonstration of such a response in designing learning programmes, delivery and assessment instruments should on its own support applied experiential learning through practice more than just traditional passive learning.

Those institutions of higher learning who have leadership that are fully persuaded by CBL/OBE and its benefits to learning and mainstream economy should adopt a learning delivery philosophy that is premised on the following five (5) basic constructs:

- a) Learners will advance upon demonstrated discovery and ultimate self-mastery in relation to the subject matter through application of robust knowledge development skills.
- b) To be declared competent, outcomes should include explicit, measurable, and portable learning objectives (goals) that will empower learners in achieving those outcomes.
- c) Assessment practices should create robust, dynamic and meaningful positive learning experience for learners.

- d) Although being on a facilitated front end - learners should receive rapid, differentiated support based on their personal learning needs.
- e) Specific learning outcomes put emphasis on demonstrable competencies premised on knowledge, comprehension, ability, application along with development of meta-skills.

In-depth review of these principles will seamlessly integrate well with a business school or institution of higher learning who's core objective is learner's practical **knowledge development** and its pursuit is to produce a caliber of learners that understand the real world and how it evolves, embraces the archetypes of economics of the information age and reconstruction and development opportunities in Africa (Abraham,2009).



*Figure 1: Levels of knowledge development – adapted to Bloom's Taxonomy by King Costa*

#### 4. APPLICATION OF CBL/OBE TO ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Drivers of business in the real world are key to developing learning practices for Organisational Leadership & Management education that is relevant and responsive (Shuayto, 2013).

Curriculum specifications should seek to clearly demonstrate the three key foundations of OBE/CBLE, namely:

- a) Explain or demonstrate what actions must the learner perform to achieve the desired outcome.
- b) Clarify the process map for attainment of these outcomes.
- c) Demonstrate critical success factors and performance indicators attributable to attainment of outcomes.

When designing Curriculum, a business school's focus should bear in mind the changing needs of the business world and information age, with special attention to the archetypes of Millennial and Centennial generations as obvious entry level participants into the mainstream business environment. Curriculum design focus needs to encourage self-reliance, innovation and creativity – desire to explore economic sustenance of communities and job creation modalities, (Kee et Al 2006). Key design focus area needs to align OBE/CBL approach to the following basic imperatives:

- a) Learning modules should be synergistic with the entire programme of Organisational Leadership & Management faculty. They should create a seamless fit with other modules as part of a “whole”.
- b) Learning design should identify and develop a competency framework/model with clear behavioural indicators (outcomes) that encapsulate the cognitive content requirement of the subject.
- c) Competency framework should have four quadrants underpinning programme design, namely:
  - I. problem solving;
  - II. communicating for impact;
  - III. team building and cohesion; and lastly
  - IV. continued personal and professional development.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OBE Curriculum Designers should bear in mind the changing needs of the business world and information age, tap into the archetypes of Millennials and Centennials as key focus of learning institutions but also entry level into the mainstream economic activity. Curriculum should encourage self-reliance, innovation and creativity – desire to explore economic sustenance of communities and job creation modalities. The model of teaching and instruction should encourage learners to be at the fore-front and cutting edge of their learning development. This model is now adopted by many forward thinking institutions and commonly known as “flipped classroom” concept.

Flipped methods focus on flipping the traditional pedagogical approach in adult learning where teaching instruction focuses on content delivery as opposed to androgogical approach that focuses on facilitating knowledge acquisition by putting the learner at the fore-front – learner centeredness. It is interesting to note that way back to the time of the Stoics, Socrates down to Aristotle and other notable ancient philosophers; education was always structured in an outcome based approach. If implemented well, OBE is transformative, innovative and encourages leaner creativity through experiential learning.

Taking it back to Aristotle, your curriculum design must have three main agendas:

a) **Logos** (*intellectual agenda*): this fosters transfer of skills and knowledge through clear understanding of application of basic linguistic concepts.

b) **Ethos** (*Behavioral agenda*): the programme design must recognize that human beings are likely prone to **act their way** into a **new way of thinking** than **think their way** into a **new way of acting**. The programme structure needs to engage participants to learn practical leadership experiences that are fully enriched by diverse and multiple behavioral reviews and feedback. Ethics must be core foundation of the programme in order to transform leaders to be generators of a new breed of global business pioneers and change agents.

c) **Pathos** (*Emotional agenda*): The design of the programme should produce 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders who are emotionally intelligent to understand that followers prefer leaders who practice acceptable engagement methods that stimulate them both intellectually and emotionally than those leaders are intellectually compelling only.

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