Identifying Managers' Perceptions of 'Value' in Public Management Development Programs: An International Comparative Study

Paul J. Davis
KIMEP University

This paper explores perceptions of what constitutes 'value' in public management development programs. The paper examines the extent to which perceptions of value differ among managers and the nature of these differences with particular emphasis on the geographical home of the participating managers. Seventy-three (73) mixed-level managers from four diverse regions (Australia; Sub-Saharan Africa; Arabian Peninsula and Malaysia) participated in semi-structured interviews. A Grounded Theory research design model was adopted for the study. While there were similarities between the managers from different regions, the data revealed differences in perceptions of what constitutes value between the regions. These differences are broadly: Social (Australia); Developmental (Sub-Saharan Africa); Instructional (Arabian Peninsula) and Informational (Malaysia). There are implications for those who design and deliver public management development programs and for companies and managers investing in this development pathway in the quest for delivering and receiving value for money.

INTRODUCTION

A public management development program (PMDP) is a program hosted by a private 'training' company in a public venue with an open invitation to organizations to send employees for professional development. Typically, the venue is a conference room in an up market hotel and target organizations are contacted through a mass e-marketing campaign. A PMDP commonly runs from between two and four days and the service provider engages a subject matter expert, often a private consultant, to design and deliver the program on a fixed-fee or profit-share basis. A PMDP may run with as few as seven or eight attendees up to around fifty with the average attendance, based upon this author's experience, at about twenty delegates. Public management development programs are big business globally. An internet search reveals dozens of companies, many of them global, providing PMDP on dozens of topics from strategic human resource management to supply chain management to oil and gas technical operations. The clients of the PMDP providers range from the world's most iconic multinationals through to small localized companies and government departments. This author has, as a private consultant, designed and delivered PMDP globally for eight providers since 2006.

Given the proliferation of PMDP providers in recent years and the large number of companies investing in PMDP as a management development activity, it is perhaps surprising that that this mode of management development has not been the focus for scholarly research. The objective of this paper is to raise awareness of PMDP through the investigation of an enduring issue concerning scholarly interest in management development programs: value for money or, return on investment. This paper reports on an international study which sought to identify managers' perceptions of value as derived from PMDP.

Specifically; this paper is concerned with reporting on how managers from different geographical regions perceive the notion of 'value' as it relates to PMDP.

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND VALUE

The literature review section for this paper is necessarily abbreviated due to the fact that there is no scholarly literature pertaining to public management development programs. While there is a literature gap concerning PMDP, there does exist considerable academic interest in the concept of value in management development initiatives. There is general agreement in the literature that management development activities should, in some measure, deliver what is broadly considered 'value' to both participants and their organizations. It is not necessarily the case that value equates to financial return or benefit although that is most assuredly one focus for much research on the topic. In its most generic sense, value can constitute anything that may be said to have made the management development activity worthwhile or justifiable. In addition to a financial return, development initiatives can return non-financial or indirect financial value in the form of, for example, additional skills, knowledge or competence or tacit outcomes like increased levels of engagement or confidence.

That there has been an increasing emphasis on proving the value of management development initiatives in organizations is well documented. O' Connor *et al.,* (2006) have said that this measurement of value is to demonstrate to the organization that management development investment contributes to organizational performance. While the authors note that doubts do persist regarding the real value of management development, they evidence that investment in management development initiatives continues to grow. Cook (2006) agrees that conjecture regarding the worth of management development investment persists. He highlights the challenge in proving a link between management development and company profitability, yet argues that management development initiatives can be evaluated for impact in some form.

It is the general agreement that value has many forms (and the difficulties proving infallible links between management development and financial returns) that have led many organizations to weigh value in management development by non-financial measures. Cook (2006) makes the point that organizations often measure customer satisfaction levels or productivity outputs in lieu of financial evaluations when assessing the return on investment in management development initiatives. Indeed; Adison and Cunningham (2006) acknowledge that while a key reason for investing in management development initiatives is to increase company profits, an equally important reason for so doing is to increase customer satisfaction levels.

This research project is concerned with one specific form of management professional development: PMDP. As explained in the opening paragraph of the paper, PMDP are formal training programs. There is conflicting data regarding the place of formal learning programs in contemporary management development initiatives. O' Connor *et al.,* (2006) are far from lone voices in their criticisms concerning the effectiveness of formal training; arguing in favour of non-formal learning modes for management development. Others, however, argue that there is still a place for formal training in management development initiatives. Adison and Cunningham (2006) provide the example of formal training being an ideal mode of learning for specialist knowledge. Meanwhile, McGurk (2010) reports on a formal training program for managers led to more effective compliance with certain business objectives. McGurk does note, however, that the formal training program he reports on had little impact on contributing to strategic change within the organization. This may suggest that formal training as a management development initiative is more likely to achieve certain kinds of results than other kinds and so formal training might best be used in management development at particular times for particular desired business effects.

Furthermore; disagreement exists in the literature concerning the popularity of formal training in organizations as a management development exercise. While O' Connor and colleagues claim formal training is in decline (2006), others have found that formal learning dominates management development initiatives in many organizations (Suutari and Viitala, 2008). Irrespective of whether the sun is setting on formal learning programs within organizations, externally run programs such as PMDP are widely used

by organizations for the purposes of management development and therefore deserve to be measured for value along with other forms of professional management development.

This research project measured the value of PMDP through the perceptions of participants attending a PMDP event. Using participant perception, opinion and reflection to evaluate a management development experience is a well established practice according to the scholarly literature on the topic. The evaluation of a management development program in a large manufacturing plant in India (Ghosh *et al.,* 2011), for example, used a questionnaire to identify participant perceptions of their management development program. The questionnaire sought participant opinions about the 'clarity of the trainer'; 'communication of the trainer'; 'facilities'; 'food' and 'practical application of the learning'. A questionnaire, along with focus groups, was used by another organization to assess participant perceptions of their management development experience Billington *et al.,* (2009).

Interviews, the method of assessing value applied by the current research study, are also a valid technique for collecting data in the form of participant perceptions regarding management development initiatives. Shefy and Sadler-Smith (2006) conducted face-to-face interviews with managers in a small hi-tech company both immediately following and some time after the completion of a management development initiative to assess participant role perceptions and behaviors. Similarly, Lennox-Terrion (2006) used semi-structured interviews, as this author did, to evaluate the value of a management development program at the University of Ottowa, Canada. In this study, participants were asked to reflect upon their perceptions of their learning and the usefulness of the training to their jobs.

Self-reporting is another approach to gathering the perceptions of managers about their management development experience. Prager and Such (2010) have said that self-reporting by participants is a valid and useful way of assessing the value of management development initiative. In a similar vein, Billington *et al.,* (2009) report on a management development initiative that sought participant self-evaluation. In this case participants were asked to assess their own learning advances measured against the program's intended learning outcomes.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Seventy-three (73) managers volunteered to be a part of the research project through participating in a semi-structured interview with the researcher at some stage during their attendance at a PMDP facilitated by the researcher. Fourteen (14) participants were from Sub-Sahara African countries; Seventeen (17) from Australia; nineteen (19) were from countries on the Arabian Peninsula and the remaining twenty-three (23) were from Malaysia. Forty-nine (49) participants were male and twenty-four (24) were female. In terms of position, eight (8) participants identified as junior or front-line managers; thirty-three (33) identified as mid-level managers; twenty (20) identified as senior managers and the remaining twelve (12) identified as executives. Participants were from a diverse range of industries including oil and gas; banking; financial services; manufacturing; hospitality; media; government; logistics; education services; transportation; information services; telecommunications and tourism. All but eleven (11) of the participants worked in some area of human resource management. Company size varied considerably from fifty employees in the smallest to over twelve thousand in the largest. In regards to age, nine (9) participants were aged under thirty. Sixteen (16) were aged between thirty and thirty-nine; twenty-seven (27) were aged between forty and forty-nine; sixteen (16) were aged between fifty and fifty-nine and the remaining five (5) were aged sixty or above. The participants from the Arabian Peninsula were from: Oman (9); United Arab Emirates (5); Saudi Arabia (3) Bahrain (1) and Kuwait (1). The participants from Sub-Sahara Africa were from: South Africa (9); Tanzania (3); Namibia (1); Botswana (1).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is founded upon a constructivist / interpretivist paradigm. Firstly, ontologically, constructivism embraces the concept that reality is created through a process of inquiry. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000) this is quite different to the positivist paradigm which posits reality as an

absolute and something that is readily apprehendable. Constructivism is especially well suited as the paradigmatic lens for the subject of this study as constructivism posits that people create meaning through interactions and that those interactions create what is perceived as reality. PMDP are a form of management development that absolutely rely upon interactions between people for learning to take place.

Constructivism also complements the study epistemologically. Lincoln and Guba (2000) observe that the epistemology of constructivism is transactional and subjectivist while positivist paradigms perceive knowledge from an objectivist and dualist perspective. Schwandt (2000) has said that the epistemologies of constructivism and positivism are markedly different. Positivist epistemology, he contends, is realist and empiricist in nature wherein positivism claims that: *"there can be some kind of unmediated and direct grasp of the empirical world and that knowledge (i.e. the mind) simply reflects or mirrors what is out there"* (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197).

Axiologically, this researcher also perceives that the true worth of meaning emanates from the social construction of that meaning through human interaction. That meaning is given shape by the values, beliefs, ethics and norms of those interacting and that meaning is subjective by nature. Positivist-influenced axiology is non-formative and detached; values and beliefs are isolated and can be controlled and excluded. Reality is predefined and can be captured. Finally, methodologically, according to Lincoln and Guba (2000), positivist paradigms tend towards quantitative research methods while constructivist paradigms tend towards qualitative methodology. Positivism seeks largely to test hypotheses while constructivism is hermeneutical and dialectical.

As noted, this study adopts a constructivist / interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism was chosen because paradigmatically it essentially seeks to understand human behaviour or attitudes. According to Schwandt (2000), interpretivism holds that human behaviour is inherently meaningful. He explains that in order to understand human behaviour such as voting or marrying, the researcher must come to know the meanings that constitute these behaviours. There is an important reason here why interpretivism, along with constructivism, was selected as the paradigm for this study. Therefore, interpretivism, with its focus on understanding human behaviour and attitudes and its principle that behaviour inherently holds meaning, is a valuable construct for this study.

This research project is framed within the qualitative research methodology. Watkins has said that qualitative research is *"Research that does not include numbers and statistical figures or "count" data."* (Watkins, 2012, p. 163) which is aligned with the data collection method for this study: semi-structured interviews. In a similarly poignant phrase that is central to the perspectives of this study, Carter and Morrow define qualitative research as a means *"to explore the meanings made by human beings"* (Carter and Morrow, 2007, p. 205). Furthermore; Andersson (2010) has said that the study of managers and management is best achieved through a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach, he argued, allows for a proximity to the managers and the complexity of their everyday roles.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

According to Evans and Kotchetkova (2009), the choice of data collection method can have a significant impact on the nature of the data collected and the role to be played by the researcher in analyzing that data. They give the example of deliberative data collection methods such as round-tables; citizen juries and workshops that can almost completely sideline the researcher from data collection. However, having chosen a qualitative research methodology, interaction-based data collection strategies were also open to this researcher. Interaction-based strategies provide a 'close up' role for the researcher in data collection and that was the preferred role this researcher desired to take.

Interaction-based strategies are *"basically conversations with a research purpose"* (Cooksey and McDonald, 2011, p. 315). That is to say, they are premised on some kind of person-to-person connection whereby the researcher and subject are engaged with one another in some form of dialogue. Commonly, this would be face-to-face but with the advent of modern communications technologies such as VOIP, the

two may not be physically in the same location. The interaction-based data collection method adopted for this research project is semi-structured interviews.

This researcher decided that semi-structured interviews struck the right balance between very personable on the one hand and impersonal on the other. Another reason for selecting semi-structured interviews for this research project is the fact that semi-structured interviews are a data collection strategy consistent with the constructivist / interpretivist paradigm (Cooksey and McDonald, 2011). Furthermore; Cooksey and McDonald also assert that research that adopts a Grounded Theory approach, as this study does, frequently use semi-structured interviews as a primary data gathering method.

Semi-structured interviews have a number of attractive characteristics which this researcher found appropriate for the intentions of this project. The following four strengths of semi-structured interviews are provided by Cooksey and McDonald (2000). Firstly; the semi-structured interview is designed to encourage a more natural conversation. Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to follow, rather than fight against, the natural flow of the interview as questions do not have to necessarily be asked in the same order. This compliments the above point of a more natural conversation. The third of the four strengths of semi-structured interviews is that they allow the researcher to explore emergent issues that materialise unexpectedly. Cooksey and McDonald (2011) explain that sometimes during an interview something is said that may not have been predicted but is pertinent to the research themes. Semi-structured interviews give the researcher the flexibility to diverge and explore emergent topics. Finally; semi-structured interviews let the interviewee do the talking and drive the flow of conversation. There need only be minimal guidance from the researcher to sometimes seek clarification or to move the conversation along.

DATA ANALYSIS

This project applied a Grounded Theory (GT) approach as the framework and process for data analysis. Although Grounded Theory was originally positivist epistemologically and objectivist by design, GT methods have been used by qualitative researchers since the approach was first developed 45 years ago (Charmaz, 2000). Today, GT is associated most with qualitative research methods and while there remain many 'schools' of GT research, this researcher adopts the well established constructivist GT method. Constructivist GT as proposed by Charmaz is adopted for guiding the research elements of this study because it a most appropriate approach for understanding people and their attitudes within the context of their work environment. GT methods have moved a long way from their positivist, prescriptive roots and constructivist applications of GT are flexible and adopted to focus on the construction of meaning.

In principle, GT methods: *"Consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analysing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data"* (Charmaz, 2000, p. 509). However, GT is fundamentally about analytical strategies and not data collection methods (Geiger and Turley, 2003; Leonard and McAdam, 2001). Optimally, GT requires extensive rich data be collected with thick description. However, GT is not prescriptive about how this data is collected but Charmaz (2000) has said that interviews are an excellent means of collecting sufficiently rich data for GT analysis and that interviews can be used *alone* to achieve this. Douglas (2003) has said that interviews are the predominant data collection method used in GT guided research and Creswell *et al.,* (2007) have also said that GT is a valuable research approach where interviews are to be the main data collection method. Interviewing is the data collection method adopted by the present study.

GT methods are particularly distinct because the various elements such as data collection, coding, analysis and theory development are not separate steps carried out in set order which is common practice with other methods. Rather, GT is better perceived as a single, holistic and fluid process whereby the 'steps' are mixed in with one another. The original architects of GT, Glaser and Strauss describe GT thus:

> *"The joint collection, coding and analysis of data is the underlying operation. The generation of theory, coupled with the notion of theory as a process, should blur and*

intertwine continually, from the beginning of an investigation to its end" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 43).

The GT process applied to this study is represented in Figure 1. It should be reiterated that there is not a single, universal GT data analysis methodology and studies do vary in their approach to adopting GT methods for data analysis. This research project has surveyed a great deal of the literature on the topic and the approach this researcher has adopted is influenced by Glaser and Strauss (1967); Strauss and Corbin (1990); Charmaz (2000) and Douglas (2003).
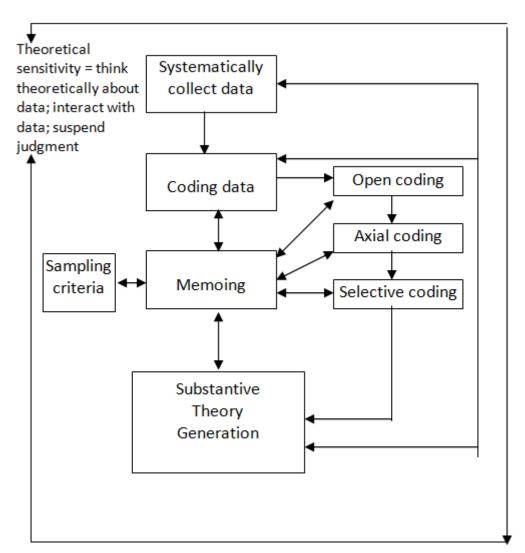
FIGURE 1
GROUNDED THEORY DATA ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Adapted from Douglas (2003)

As data began to materialise from the semi-structured interviews this researcher began the process of coding that data. Following the advice of Charmaz (2000) that data analysis should begin early and then be ongoing, this researcher began analysis at the completion of the tenth interview. Douglas (2003) describes the coding process as a result of interrogating the data and sorting it to formulate provisional

answers. The process involves breaking down data, making sense of it and reassembling it in new ways. The objective of coding is that through coding text, categories begin to emerge and, secondly, coding commences the chain of theory development. Charmaz cautions that categories should not be pre-determined and this researcher was careful to begin the analytical exercise with no existing categories. The researcher should allow him or herself to be guided by the codes; they may lead the researcher in unexpected or new directions.

As data began to materialise from the semi-structured interviews this researcher began the process of coding that data. Following the advice of Charmaz (2000) that data analysis should begin early and then be ongoing, this researcher began analysis at the completion of the tenth interview. Douglas (2003) describes the coding process as a result of interrogating the data and sorting it to formulate provisional answers. The process involves breaking down data, making sense of it and reassembling it in new ways. The objective of coding is that through coding text, categories begin to emerge and, secondly, coding commences the chain of theory development. Charmaz cautions that categories should not be pre-determined and this researcher was careful to begin the analytical exercise with no existing categories. The researcher should allow him or herself to be guided by the codes; they may lead the researcher in unexpected or new directions.

This researcher adopted a thorough, three level coding process advanced by Douglas (2003) and Charmaz (2000). The fist coding activity is called open or critical coding; the second level is known as axial coding and the third level is called selective or focused coding. Open coding involves analysing the text line-by-line or phrase-by-phrase. This is a slow, focused and methodical process which ensures every word is read through an analytical lens. Charmaz (2000) also observes that this approach deters the researcher from imposing extant theories on the data or his or her own beliefs. Open coding supports constructivist ideology as the process focuses the researcher on the subject's views of their realities. Charmaz also notes that open coding empowers the researcher's ability to relate the respondent's views to the contextual background that has informed the research problems.

Open coding helps keep the researcher thinking about the meaning that is being revealed through the data and forces continuous questioning of that meaning. Line-by-line coding also quickly reveals any patterns that may become categories. The process also greatly assists comparisons to be made between data. Charmaz (2000) stresses the importance of comparisons in data analysis exercises. Comparisons can include comparing different respondents' views and experiences of the same phenomena; comparing data supplied by the same respondent; comparing codes for consistency and comparing categories for similarities and differences.

Following open coding this researcher then undertook axial coding, the second 'level' of data coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), axial coding is the process of reassembling data to identify connections between a category and its sub-categories. This facilitates a deeper appreciation of the category in terms of its context and consequences. Douglas (2003) recommends that axial coding arrange the line-by-line codes to identify any relationships between them for the purposes of revealing core codes or primary codes. This researcher found that axial coding can take some time to reveal or decide upon core or major codes and the process progresses more fluidly as more data are analysed.

The third and final level of coding is called focused (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) or selective (Douglas, 2003) coding. The goal here is to take codes that appear frequently from the previous exercise so the researcher can refine and group these codes into clear and more specific sub-codes. For example; this researcher found through his analysis that the code "identifies HR functions" appeared very frequently but, on closer examination, contained many different functions of HRM departments. The single "identifies HR functions" code was unmanageable in size and scope to work with so this researcher broke it down into more specific and focused sub-codes (e.g. "recruitment"; "training"; "records management" and so forth). Another example was that the code which was known as "Interactions with HR" was split into three sub-codes: "positive interactions"; "neutral interactions" and "negative interactions."

Strauss and Corbin (1990) introduce a matrix in relation to selective coding. It provides a visual representation of the relative importance or centrality of conditions that influence respondent perceptions or opinions. They argue that this can enhance the quality of the researcher's explanations and conclusions

about phenomena by allowing the layering of data . This researcher developed a concentric circles model based on this idea and found it very helpful. The concentric circles model was used as a technique to visually map the relative importance, or centrality, of interviewee responses to the key themes of the questions. An example from this research project is provided in Figure 2

This researcher also used memoing throughout the research process. He found the concept is much like the common use of small 'sticky notes' which have become ubiquitous in modern organisations. According to Douglas (2003):

> *"Memos are written continuously through the entire research process... they are used to reflect upon and explain meanings ascribed to codes by actors and the researcher; to identify relationships between codes; to clarify, sort and extend ideas; and to record crucial quotations or phrases"* (p. 48).

Memoing is a common technique in Ground Theory framed data analysis. Memoing encourages the researcher to minute thoughts and record observations that may become useful later. It is a way of capturing ideas and suggestions for self as they occur which might otherwise be forgotten when the particular idea becomes relevant later in the analysis or formulation of grounded theories. Memoing can be a way of connecting thoughts and ideas that span the various stages of the data analysis exercise.
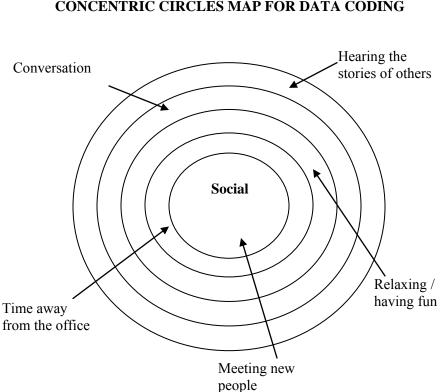
FIGURE 2
CONCENTRIC CIRCLES MAP FOR DATA CODING

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participants across the four regions provided many examples of what they perceive as constituting value in PMDP. There was a broad consensus on three issues that equated to value for money: new learning or new information; content relevant to current work context and issues; benefiting from the real

experiences of the facilitator and other delegates. Typical examples of the consensus among delegates from different regions on the point of new learning and new information include:

> *"It will be valuable if I walk away knowing something useful that I didn't know before I walked it...you want to hear something different; not just what you already know."*
> (Australian delegate; female; media; 40-50 years)

> *"I come to learn, so I hope that there will be much new information and I will hear ideas that I can use in the company. A training program is...should be...a learning program."*
> (Malaysian delegate; male; telecommunications; 30-40 years)

> *"For me the important thing is to get some competitive advantage for my division and my company, and that means some kind of latest thinking to apply in the job...something that my competitor does not know because he didn't attend the program. I rely on the program to give me an edge; that's really what I am paying for."*
> (Sub-Sahara African delegate; female; oil and gas; 30-40 years)

The second point of broad agreement among delegates from different regions was that value equated to gaining relevant information or learning to current work issues and contexts:

> *"We have some reorganisation in our company; a restructure, and I am hoping to find out advice and ways to deal with the human side of restructuring to manage our employees through the process. This is important right now; a top priority for us."*
> (Arabian Peninsula delegate; male; oil and gas; 50-60 years)

> *"There are some major challenges...well, problems to be honest, that we are facing right now and we are looking for answers wherever we can. Maybe this course can shed some light...that would be really helpful."*
> (Sub-Sahara African delegate; female; government; 30-40 years)

> *"We want to implement a talent management program in our company so this course obviously looked perfect for us."*
> (Malaysian delegate; female; logistics; 30-40 years)

The third issue upon which there was general consensus in terms of perceiving value from PMDP was benefiting from the experiences of the facilitator and other delegates:

> *"It's always good to come to this type of thing and find out what others are doing in their companies...not just to learn what's working but also what doesn't work."*
> (Australian delegate; male; financial services; 50-60 years)

> *"The facilitator is an expert in the field so it is valuable to listen to his experience about industry trends and best practices."*
> (Arabian Peninsula delegate; male; transportation; 40-50 years)

> *"Networking with other delegates is the most valuable part of the program...the facilitator is very knowledgeable but hearing the experiences of peers and sharing ideas and stories with them is what really helps to improve how you do things."*
> (Sub-Sahara African delegate; female; utilities; 40-50 years)

There were, however some distinct patterns observable from the data based upon the geographic clusters. It was discernible, for instance, that the Australian delegates described value partially in the context of social dimensions such as having fun; chatting with others over lunch; connecting with others on social media; enjoying a break from regular work; meeting new people; relaxing; de-stressing and mingling with others during coffee breaks:

> *"I come because it is a way to escape the office and unwind a bit while still being seen to be doing something worthwhile...I enjoy the social part of the program where you can relax but still be discovering something through having a yarn with others."*
>   (Australian delegate; male; logistics; 40-50 years)

The social aspects of PMDP were not mentioned at all by delegates from the Arabian Peninsula and very little by those from Malaysia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Australian interviewees also stressed that they attended the program to validate what they were doing in business; check they have the latest knowledge; to refresh their knowledge and to benchmark their professional practice against what other delegates were doing in their companies:

> *"We send people to training like this for reassurance that we are on the right track... we are a market leader so there shouldn't be too much new in these programs; its more about making sure that what we are doing is right.*
>   (Australian delegate; female; media; 40-50 years)

Therefore, for the Australian delegates, there was much more of an emphasis on seeking reassurance about what they know and what they are doing rather than actively seeking to learn or acquire new knowledge. This contrasted sharply with the Sub-Saharan African delegates and the Malaysian delegates who sought new knowledge from their PMDP experience.

The delegates from Malaysia placed a much greater emphasis on the learning materials as a measure of value than the other three clusters. Common responses from the Malaysian delegates included: quality of materials; quantity of materials; number of 'take away' resources; number and usefulness of models and check-lists; follow up support from the facilitator; bonus resources; practicality of resources; clear explanations in the learning materials. While some delegates from other clusters referred to knowledge or what they learned during PMDP, the focus was not on the physical materials themselves but on what could be extrapolated and applied from course content. Delegates from the other clusters paid scant interest in the physical learning guides and resources:

> *"There should be a lot of well presented resources to take back to the business because when the training is over, the trainer is gone, and you need to maintain the, how to say it, momentum of the training days."*
>   (Malaysian delegate; male; manufacturing; 40-50 years)

> *"I like the booklets and soft copy of the PowerPoint slides...I can return to my colleagues with information to share and I can train them using the materials. This way, everybody can benefit, not just the two or three fortunate enough to attend the workshop."*
>   (Malaysian delegate; female; banking; 30-40 years)

Delegates from the Arabian Peninsula discussed the concept of value as being much more related to the knowledge and expertise of the facilitator than did the delegates from other regions. For those from the Arab nations, value was inextricably linked with what the facilitator knew and shared with them. These delegates saw the facilitator as the provider of answers and suggestions; a subject matter expert who should provide solutions which can be relied upon. Several delegates saw the facilitator as someone who should not be without a good answer and who should not be unsure in answering questions. There

was even the expectation that the facilitator should be able to readily provide high quality, on-the-spot solutions to specific, real business problems the delegates' companies currently face:

> *"We need to know what is the best practice in the best foreign companies and we need the expert trainer to tell us and show us...my company sends many people to trainings to know how we should be working...we wish to know the right ways."*
>
> (Arabian Peninsula delegate; male; oil and gas; 50-60 years)

> *"My company has questions about what we should do next in developing employee competence...is it this way or that way? This model or that model? I expect to talk with the trainer about our company and find the answers for us."*
>
> (Arabian Peninsula delegate; male; construction; 50-60 years)

Even though PMDP are for a general audience, unknown to the facilitator, the Arabian delegates held far higher expectations of the facilitator's ability to meet specific business conundrums with infallible solutions. In this way, the Arabian Peninsula delegates tended to equate value with the facilitator's ability to instruct them what to do and to solve their business problems. In contrast, this theme did not emerge from the responses of delegates from the other three regions who sought information or ideas which they might adapt and adopt to address business challenges.

Finally, the Sub-Sahara African delegates placed a much greater emphasis on professional networking and professional development as benchmarks of value than did the other delegates. The Arabian Peninsula delegates did not mention networking with other delegates or professional development in their interview responses and while the Australia delegates did talk about interactions with other delegates, the focus was on social rather than professional interactions. Three of the African delegates explained that they get few opportunities to attend PMDP facilitated by international specialists and that therefore such events can be a rare opportunity to meet their professional peers from other companies in other countries. Exchanging business cards; asking other delegates questions; listening to others' problems and solutions; developing skills and knowledge; hearing how to solve business problems; practical class activities and group discussions were some of the common responses given by the Sub-Saharan African delegates when describing what value in PMDP means to them.

> *"The most important thing for me is to get among the other people from other companies and listen and talk with them...I always leave a program like this with everybody's contact details...the best information often comes from your peers."*
>
> (Sub-Sahara African delegate; female; utilities; 40-50 years)

> *"I think trainers don't want to come to Africa; we don't see many high quality international trainers here so when they do come, we don't want to miss the opportunity to up-skill and add to our knowledge...I love the networking such programs allow."*
>
> (Sub-Saharan African delegate; female; oil and gas; 30-40 years)

Table 1 provides a diagrammatic summary of the key regional perceptions of value relating to PMDP. The thematic differences that emerged from the data reveal an insight into the varying foci for perceiving value that managers in different regions would appear to have. The priorities for different regions may be influenced by factors such as cultural or societal norms and values; national or industrial stage of economic development; organizational conditioning or other such variables. This study does not seek or claim to understand the underlying reasons for the apparent regional differences in perceptions of value concerning PMDP only to highlight that differences do exist. Future studies may consider investigating the associated issues of this study.

TABLE 1
VALUE PERCEPTION TYPOLOGIES FOR REGIONAL CLUSTERS

Australia	Sub-Saharan Africa
Social	*Developmental*
Non-formal, ex-curricula interactions for fun, enjoyment and non-professional discourse; validation of current practice	*Professional networking; professional skill and knowledge development; enhance practice; learn from others*
Arabian Peninsula	**Malaysia**
Instructional	*Informational*
Solutions to real business problems; expert advice from facilitator; answers and direction; address specific individual concerns	*New tools and guides for adaptation; Resources to take away and implement; prescriptive guidance*

Table 2 provides some recommendations for public management development program designers and instructors. The table highlights the differences in design preferences based upon the value perception typologies presented in Table 1. The recommendation is that the design features of different programs in terms of content delivery and instructional style need to vary significantly to best meet the differing value perceptions of different regional audiences. For example; a very flexible, even negotiable, program structure might be welcomed by Australian managers whereas a formal, pre-determined, rigid and carefully timed program structure is most likely to be appreciated by delegates from Malaysia and the Arabian Peninsula. In terms of delivery style, learners from Australia and Sub-Sahara Africa reflect a strong preference for a high level of control over their own learning. For Australians this would likely be informal and social while for Sub-Saharan Africans it would be learning-situated and guided by the instructor. Self-guided learning, however, would not likely be well received by, in particular, Arabian Peninsula managers whose typology suggests a far more instructor-centered approach would be most suitable.

In terms of content design, Arabian Peninsula and Malaysia managers would probably prefer content heavy with facts in both the facilitator's oral delivery and the printed learning materials. These delegates do not indicate a preference for having to interpret or contextualize content; it should be readily understandable and able to resonate in itself with their needs. Australians, conversely, seem much less interested in facts and data and indicate a preference for receiving knowledge tacitly and informally. For Sub-Saharan Africans a balance between informal and formal content delivery would appear to be important as they consider both casual networking and instructor delivery to be important for their learning needs. Participative interaction is strongly favored by Australians and Sub-Saharan Africans and strongly disassociated with what Arabian Peninsula and Malaysian managers value according to the interviews. Finally Table 2 shows that the managers in different regions also have differing preferences for the level of authority the facilitator exerts over the learning process. Again, there is a big difference between the Australian managers' preference and that of the Arabian Peninsula managers with the former's typology suggesting a preference for minimal facilitator control and the latter preferring a high level of facilitator control.

TABLE 2
PROGRAM DESIGN FEATURE RECOMMENDATIONS

	Australia	Sub-Sahara Africa	Arabian Peninsula	Malaysia
Formal program structure	*Low*	*Moderate*	*High*	*High*
Self-guided learning	*High*	*High*	*Low*	*Moderate*
Preference for facts over tacit knowledge	*Low*	*Moderate*	*High*	*High*
Participative interaction	*High*	*High*	*Low*	*Low*
Preference trainer control over learning	*Low*	*Moderate*	*High*	*High*

CONCLUSION

The research found that while managers from different regions of the world do share common perceptions of value pertaining to PMDP, they differ starkly, too, on what equates to value in their opinion. The implications for PMDP providers and organisations investing in PMDP as a part of their strategy for the professional development of managers are significant. Firstly; service providers and the consultants they contract to design and deliver PMDP should avoid a generic approach to hosting and delivering the same program in different regions. For better results and increased levels of client satisfaction, the research findings suggest that a tailored approach be adopted depending on the origin of the participants. Secondly, canvassing participant expectations and needs prior to the commencement of the program may be a useful tactic to help the program facilitator better meet the 'benchmarks of value' of participants.

A third point worth considering is the design and structure of programs. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, more applied practice and simulations would appear to heighten the participants' sense of value in the program. They may also prefer more effort on the part of the program trainer to encourage and facilitate networking and information exchange. In Australia, meanwhile, more time for socializing and a less rigid course structure might heighten participant satisfaction with their investment. In Malaysia a greater focus on the volume and quality of take-away materials would seem to be important to increasing participant perceptions of value. For Arabian Peninsula PMDP it would appear that greater focus on facilitator preparation and a pre-course questionnaire for participants informing the facilitator ahead of time about specific questions and issues participants have is integral to a successful program.

A further conclusion emanating from the research findings is that organizations investing in PMDP should better understand the expectations of their managers and how service providers aim to meet these expectations. Organizations should also carefully consider their own perceptions of value and whether these are aligned with their managers who are attending programs. Briefing managers before they attend PMDP could be one way to ensure that these managers also consider what their employer considers to be valuable in their attendance at a given program.

This research has provided an important insight into a booming area of management professional development. It would seem there is more to discover about PMDP and their value. More research on this

topic would benefit PMDP service providers, consultants, managers undergoing development and their organizations.

REFERENCES

Addison, S. and Cunningham, G. (2006), 'Developing your management team', *Industrial and Commercial Training,* Vol. 38, No. 7, pp. 379 - 383.

Andersson, M. (2010), 'Struggles of managerial being and becoming: Experiences from managers' personal development training', *Journal of Management Development,* Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 167 - 176.

Billington, L., Neeson, R. and Barrett, R. (2009), 'The effectiveness of workshops as managerial learning opportunities', *Education and Training,* Vol. 51, No. 8/9, pp. 733 - 746.

Carter, R.T. and Morrow, S.L. (2007), 'Qualitative research: current and best practices', *The Counseling Psychologist,* Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 205 - 208.

Charmaz, K. (2000), 'Grounded theory: objectivist and constructivist methods,' in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed.),* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Cook, P. (2006), 'Management and leadership development: making it work', *Industrial and Commercial Training,* Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 49 - 52.

Cooksey, R. and McDonald, G. (2011), *Surviving and Thriving in Postgraduate Research,* Prahan, Victoria, Tilde University Press.

Creswell, J.W., Hanson, W.E., Clark-Plano, V.L. and A. Morales (2007), 'Qualitative research designs: selection and implementation', *The Counseling Psychologist,* Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 236 - 264.

Douglas, D. (2003), 'Grounded theories of management: A methodological review', *Management Research News,* Vol. 26, No. 5, pp. 44 - 52.

Evans, R. and Kotchetkova, I. (2009), 'Qualitative research and deliberative methods: promise or peril?", *Qualitative Research,* Vol. 9, No. 5, pp. 625 - 643.

Geiger, S. and Turley, D. (2003), 'Grounded theory in sales research: an investigation of salespeople's client relationships', *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing,* Vol. 18, No. 6/7, pp. 580 - 594.

Ghosh, P., Prasad-Joshi, J., Satyawadi, R., Mukherjee, U. and Ranjan, R. (2011), 'Evaluating the effectiveness of a training programme with trainee reaction', *Industrial and Commercial Training,* Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 247 - 255.

Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research,* London, Weiderfeld and Nicolson.

Lennox-Terrion, J. (2006), 'The impact of a management training program for university administrators', *Journal of Management Development,* Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 183 - 194.

Leonard, D. and McAdam, R. (2001), 'Grounded theory methodology and practitioner reflexivity in TQM research', *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management,* Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 180 - 194.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (2000), 'Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences,' in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed.),* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

McGurk, P. (2010), 'Outcomes of management and leadership development', *Journal of Management Development,* Vol. 29, No. 5, pp. 457 - 470.

O' Connor, M., Mangan, J. and Cullen, J. (2006), 'Management development in Ireland: justifying the investment', *Journal of Management Development,* Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 325 - 349.

Prager, H. and Such, B. (2010), 'Building a global management pipeline', *Industrial and Commercial Training,* Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 160 - 163.

Schwandt, T.A. (2000), 'Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics and Social Constructivism,' in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed.),* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Shefy, E. and Sadler-Smith, E. (2006), 'Applying holistic principles in management development', *Journal of Management Development,* Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 368 - 385.

Strauss, A.L. and Corbin, J. (1990), *Basics of Quantitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques,* Newbury Park, Sage.

Suutari, V. and Viitala, R. (2008), 'Management development of senior executives', *Personnel Review,* Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 375 - 392.

Watkins, D.C. (2012), 'Qualitative research: The importance of conducting research that doesn't "count"', *Health Promotion Practice,* Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 153 - 158.