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Developing an Operational Model for the Degree Programme of International Business at the Saimaa University of Applied Sciences

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Abstract

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This thesis was made for the Saimaa University of Applied Sciences. The main goal was to investigate how the operational model of the International Business program should be formed that it would answer to the needs of working life. The objective of the research was to find out the needs of the South Karelian organizations for international business competence.

The information of Saimaa UAS' needs, the current study plan of the IB programme, different operational models as well as learning environments and teaching methods were gathered from books and internet sources. Six local organizations from different operation fields were interviewed by a theme interview method in order to find out about their need for international business competence.

The results were analyzed with a thematic approach. Based on the findings the new operational model was created for the IB programme. The new model is a cooperative model designed to answer to the needs of the local organizations as well as to answer to the Saimaa UAS' need to offer requisite expertise for the IB students. Further study can be applied to investigate the opportunities of Russian business possibilities and how the IB programme could better make use of the international cooperation.

Keywords: international business, competence, need charting, benchmarking, operational model, cooperative company, learning environment

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1 Introduction

Today the needed expertise and competences in work are changing along the development in the working life. The highly competitive operating environment requires the employees to have more and more versatile competences and adaptability.

According to the Action Plan 2010–2012 (Saimaa UAS 2010, p. 10) the challenge is to provide requisite expertise for students so that they are employed in their professional fields after the graduation.

The Action Plan 2010–2012 (Saimaa UAS 2010, p. 10) also emphasises that responding to that challenge requires closer cooperation with local organisations, anticipation of the needed expertise as well as constant development of study plans. Correspondingly, the International Business (IB) program could be developed into an integrated environment where students, teachers and local organisations work together even closer.

To serve the needs, to support the development and to contribute to respond to the challenge, the thesis proposes an alternative operational model that could be established for the IB program of Saimaa UAS.

1.1 The goals and definition of the research

In order to discover the best suitable model, the thesis is going to research the needs of the local organizations – what kind of international business competencies they demand, as well as what kind of, and in what scale, they have genuine assignments for IB students.

According to the discovered needs the thesis will develop a new model which will consist of a new study plan, new learning environment and new teaching methods. The aim is that the new model answers to the needs of local companies and supports student’s learning of theoretical, practical and generic skills in international business.

This thesis is done as a pair work between Anu Forsback and Johannes Liuska. In the beginning of the process the researchers have topics assigned for both to execute. The work is divided between the researchers so that Anu Forsback writes mostly chapters 4, 10, and the abstract and Johannes Liuska writes mainly chapters 2, 5, 9. The researchers write together chapters 1, 3, 6, 7 and 8. The final results are edited by both of the researchers as the thesis and topics are gone trough and modified mutually along the thesis process.

1.2 Reason for the thesis

The reason why the thesis is executed is that there has been, and will be, a lot of progression in the development of new learning environments. The universities are looking for new ways to contribute learning and to reach the learning objectives. Saimaa UAS has declared that the education processes should be developed thus new operational models and learning environments have been established at the Saimaa UAS. In addition, the other Finnish universities have also developed new models based on their own objectives.

1.2.1 Strategy and Action Plan

Based on the Strategy 2010–2015 (Saimaa UAS 2010, p. 13) the particular educational development objectives are to: 1) increase the efficiency of the education processes, 2) develop the studies to respond to the needs of working life, 3) develop the teachers’ pedagogic expertise, and finally 4) develop the learning environment. Thus there is a need to develop the IB programme.

The Action Plan (Saimaa UAS 2010 p. 10) indicates that increasing the efficiency of the education processes requires varied, innovative and student-centred improvement measures. The thesis supports to reach the development objectives of Saimaa UAS.

The Action Plan (Saimaa UAS 2010, p. 15) also notifies that the successful integration of education and research and development (R&D) requires changes in the operational culture and study plans. In addition the integration may tighten the cooperation between students, teachers and local organisations which facilitates the possibility for students, also foreign degree students, to work in the local business life. The cooperation can create an efficient and beneficial network between all the three parties. This would lead to a situation where the university would produce skilled workforce. Students are employed by the organisations since the local businesses value students' international business expertise which is customized in the integrated education process.

1.2.2 The development of the new learning environments

Saimaa UAS has been developing new learning environments in the Finnish degree programmes. Today there are several cooperative companies in Saimaa UAS such as Fissio, Kiintopiste and Icaros. There is also a similar kind of learning environment in the Mechanical Engineering program where they have project based courses. In the Health Care and Social Services unit they have a learning environment called 'Living Lab' where students can execute projects related to the working life.

Respectively Saimaa UAS is not the only university that has developed these kinds of work life related learning environments. Since 1993 in Jyväskylä UAS there has been a unit of Entrepreneurship called 'Tiimiakatemia'. According to Leinonen, Partanen & Palviainen (2002, p. 11), Tiimiakatemia is a special unit of marketing and entrepreneurship where new students form and run a team cooperative company. Thus the learning is based on the execution of genuine assignments from the clients. A similar model called Proakatemia was established in 1999 in Tampere UAS. The first international team company called Extempo was formed in Proakatemia and recruitment of new exchange students was started year 2011. All of these organisations and learning environments listed above, except Extempo, operate in Finnish. The operational models are benchmarked in more detail in the chapter 7.

2 Description of Saimaa University of Applied Sciences

In this section the objective is to generally describe Saimaa UAS and the set strategic emphases. The focus is also on the IB study plan and BBA students' general and specific competences. The idea is to benchmark the current state of the IB programme which has also influence when establishing the new model.

2.1 General information

Saimaa UAS is a higher education institute in South Karelia Finland. Based on Saimaa UAS's websites the university has campuses in Lappeenranta and Imatra that offers 20 degree programmes for all 3200 students. Four programmes are conducted in English. According to Saimaa UAS (Powerpoint presentation 2012) there are 480 international students, of which 315 are degree students and 165 exchange students.

Based on the strategy 2010–2015 (Saimaa UAS 2010, p. 9) the three strategic emphases has been set as follows: 1) User-driven technologies and Commercialization, 2) Management and Entrepreneurship, and 3) Health- and welfare services and service processes. The strategy 2010–2015 (p. 12) also lists the strategic goals as the following: 1) Education, 2) Research, Development and Innovations, and 3) Internationality.

By listing the strategic emphasis and goals, it can be seen that the thesis is made to answer for Saimaa UAS development objectives. Based on the strategy 2010–2015 (Saimaa UAS 2010, p. 2) the greatest challenge and the focus of development in Saimaa UAS are on the R&D. The university is focusing the R&D operations on the local economy and the emphasis is on the demand-driven and user orientated development projects. Still the R&D volumes are relatively small and furthermore Saimaa UAS has not been able to integrate R&D and education sufficiently.

2.2 The current IB programme, studies and competences

Based on the Saimaa UAS' SoleOps platfrom the International Business program consists of 210 credit points completed in 3.5 years. The program offers students theoretical skills in international business, problem-solving and social skills in an intercultural environment.

The studies are intended to prepare students for diverse aspects of international business operations; marketing, finance, logistics and management. Foreign languages, culture and internationalization are also essential parts of the program. According to the SoleOps, the content of the studies corresponds to the needs of labour market and some of the courses are completed as actual workplace projects.

The structure of the degree is the following:

• Basic studies	34 credit points
• Professional studies	116 credit points
• Elective studies	15 credit points
• Placement	30 credit points
• Final thesis	15 credit points
• Total	210 credit points

On the SoleOps platform Saimaa UAS defines the competences of a Bachelor of Business Administration as follows:

- Basic business competences
- Oral and written communication skills
- International business and marketing competences
- Management, leadership and supervisory skills
- Project and team working skills
- IT, research and analytical skills

The current IB programme has been operated in a conventional way including theoretical lectures, group works and assignments as well as individual exercises. Generally the practical objectives are aimed to be achieved through the given group works and practical training. Hence the practical point of the education process could be improved. Students would have real opportunities to practise and apply their theoretical knowledge and skills into real business projects.

In fact, there are several possibilities to gain genuine business experience during the BBA studies. Practical training and the courses such as Business Projects, Marketing cases and IB Simulation may facilitate familiarizing with the working life and execute real business assignments. However, the challenge is that in reality these courses might not be directly linked to the learnt theories and the assignments may not be delivered from client companies. Therefore the experiences in the genuine business environment may be rather poor.

3 Methodology

In this section the aim is to describe the methodology part of the thesis. The methodology is essential since it guides the way the information is collected and analyzed. In this section the topics of the operational thesis and the elements of the qualitative research are gone through.

3.1 Operational thesis

The thesis is carried out by an operational method since the aim is to develop and create a proposal of the new operational model for the IB programme. Thus the idea is not to create new theories but to collect, utilize and apply existing and new information and knowledge in order to provide a concrete result which in this case is the new model including the new teaching methods, study plan and learning environment.

The operational method is used because the methodology can be utilized more freely. According to Vilkka (2003, p. 57, 58) the operational model gives certain freedom for the researchers to execute the study and analyze the data compared to a research method where information is collected mainly by a quantitative research.

Several literature sources are studied in order to describe the theoretical framework of the thesis. The frame is the basics of need charting, benchmarking, the definition and elements of an operational model. The information to describe the Saimaa UAS and the current IB programme, the learning conceptions as well as the BBA competences are found from the related books and web sources.

The benchmarking of the existing models is mainly carried out by searching data from the Internet and available literature. The information to describe the

Fissio's model was collected by a semi structured email interview from two representatives.

The qualitative research methodology is utilized in order to find the needs of the international companies. The information concerning the research methodologies is also studied in the related literature.

The figure 1 below illustrates the actual content of the thesis. First the research problem is defined. Then the key concepts and theories are described. Also the methodology is explained: how the information was collected and analysed. Based on the analysed and interpreted empirical information the thesis proposes a new operational model including the key elements.

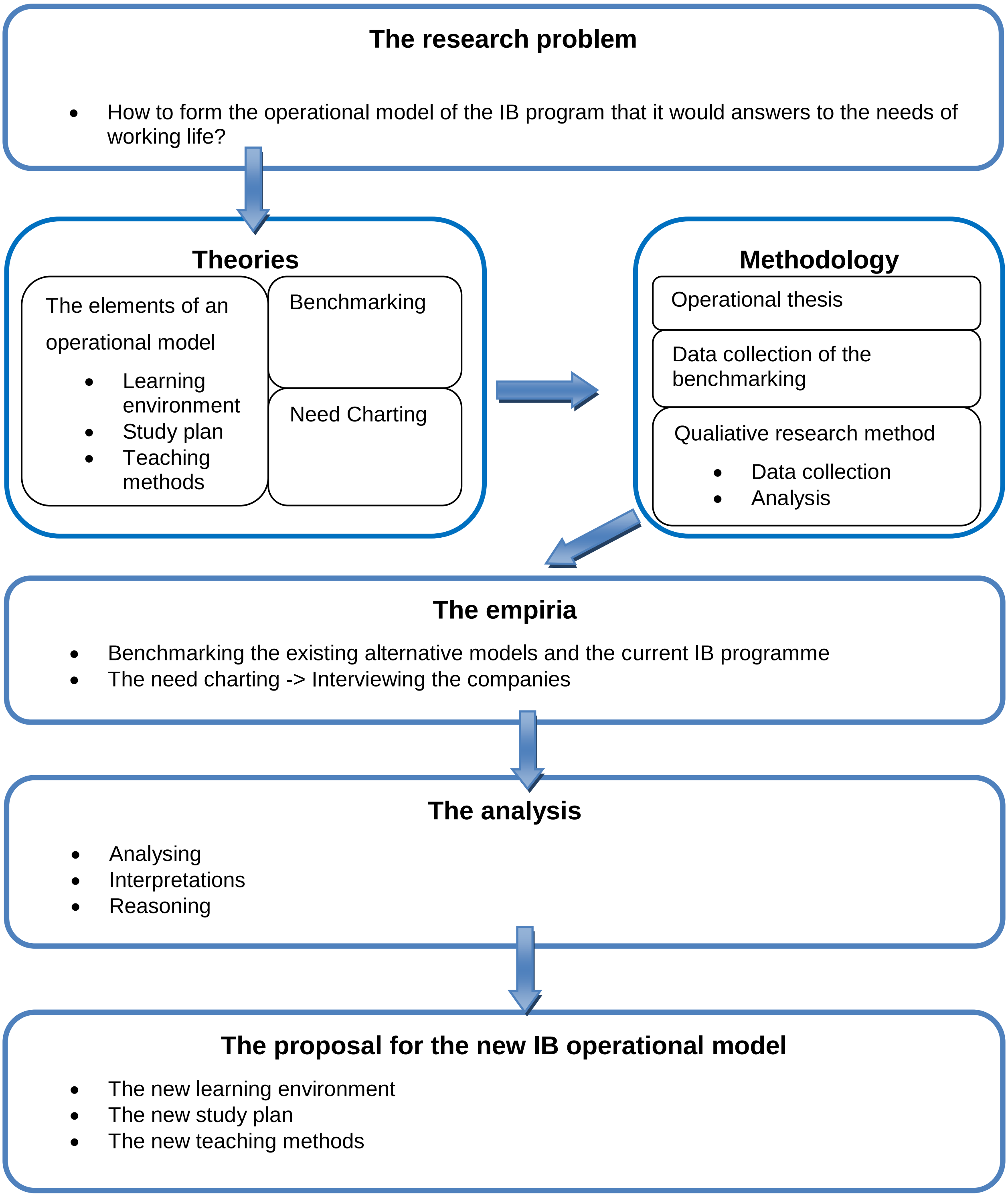

Figure 1. The framework of the thesis.

3.2 The qualitative research methodology

As mentioned earlier, the thesis will research the need for international business competence from the local international companies in order to develop the operational model for the IB programme. In order to carry out the thesis, the selected research, data collection and analysis methods are beneficial to be defined and rationalized.

There are two kinds of research methods; a quantitative and a qualitative method. In this chapter both of them are described in order to comprehend the principles of the methodologies as well as to give reasons why the qualitative method is finally chosen to be used in this thesis. Furthermore, it is important to know the difference between the methodologies before the real execution, analysis and interpretation of the research.

According to Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 13) the qualitative method pictures the non-numerical nature of the phenomenon, whereas, the quantitative method expresses the numerical nature of the material and analysis. Based on McLauglin's (1991, p. 294) comparison, the difference can be explained further as follows: the qualitative method subjectively expresses the quality of the research material on a micro scale in order to understand the nature of the research objects. Whereas, the quantitative research method objectively and numerically expresses the research material on a macro scale in order to explain the research objects. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 14)

However, as Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 14) tell already McLaughlin (1991, pp. 293–295) has reminded that research methods cannot be divided as simply. Correspondingly these differences are not stable and thus can vary and overlap depending on each research. Thus these kinds of comparison lists should not be taken too strictly only to explain the differences.

Even though the approach of the methods is different the boundaries between them may be unclear. For example, in this thesis the qualitative research method is used. Simultaneously the obtained research material could be analyzed by the quantitative method, and vice versa. On the other hand, using both of the methods can be scientifically questionable. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 13.)

The research material might contain a certain amount of quantitative data related to the quantity of the possible business assignments. Thus the use of both methods should be taken into consideration while analyzing the research material. Nevertheless, the core findings concentrate on the qualitative aspects.

According to Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 15) the elements of the qualitative research method are; the data collection method, the perspective, the theoretical or discretionary sample, the qualitative and inductive analysis, the nonexistence of hypothesis, the status of the researcher as well as the narrative. In the next paragraphs, six of these elements are described. The narrative element is not considered in the thesis because the aim is not to collect stories or other narrative information, nor to investigate the narrative dimensions.

3.3 Data collection method

Eskola and Suoranta (2008, p. 15) define the qualitative material as material which phenotype is text. The text can be interviews, diaries, letters and other literary material. In this thesis the qualitative material is the data gained from the interviews kept to local organizations.

3.3.1 Interviews and group interviews

An interview is a situation where the interviewer asks questions from the interviewee. Nowadays interviews are more likely to be conversational amongst the interviewer and the interviewee. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 86.)

An interview is interaction, in which both representatives affect on each other. It is distinctive for an interview, as an interaction situation, to be: (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1980, p. 41) 1) slated in advance and 2) started and directed by the interviewer. Even more: 3) the interviewee usually needs to be motivated by the interviewer and the interviewer needs to maintain the interview situation; 4) the interviewer needs to know his role and the interviewee learns it and 5) the interviewee has to trust that his information is handled trustworthy. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 86.)

3.3.2 The theme interview method

After studying the different interview methods, such as structured interview, half structured interview, theme interview, open interview and group interview, the final decision of the method to be used is made.

In order to find out the need for international business competence from local international businesses, the chosen method is theme interview. Theme interview is utilized because it gives the interviewers an opportunity to discuss specific themes deeply with the organizations' representatives. The idea is not to restrict representatives' thoughts but to get their opinions to be expressed as openly as possible in a profound discussion.

The interviews can be executed face to face or as a phone interview, but in this thesis the interviews are executed face to face. The aim is to interview as many companies as it takes to gain the required saturation point in the answers. The interviews were held in May, June and July 2012. The companies were contacted by phone and a brief (appendix 2) about the research was sent by email in order to provide equal ground information for each representative of the companies. The interviews lasted approximately for one hour and the discussions were recorded in order to capture all the topics covered.

3.4 The structure of the theme interview

In the theme interview method the themes are determined in advance. There are not exact questions or a precise order for questions that exist in a structured interview. The interviewers make sure that all of the themes decided in advance are gone through with the organizations, which guarantees an insignificant risk for misunderstandings and reliability. The interviewers have some sort of a support list of the topics, but no ready questions are made. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 84.)

Since the theme interview method resembles more of an informal discussion than a pure inquiry, the themes are covered in different order in each organization and the extent of the discussion of each theme varies as well. However, all of the topics are discussed in every organization in the extent that is seen relevant in each case company.

The interview will discuss factors such as basic organizational information; name, business field and amount of employees. Deeper information is gathered about the amount and type of the projects which have been accomplished in the organizations by using students' help.

After the organizational information the interview is going to be proceeded by a general "BBA as an employee" – theme including questions such as:

- What kinds of skills are required from a bachelor of business administration graduate when they become employees?
- Or/and what kinds of competencies are required in a specific job? (Most of the representatives used a specific job description as an relevant example of BBA's work and this way it was easier to form questions around it)
- Also questions of the trainings importance and amount were presented. The aim was to find out if the companies have noticed deficiency in the skills of the new employees.

The main questions will be related to the need of IB competence in the respondent companies. What kind of international cultural and communicational skills as well as international business skills are needed? These issues will be addressed through 9 themes:

- Marketing and sales
- Finance
- Cross cultural competences
- Logistics
- Management
- Generic skills
- Research and development
- Amount and types of projects

3.5 The perspective of the research objects

The execution of the research in the field is also a special way to get close to the objects thus the participation of the respondents is central. In the field study the researchers aim to remain the nature of the phenomena as they exist without manipulating the research situation. In this case it can be talked about a naturalistic hold which aims to reach the perspective of the objects. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 16.)

In this thesis the researchers are not going to observe the working life closely in action but through the interviews. However, the aim is to reach the perspective of the local international companies as well as possible. It would not be beneficial to study companies just randomly because the main criterion is the international operation. Thus the researchers have to interview only the organisations that have international operations such as serving foreign customers or performing in foreign markets.

The qualitative research will be applied to answer to the goals of the thesis. This method is effective when trying to execute a survey where the goal is to understand a phenomenon thoroughly. The idea is that facts that have not been written down could be searched and utilized as well. So the point: *"qualitative research serves in situations where the aim is to execute an idea that's based on the whole target group's sentiment"*, (Vilkka 2003, p. 63) is made use of in this thesis. The target group being the international business organizations in South Karelia whereas the problem is to find out the need for the new IB operational model, the type of it and the amount and sort of assignments the organizations have for the students to execute.

3.6 The discretionary sampling and the coverage of the data

The criterion for the science of the research material is not the quantity but the quality and the coverage of the concept. Thus the qualitative research usually focuses on a small amount of cases and the aim is to analyze them thoroughly. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 18.)

In a qualitative research the sample can be collected either by a discretionary, theoretical or purposeful selection. This is one of the attributes that define the qualitative research’s nature. If one of these methods is used the sample size of the research will be comparatively small. This does not mean that the material size itself would be minimal. A lot of information can be found out even if the sample size is little. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 61.)

As Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 67) claim the size of the research material and the key figures are not that crucial as the strong and profundity of the interpretations.

Generally in a qualitative research the coverage of the data is thought about when referring to the felicity of the size, analysis and interpretation of the results of the thesis. Secondly, the coverage of the data is mentioned when referring to the entity that the research has created. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 61.)

3.6.1 Size of the material

In a qualitative research the aim is not to create statistical generalizations, but to describe a happening, understand a certain action or to give a theoretically sensible interpretation of some phenomenon (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 61).

Generally speaking when conducting a qualitative research the size of the material does not have an immediate affect or significance to the success of the research. It always depends on the case that is researched. The meaning of the material is to support the researcher when building the conceptual connotation of the phenomenon researched. Therefore it is equally important to try to gather a defined qualitative material, as it is from the very beginning trying to develop a theoretical sensibility from the target phenomenon. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 62.)

3.6.2 Saturation of the qualitative material

There are few rules formed to assign the size of the qualitative research. First it is reasonable to think that there is enough material when new cases do not produce new information valid to the research. One way to solve the sufficiency of the material is to talk about its saturation. The amount of the material in a qualitative research should be concerned separately in every research. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, pp. 62–63)

In this thesis the material is collected by a theme interview held to local organizations that are chosen from different operational fields. In order to get reliable and similar information from the companies the same answers need to come up repeatedly. This means that new information is not anymore produced. Therefore the amount of organizations is undefined, but approximately 6 – 10 organizations are possibly interviewed. If the answers of the organizations seem to vary, more companies will be interviewed until new information is not anymore produced.

The reliability of the collected material can be tested by dividing the material in half. Only the other half of the material is analyzed. The gained interpretation of the analysis' suitability can then be investigated in the remaining half of the material. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 64.)

3.6.3 Delimitation of the material

Because the qualitative material is basically perpetual, the delimitation of the material is vital. In the beginning the material should be fairly small. Then an integral interpretation can be shaped from the corpus. This method should be kept as a rule of thumb when carrying out a qualitative research. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 65.)

In a qualitative research the delimitation of the material happens by looking at the theoretical coverage. Therefore it is important that a structured theoretical context guides the legwork. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 65.) When conducting the research it should be kept in mind which operational model responds to the needs of the local organizations the best.

As Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 65) tell already Yin (1987, pp. 23–25) has stated that a case study can be defined as an empirical research, in which a phenomenon happening in present is studied in a real life situation, in its own environment. Usually a case study is directed at one case, but also investigations concerning many studies are possible. The object of a case study can be chosen in many ways. It can be as typical as possible and representative or it can be rare or unique and exceptional. A perpetually revealing or an instructive case can also be chosen. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 65.)

3.6.4 Generalization

There are two methods to generalize data, an analytical and statistical generalization. This research will focus on a single case which is the case that represents the local phenomenon, the need for international business competence in the local organizations. In the analytical generalization the aim is to generalize theoretical prepositions and the interpretation based on the analysis can be generalized to the present time and to the companies researched. (Yin 2009, p. 15, p. 38.)

In addition, Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 65) highlight that a versatile analysis of the case includes elements for generalizations, thus the case has to be described and conceptualized properly. As Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 65) write Sulkunen & Kekäläinen (1992, p. 11) have stated that it is important that the analysed research material forms a case, an entity. In other words, this operational thesis will provide an answer only to this specific research problem: how to form the new operational model of the IB programme to answer to the needs for international business competencies of the local international companies.

However, as Eskola and Suoranta (2008, p. 66) tell, Sulkunen (1990, pp. 272–273) affirmed that the generalization needs to fill certain criteria in order to be valid meaning the rational collection of the material. Thus it is desirable that the interviewees obtain similar level and quality of experience, they should get information related to the research problem as well as they should be keen in the topic itself. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 66)

In this thesis, the companies' representatives were selected taking in account their level of experience. The representatives interviewed are in manager level positions in the companies. It is vital that the interviewees receive research related information from the researchers and thus a brief is sent to the representatives. The representatives are also keen in the research and motivated to be part of the study.

3.6.5 Triangulation

According to Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 68), Brewer & Hunter (1989) have defined the triangulation as a simultaneous application of diverse research material, methods and theories. The intention of the triangulation is to obtain a comprehensive picture of the research object and to utilize different angles to create more solid interpretations and creditability. Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 69) tell that Denzin (1978) has defined four types of triangulations as follows: data, investigator, theory and methodological triangulation.

In this thesis the triangulation occurs as an investigator and method triangulation. The research was executed by two researchers thus, for instance, the technique and interpretations of the persons can be diverse in the whole thesis process. However, Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 69) recommend that in the end the researchers ought to reach a consensus in all aspects.

3.7 The qualitative and inductive analysis

The qualitative method does not necessarily require any presumptions. The data based analysis is typical for the qualitative method which can even mean that the theory can be based on the empirical material. This, of course, can be problematic because qualitative material is endless. Thus the research material, the corpus, should be delimited so that further analysis is logical and convenient. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 19.)

The analysis of the qualitative material aims at creating lucidity to the data and so to create new information about the object researched. The intention of the analysis is to summarize the material without misplacing the information captivated in the material. Contrariwise, the target is to grow the information’s value by creating the incoherent material into a clear and pleasant substance (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 138.)

There are at least three ways from the interviews to the analysis. The first way is to demolish the material and from there the researcher can proceed straight to the analysis only trusting to the investigators intuition. The second way is to code the material after it has been demolished and from there proceed to the analysis. The third option is to unite the materials demolition and the coding operation after which the researcher would proceed to the analysis. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 151.)

After the material has been collected, demolished to text and prepared to a technical mode, it has to be organized. For the researcher to prevent making missteps in the analysis, steps need to be taken gradually. The researcher needs to trust that the first outline is not the last one. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 152.)

3.7.1 Theme method

The findings are analysed by the thematic approach. Through the thematic method it is possible to concentrate to the problems that lighten the research problem. It's possible to compare the presentation and appearance of some themes in the material. The materials central subjects can be separated and displayed as a frequency of different kinds of question settings. The preliminary attempt is to find and separate the crucial themes for the research problem. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 174.)

In order for the theme method to be successful the empirical part and the theory need to collide. This is shown in the research text as an attachment of the above mentioned to each other. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 175.)

The theme method will be used, because when analyzing the material it is essential to concentrate to the problems arising from the material. By the theme method the problems can be found and separated from the material. After this they can be answer through a battery of questions.

In this thesis it is important to be able to get the knowledge of the most important themes to the organizations' to the awareness of the researchers. The researchers will compare the organizations' answers. The new operational model will be based on this information.

3.7.2 The other analysing methods

According to Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 161) there are also many other ways to analyze the qualitative material. There are at least three methods that could have been used in the thesis such as quantification, typology and content analysis. It is reasonable to describe briefly the methods and justify why they were not used in the thesis.

The quantification means calculating measures from the output and classification of the material to versatile classes according to variable factors. In this thesis the aim is not to classify the material to many classes nor calculate the answers. Therefore quantification is not used.

Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 181) deem that typology is a way of grouping the material into different types by finding similarities. The aim is to create clear groups with similar stories. The types summarise and typify the material and they are filled with everything that is not found from a single answer. In this thesis it is not important to create similar stories of the gained material. Therefore this method is not used.

Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 185) write that in the content analysis the aim is to sort out the substance by solving what or how a certain topic has been talked or written about. The research problems are answered through quantitative measurement results. The measurement happens as a frequency or volume measurement. This method will not be used as it is not important to calculate how many times a subject is written about or a term been used.

3.8 The nonexistence of hypothesis

The nonexistence of hypothesis means that the researchers do not have a strict presumption about the research object or the results. So in other words it means that the aim is not to prove the hypothesis, but to create it based on the material so that the researcher can find new perspectives and viewpoints. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, pp.19–20.)

However, in order to find new perspectives the researchers have to acknowledge the presuppositions about the research objects, and have to consider them as a presumption of the research. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 20)

Practically it means that the thesis can set “a working hypothesis”. According to Eskola and Suoranta (2008, p. 20) the goal is to obtain new intelligence and learn about the phenomenon. The working hypothesis of this thesis could be: the local international companies have versatile needs for international business competences.

3.9 The status of the researchers

In the qualitative research the researchers possess a central status. The researchers have certain kind of freedom in the study which gives possibilities for flexible planning and execution of the research. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 20) However, using new solutions must be explained and justified, otherwise the research is not possible to be evaluated. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 20)

According to Vilkka (2003, p. 64), the reliability of the goals should be measured by three main themes. First the collected interview material needs to describe the problem thoroughly enough to meet the standards of a reliable thesis. Secondly the collected material concerning Saimaa University of Applied Sciences’ needs and operational models explain the problem in an adequate amount of detail. And at last the quality of the material needs to answers to the thesis’ contextual goals and to the target group’s needs and wants.

The unknown information is essential. In order to prove the reliability and the value of the thesis, the operational model can not only be based on the assumptions of the researchers. The operational aspect of this thesis must be based on theory to give a reliable, errorless and impeccable reasoning concerning the development of the IB programme.

3.10 Conclusion of the research methodology

As mentioned earlier the research problem of the thesis is: what is the best suitable operational model for the IB study program that answers to the needs of the local international companies? To find the solution the qualitative research method is chosen since the goal is to find answers containing the qualitative nature: 1) companies' opinions and attitudes towards the needs and types of international business competence, 2) what kind of competences are expected from an international business student, and 3) what kind of characteristics the companies appreciate? The qualitative method corresponds better to the requirements when find answers to these questions.

However, since the data might also hold numerical material concerning the amount of possible company assignments, the quantitative method cannot be fully dismissed. Therefore the use of the quantitative method should be taken into consideration in the stage of data collection and analysis.

The data about the needs are collected by the theme interview method. The coverage of the data is reliable when the answers reach a saturation point: any new material is not produced in the interviews. Therefore a large amount of data is not necessary to be collected in order to keep the data collection rational.

In the analysis phase the method chosen is the thematic approach. By forming the interpretations the aim is to create conceptual connotations to respond to this single case. Thus this thesis provides an answer only to the specific research problem: "how to form the new operational model of the IB programme to answer to the need for international business competencies of the local international companies?"

As also mentioned earlier, the research must be aware of the possible contradictories of the research methods related to the data collection, analysis and interpretation. The researchers have to fully understand what has been conducted. They also have to be able to describe and justify all made decisions, which is crucial for strong, profound and reliable interpretation of the results.

4 Need charting

The aim of the need charting is to find out the total quantity need of the customer and to make the customer interested in the decisions, products or services the company offers. It is important to understand that during need charting the product or benefits of the product are not presented. The main focus is to find out about the customer's needs. The sales man presents the customer questions and lets the client talk. (Rubanvitsch & Aalto 2007, p. 77.)

Through need charting the salesperson gets to know his customer and can add value to the possible purchase as the customer finds the overall decision of purchase better than purchase of one product. (Rubanovitch & Aalto 2007, p. 78.)

Need charting begins with picking the potential customers. First the researcher should list customers that can buy quite soon, within the nearest weeks. Then list customers that can buy within a longer term period. After this both of the lists should put to a potential buying order and then the lists should be combined. It's motivating to think that after every two easy sales the sales man can concur one harder longer term sales. (Sarasvuo 1998, p. 97, p. 106.)

After spotting the potential customers it's time for the first contact with the customer. Basically the most important thing is to sell the salesman to the customer in a positive sense. Keep in mind the values of the customer, the salesperson's own personality and his level as a professional. Make sure that the customer feels comfortable. Leave a good memory and feeling from yourself to the customer. Begin to sell the actual product only after the customer shows interest towards it. (Sarasvuo 1998, p. 107.)

Thirdly the qualification of the customer is important. This means that the purchase requirements of the customer are analysed. Basically it should be found out if the customer actually needs the product. Then the customer's reality of the need should be assessed, for example; has the customer ever used the product and what does he enjoy most in the product? The aim is to let the customer research the final decision about his requirements. (Sarasvuo 1998, p. 113.)

After having qualified the customer and generated trust permission is asked to present the product. A professional seller never sells before the customer has given permission for it. (Sarasvuo 1998, p. 121.)

4.1 Need charting in this thesis

In this thesis the need charting will be conducted at the chosen organisations in order to collect the research material. *“Recommended ways to collect information through personal interviews are either by form or theme interviews”*, Vilkka (2003, p. 63).The material will be collected by personal interviews through a theme interview method. According to Vilkka (2003, p. 63), the theme interview situation being a half structured situation is a freer way to collect information. This model works when the aim is to collect data of a specific theme.

The interviews can be executed face to face or as phone interview, but in this thesis the interviews are executed face to face. Interviews with organizations face to face are beneficial, because there is a smaller chance for errors than when asking for organizations’ to answer to a form via email. It is easier to estimate if the information holds true while specifying questions can be asked from the organizations. (Vilkka 2003, p. 63.)

4.2 Marketing research

According to David A. Aaker (1990, p. 3) the meaning of marketing research is to advance the decisions made in marketing by providing relevant, timely and accurate information.

David A. Aker continues (1990, p. 5) that marketing research is the element that combines organizations to their markets through information. The information is vital as it is implemented to create a picture of the 1) marketing opportunities and problems, 2) generate, refine and evaluate marketing actions, 3) observe the marketing performance and 4) progress understanding of marketing as a process. Marketing research is needed in order to find out the information necessary to contend with the issues. It 1) designs the method for collecting information, 2) manages and implements the data collection process, 3) interprets the results and 4) communicates the findings and their propositions.

In this thesis the marketing research is conducted for Saimaa UAS from the international companies’ point of view. The idea is to gather reliable information from the local organizations through a theme survey in order to make a decision about the need for the new operational model of the IB students. By carrying out the survey it is possible to provide relevant and up to date information about the situation in the market. What are the needs in the organizations' and is there use for the new operational model and if so, what kind of an operational model.

5 The elements of an operational model

In the following section the aim is to describe the basic elements of an operational model which are the key theoretical concepts in the thesis. There are three elements in the operational model: the learning environment, study plan and teaching methods. Since the new model is constructed on the elements, this theoretical framework is an essential part in the analysis when the new model is formulated and proposed.

5.1 Learning environment

There are many definitions for a learning environment. According to Helakorpi (2001, p. 137) learning environment can mean a physical space, place, community or operational practice which aims to contribute learning. Based on the learning conceptions and objectives the different kinds of learning environments aim to contribute certain kind of learning. Considering the aim of the thesis, the learning environment should contribute students learning in both theoretical and practical expertise based on the needs of the working life.

Nevertheless, Helakorpi (2001, p. 135) writes that the learning environment can be seen as traditional class room teaching where the learning and the learnt information might be unlinked and used in different time and situation. This could be considered as 'non contextual learning'. Helakorpi (2001, p. 115) also claims that in the regular pedagogic model the teaching is based on transferring information from teachers to students and therefore students activeness is rather low. As Helakorpi (2001, pp. 50–51) informs schools are still seen as physical buildings and spaces that control learning and teaching thus the learning is information-based and controlled externally. This method has been adequately functional but nowadays the technological and work life developments make the working environment more complex, therefore the traditional learning environments may be outdated.

However, the new concepts consider the learning environment as a contextual and situational environment where learning is not just a physical situation but includes social and mental factors. The new concepts emphasize that learning is achieved better in an environment and situation where the learnt information is utilized to solve problems. (Helakorpi 2001, p. 135.)

In addition, Helakorpi (2001, p. 115) deems that in the new concepts, the cooperation between students and teachers, activeness, learning by doing -approach and individualism are underlined. In addition, the open environment has seven characteristics. 1) The learning is comprehensive and experiential which also underlines the significance of the situational learning. 2) The learning is also a process where the new skills and knowledge are obtained actively in the problem solving, for example in the project studies. 3) The open environment contributes an associative approach meaning that the new information is combined with the earlier knowledge which requires capabilities for creative and critical pondering. 4) The learning in the open environment happens through individual and group works thus the team working skills are crucial. 5) Contrary to the conventional learning environments, in the open environment, versatile information sources are utilized which are not restricted only to books. 6) The learning in the open environment requires also self-direction capabilities. 7) Finally also the teachers' roles are modified since in the open environment they ought to act as counsellors and supporters for the students. (Helakorpi 2001, p. 52.)

Helakorpi (2001, p. 137) also enlightens the elements of the new open learning environments. The organisation's elements include: the open organisational culture, team work and mixed groups, instructive study plan and personal study plan. The methodology element concerns: student-centred approach, independence and a personal study plan, student teams, screening tests and portfolios. The physical learning environment includes: works shops, library, educational technology and networks, and the physical space.

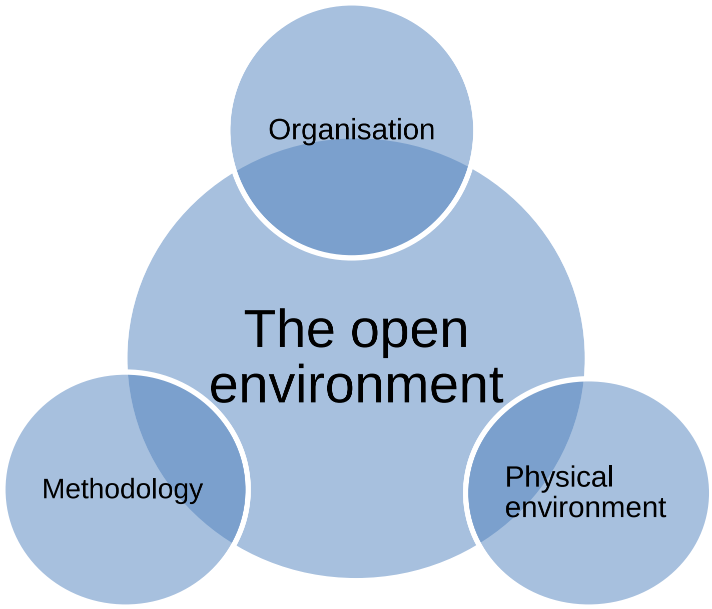

Figure 2. The elements of the studies in the open learning environment (Helakorpi 2001, p. 138).

According to Aarnio, Helakorpi & Luopajärvi (1991, p. 60), Sarala (1988) has described that in the learning environment the students and teachers of a class form the immediate working environment where people, working methods and objects are the key factors. Consequently, this immediate environment is a part of a social and physical environment inside a broader environment. Thus it's vital to investigate the study plan and teaching methods inside the environment as well.

5.2 Study Plan

There are two fundamental perspectives for the definition of a study plan. The first one is an administrative study plan (a so called "Lehrplan) which contains the learning subjects, the allocations of subjects and working hours as well as goals of the studies. The other definition is a "curriculum" study plan which is more student–centred and supports the learning process. (Aarnio et al.1991, p. 105.)

There are four levels to divide study plans. First one is the ideal study plan that instructs students' development and learning. The second level is a written study plan for administrative purposes to document the pedagogical goals and educational perspectives of the school. The third level is the implemented study plan which means teachers' own interpretation of the administrative study plan. Teachers have their own conception, for instance, what kind of teaching methods will be used. The fourth level is the realized study plan from the students' point of view, students' learning outcomes and interpretation of the teaching. (Aarnio et al. 1991, p. 105.)

Broady (1986) has defined a so called hidden study plan which refers to the learnt matters that are not mentioned in the official study plan. For example, the sociological functions, social interactions and team working skills are strongly present in the studies but might not be officially mentioned as core of the study plan. (Aarnio et al. 1991, p. 108.)

In the thesis the aim is to propose the ideal and administrative study plan which is based on the needs of the working life. The idea is not to suggest specific courses but general themes and competences which could be taken into account and included in the education.

There ought to be measures to evaluate a good study plan. Previously Kari (1990, p. 69) has defined seven indicators below for a good study plan. (Aarnio et al. 1991, p. 108.)

The good study plan is:

1. systematic
2. congruous, adequately functional
3. balanced, evolves students' personality equally
4. continuous, educational levels are linked
5. flexible, (i.e. a possibility to modify study plans according to the development in surrounding)
6. efficient, the study plan leads to the goals
7. takes into consideration individualism

These indicators are relevant tools when forming the study plan to the new model. These indicators already signify that the regular class room environment may not facilitate the realisation of a good study plan. The regular model might be systematic, adequately functional and lead to the goals. However, the new environment concepts could facilitate better the students' different skills and interests. In addition, it also may provide more continuousness and flexibility.

5.3 Teaching Methods

There are plenty of definitions for teaching methods. Therefore it is reasonable to describe first the primary concept. Teaching method is: *"a teaching form which the teacher has considered as the best method to enhance the learning process and to achieve the learning goals"* (Aarnio et al. 1991, p. 157.)

Aarnio et al (1991, p. 157) tell that Lahdes (1986) has identified three levels of teaching methods. 1) Traditional class room teaching; lectures, exercises, discussions, 2) studies in groups; group works, 3) individual teaching; personal exercises and programmed teaching. The teaching methods aim to certain kinds of outcomes according to the learning objectives. For instance, the traditional method aims to transfer information utilizing the existing literature. However, as Helakorpi (2001, p. 179) states this kind of teaching method can be shackling and information cannot be moved from one person to another.

According to Helakorpi (2001, p. 121) the teacher's main role in a team organisation is to act as a facilitator, to prepare exercises and guide independent individuals. Helakorpi also claims (2001, p. 135) that self-direction is a basic concept of the new learning philosophy. According to Helakorpi (2001, p. 135) Knowles has defined that selfdirecting in the studies is a process where the student has independence to define, acquire and measure the learning. Even though the self-direction emphasises independence, the idea is not to ignore the surrounding but to have dialogue with the other students and teachers. Thus the communality is essential in the new teaching models. In the communal model teachers have a consultative role in order to develop individuals and the work community.

The studies in the new contextual environment can also be called as cognitive work shop studies. The knowledge and skills are obtained in the context where they are needed. Thus the theoretical and applied knowledge are actively acquired in the problem solving and practical operations. (Helakorpi 2001, p. 139.)

As in the work shop studies, the purpose of the project studies is to link the learning into the students’ experiences. The basis is the problem centred approach where the new information is reflected and constructed into the earlier knowledge. In this method the cooperation between the students and the teachers is underlined: the projects are planned, executed and evaluated together.

6 Benchmarking the existing operational models

The word “benchmark” means a point of reference. It describes the objectives or norms that are reached. Benchmarking is a useful tool to measure and evaluate own performance and compare it to others’. (Karlöf et al. 2003, p. 35, p. 37.)

The role of benchmarking is to collect ideas and stimulation in the surroundings, or competitors. Thus benchmarking may enhance the creativeness and innovativeness to develop even better solutions. Thus the idea of benchmarking is not to copy processes from the competitors but to obtain even higher standards.

In this thesis one of the aims is to benchmark and describe the existing models that are linking theoretical and practical learning. The purpose is to enlighten which basis and elements the operational models are built on and how do they contribute learning. The elements of the operational model presented in the previous chapter are used to enlighten the existing ones. The existing models are the Saimaa UAS cooperative companies, Proakatemia, LCCE® and the Young entrepreneur platforms.

6.1 The Saimaa UAS cooperatives

According to the website of The Federation of Finnish Enterprises (Suomen Yrittäjät 2012) the cooperative is a community whose aim is to practice some economical actions to support the economy or the living of the members. This is possible when the members use the services or products of the cooperative company. One function of the cooperative company can be also to implement an ideological purpose, thus the idea is not to deliver the revenue to the members. In the Saimaa UAS the cooperative operational model is implemented to contribute students learning that links the theoretical and practical aspects together in the studies.

As mentioned earlier Saimaa UAS has several students' cooperatives. In this thesis the Fissio cooperative model is used as an example. Fissio was founded in year 2010 by the marketing students. The studies of the marketing specialization are carried in the cooperative operational model where students run the business as a part of the studies. Fissio has an office at Skinnarila Campus and currently there are 9 students studying in the team company. Originally in year 2009 approximately 20 marketing students were taken in to the programme.

According to the representative of Fissio, the students study business operations by executing genuine assignments for the real organizations. According to the company's website, Fissio offers versatile marketing solutions for the organizations in South Karelia. Fissio's business area concerns event production, graphical implementations and solutions of the social media. Clients are acquired by making genuine sales and marketing work.

According to the representative of Fissio, the company chooses the annual Board including the CEO, a Chairman, a Fund Manager, a Client Executive and a secretary. The duties between the students are rotated in order to provide equal possibilities to try several positions.

The learning environment in the cooperative contributes to link students' learning of the theoretical and practical competences and thus the studies are contextual and situational. Thereby students learn by doing in social interaction. They study basic studies during the first year in a conventional class room environment. During the second year they operate the team company while executing real business assignments for real clients. The theoretical knowledge is obtained by reading books and the information is shared among the other team members during meetings and projects. As the representative said the goal of the cooperative operational model is that the students would obtain more practical competence in marketing than earlier.

The team company is founded within the last period of the first year. Therefore, before that, the students have studied the basic core studies of the marketing programme. The basic studies such as languages and mathematics are carried out as conventional class room lectures.

In Fissio the original study plan and the team company study plan were overlapping thus the studies followed a “double study plan”. However, the intension is to allocate the studies as in the study plan of the new team company called Loiste founded in 2011. The course and credit points are based on the study plan of Loiste which can be found attached in the thesis as an appendix no. 1.

Based on the study plan, the studies include 74 credit points of basic studies, 45 points of professional studies, thesis worth of 15 point and elective studies worth 15 credits points. The practical part of Fissio’s studies contains of 21 points of team operations and 40 points of project studies. The 40 points include 10 points of actual projects and a practical training of 30 points. The practical training can be carried out by working in the team company.

Based on the study plan of year 2011, professional studies contain theoretical knowledge of specific competence areas such as management & entrepreneurship and innovation, commercialization and branding etc. Students have to study at least 5 credit points from each competence area. The 5 credit points include theoretical knowledge of the books, seminars, additional courses, and visiting lectures. The expertise is verified by CVs, portfolio, references and networks. Students have to read professional literature at least worth 25 credit points.

In Fissio the teachers act as facilitators or as “coaches”. They deliver their own view points and advice the students in their work and the intension is not to transfer information from the teachers to the students. During the first operating year Saimaa UAS helps the cooperatives by conveying assignments and projects for the students. In the study plan 2011, coaches’ hour resources are allocated as follows: 768 hours for each 1st and 2nd year and 336 hours in the 3rd year.

The studies include conventional class room teaching, group works and independent exercises. However the amount of the class room teaching is reduced in order to enable the social interaction to enhance learning. Social interaction happens through projects which are carried out in organizations as well as when students are able to teach each other's in the meetings after they have enhanced their own knowledge.

6.2 Proakatemia

Proakatemia is a cooperative operational model of Tampere UAS. New students of Proakatemia study basic studies for the first year and the next 2.5 years are reserved for team based learning. The combined turnover of all the Proakatemia team companies was 400 000€ in year 2011. The vision of Proakatemia is to be a nationally and internationally respected University of Entrepreneurship in year 2014 (Proakatemia 2011).

However, the main differences between Fissio and Prokatemia teams are that in Proakatemia the students study either business or information & communication technology. According to the Proakatemia's website, the students have to apply for the programme and those who become accepted continue the studies forming the team companies. Also a new international team 'Extempo' was created in Proakatemia in year 2011. The other teams have international relations and projects as well.

The learning environment is similar to Fissio's. The aim is to support students to apply the theoretical knowledge into practise while executing genuine work life related assignments. Proakatemia has several teams and each of them has its own coach. The team members choose the leader which is called a 'Business Leader'. In addition, Proakatemia does not have compulsory lectures or exams. Studies include team meetings, group works, development of the company, independent studies and projects. Team companies execute versatile projects such as marketing, communication, sales and event production. Furthermore, the new teams can start and practise their operations by executing a project or event that is inherited from Proakatemia's older teams.

The study plan includes projects, seminars, workshops and rapid innovation assignments. According to the Year Book 2011 (Proakatemia 2011, p.24) a student of Proakatemia reads 50 books on average during the studies. The knowledge is generated into mind maps, essays and other forms. The theoretical data is utilized in the team company and projects. There is no timetable in Proakatemia. Team meetings, so called workshops, are held twice a week. Everyone is responsible for his or her time management and therefore motivation for independent working and self improvement is essential. This kind of environment requires self-orientated working methods that are underlined in the new learning environment concepts.

These teaching methods are also similar to Fissio. According to the Year Book 2011 (Proakatemia 2011, p. 13) the coach has an important role in the team operations. The tasks are to support the team and ensure the progress of the studies. The coaches are advisors who have a lot of information and networks. Students have to utilize the coaches' expertise and be active towards them. The students also make a learning contract and according to the individual planning the development discussions are held between the students and teachers.

6.3 Learning and Competence Creating Ecosystem®

According to the media release on the 26.11.2009 of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS) the Unit of International Business and Culture has developed an operational model called "Learning and Competence Creating Ecosystem" (LCCE®) which is a registered trademark.

According to the press release the aim of the concept is to operate as an innovative 'mill', which is an open and innovative environment process for the interest groups: students, University, teachers and organisations. The open environment means that the University opens the study plan and their development assignments for the organisations. Mutually the organisations open their development projects to the University. When these two members cooperate, both students and teachers are able to open their competencies for the utility of organisations and university. In this ecosystem the theoretical studies and genuine working life assignments complete each other. The concept also supports the University to complete the set statutory duties: education, R&D and regional development. The LCCE-concept provides an opportunity for all members to gain mutual benefits and the students will have the possibility to participate in the genuine business assignments, gain needed skills and network for the future career. In practise LCCE means that the study plan and project courses are more integrated than in the traditional class room teaching model. For the students the concept means that certain professional study entities include theoretical and also practical studies, such as real working life projects.

According to the KyUAS websites the LCCE study plan has four levels. The first one includes innovative and entrepreneurial learning environments during the four study years. This level includes R&D projects, group works and case studies. On this level a student can earn 4 to 8 credit points. The second level is the LCCE entrepreneur studies which are worth 12 credit points. This level contains group works, innovations, creativeness, risk taking and project management. The third level is LCCE entrepreneur sparring process within the years 2-4 worth 10 credit points. This level is a customized study plan for individual needs and wants. Finally, on the fourth level the students can implement and generate their business ideas into their own start-up companies (KyUAS 2012.)

Teachers support the students by planning, guiding and coordinating the projects, and according to the media release the teachers are called as older colleagues. The business assignments are not only retrieved clients but KyUAS and local organizations develop stable cooperation and framework conventions. The aim is to guarantee challenging and targeted assignments for the students.

6.4 Young Entrepreneurship Start Up Programme

According to the web pages of Nuori Yrittäjyys, 2008, The Start Up Programme is an option for students aged from 19 to 30 years to manage their own organization. The students get to augment their understanding of how they could start up a business using their own talents.

The learning environment's aim in this program is to start up a student organization with actual money for one year. This program is in fact meant for 9th class of the primary school - vocational schools.

The pupils build up their thoughts and abilities vital for their personal achievement. These aspects also affect on their employability and on the understanding of how the business works. The YE Start up programme offers the juveniles a learning environment at school where they can use the knowledge they have gained in practice. The skills will be learned by doing.

The study plan of the program is versatile. The students of the Start Up Program get to peek to the real business life's expectations. They need to come up with a concept for a business, produce and explore a business plan, be liable in the eyes of the shareholders while managing the operations and the company. The aim is to go through every step of starting up a business to winding it up during the academic year.

The students get to understand the meaning of self-employment, creation of business, what risk taking means and how to survive in hard conditions. These issues are taught by volunteer business consultants' guidance and support. The goal is to teach the students the knowledge of the working life as well as to understand and use an entrepreneur like attitude and approach already within the studies.

The teaching of the students happens at school mainly through the guidance of the teachers. The learning by doing approach plays a big part as well as learning from other students. This method could be used if it is possible to start up the company for the whole study period and at the University of Applied Sciences.

6.5 JA-YE Company Programme

It is told in the web pages of Nuori Yrittäjyys, 2008, that the young entrepreneurship company programme was meant to be established for one semester only.

One option for a new operational model could be the Company Programme. The aim of this programme is to form a real business for the students. The learning environment would be at school within the student organization. The learning is guided by the teacher and the group dynamics. In this programme it is possible to visit organizations to listen to the professionals and learn in this way as well.

The model's study plan makes it possible for the pupils to find out how an organization operates. The students decide on a board of directors from their group, raise share capital, and choose a product or service to market and finance. When the programme ends a report and financial records are presented to their shareholders.

The students are able to gain experience by doing. Their skills in teamwork, management and performing, scheduling and monetary control expand. They also discover what taking responsibility is like in order to create success for the company.

According to the web pages of Nuori Yrittäjyys, 2008, "the students sell stock, elect officers, produce and market products or services, keep records, conduct stockholders' meetings, and liquidate (usually returning a profit), all in about 12 - 26 weeks."

The teaching partly happens through the help of volunteer consultants from the real business life. The advisers act as mentors to guide the companies. The new student organization's team work based learning aspect should not be forgotten either.

For the IB programme this concept needs to be possible to put into practice for 3,5 years period of time. If this is possible this method is worth thinking about.

7 Analysis of the needs of working life

The interviewed companies' size varied from micro to large. Several business fields were represented such as: manufacturing, tourism, IT and services and construction. Since the interviews were anonymous, in this thesis analysis the companies are named by capital letters from A–F.

Company A is a small family run hostel serving both domestic and foreign tourists. Company B is a small IT-firm focusing on Russian marketing established in year 2011. Company C is a medium sized metal manufacturing company operating both in domestic and international markets. Company D and E are both large international forest industry companies. Company F is a large construction and service company operating in Europe and Russia.

The company representatives' possess a management level position such as managing and sales directors. Five of the representatives have been present in the organizations' operations for many years. Company B's representative has been in duty since the early 2012. Based on these facts, the sources of information can be considered reliable.

Several citations are provided in order to sharpen the content and meaning of the findings and to provide a reliable basis for the new operational model. The number of interviewed companies is rather low but certain important issues in the themes started to repeat themselves. Thus it was reasonable to base the analysis on the data captured from those six companies.

7.1 BBA as an employee

According to the interviews the basic requirements underlined were

- Basic business skills, such as customer service orientation and accounting
- Basic IT-skills, such as Microsoft Office, email and other basic programmes

- Cross cultural skills, such as a knowledge of Finnish, English and Russian language as well as a comprehension of the target market's culture

The required competent that was underlined in all of the companies was to comprehend the whole process of business operations. Thus it is essential to know how a business is run in reality and what does it demand. This aspect needs to be resolved through the new operational model.

The company E saw that the BBA degree is suitable for tasks in the supply chain management, such as order processing, invoicing and production planning, which are the tasks mentioned also by the company D. The company E also mentioned some special professions that BBA students could be placed such as business controllers of sales in close cooperation with sales departments around the world. The job description includes supply chain management, invoicing, production planning and processing of orders. The company F stated that the BBA degree meets rather well their sales operations referring to the need of business education and presentation skills.

In addition, in the company D, it was clearly stated that they expect that a new employee has already some work experience. Also the company C mentioned that if they hired a BBA, he or she should have a certain specialized competent such as international business: *"we don't have any use for ordinary BBAs",* the company C stated.

Additionally during the interviews a new theme "Law" occurred from behalf of the organizations. Thus the law theme should also be taken into account in the new operational model.

7.2 "The work educates"

However, the expectations of the new employee may not be high. As Company B stated: *"when a just graduated student comes to work, the expectations are that the job will teach him/her".* This, rather dubious perception in the graduates' skills, was very common among the representatives.

In addition, in the company E, it was strongly stated that: *“80% of human learning is learning by doing, it’s just a fact”.* The representative E also continued: *“my own experience is that even though you have been on a course for a week, what you get out of it is quite a little versus you do a work with somebody for a week”.* The company F declared that the degree itself is just the first step: “*it’s then a question of an attitude and type of personality how you manage in the life”.*

Based on the interview data it can be declared that companies require certain basic business and cross cultural skills but the actual work will teach the needed competences. However, many of those competencies could be educated before entering the working life. Thus the new operational model should facilitate students’ learning in both a theoretical and practical approach.

7.3 “No huge deficits”

The positive aspect is that most of the organizations stated that BBAs do not have huge deficits in the required basic business skills. However, all of the organizations have been giving orientation and instruction to the new employees for example in the operations management software programmes such as SAP. Unfortunately, such widely used management software is not included in the current IB study plan. This is the first recognizable disadvantage of the IB graduates which should be discussed further in the new operational model.

Also some lack in the skills of international business management can be seen. As the representative of company D stated *“I assume that market managers* (an ordinary BBA level occupation in the company) *know international order-delivery documentation”.* Reflecting to the current IB studies, such fundamental supply chain management tools are only presented in the online course ‘Operational Logistics’. Again, one tool to be thought about when creating the new model.

7.4 The brand of the BBA degree

There were also issues that arose around the image of the degree. A couple of the companies were not really aware of the BBA degree and its level of higher education. For example, company D thought that the lower level vocational business degree has been removed and replaced by the BBA degree.

The diverse and obscure conceptions of the BBA degree in the companies may lead, for instance, into under appreciation of the BBA graduates. Thus the brand of the BBA degree needs to be refined and promoted. It needs to be cleared to the organizations what kind of a professional the BBA graduate is and what are the competences. This is an issue that needs to be considered more closely in the forming of the new operational model.

7.5 Marketing and sales

All of the large companies have separate marketing departments and units; therefore it is hard to find out the specific requirements of the marketing and sales skills. Due to the limited resources of the interviewees, it would have been rather time consuming to investigate all separate departments of the companies. However, the material was absorbed from the representatives that yet had relevant information.

Despite of the separate departments certain findings from the large companies can be addressed too. As the representative of company E stated *“understanding of the whole business process is important in sales”.*

The representative of company D mentioned that the market managers’ duties are wide and versatile. They have to take care of the process from the order entry until the end user thus the market managers have to have comprehension on the whole supply chain management. Also the competence mentioned in the company D was that the market manager needs to take care of the customer satisfaction about the service they get. This is a rather obvious matter, but it requires that the employee can comprehend the supply chain and has good communicational skills. The company D also stated that sales’ planning is more and more important. For instance the market managers in the company D have to plan three months ahead how their own business area will develop. Also the managers have to promote their product when acquainting new clients.

The representative in the company F stated that:”one is a salesman and another just isn’t”, referring that being a salesman is a question of personality. According to the representative F it is important to built trust in the customer interface. However, dealing with the customer is psychological and the trust is built during the first seconds when meeting with a new customer, as the representative F told. The company F also mentioned that it is important to bring data from the interface and market to production. Therefore it is vital to know the market, customers and customers’ point of view.

All in all, according to the interviews the importance of comprehending the whole business process was underlined. Employees should know the offerings, customers, markets and how the processes work. Since sales and marketing are basically interaction with the customers it is vital to have good communicational skills, especially in the direct customer interface sales.

However, in the small organizations there might not be specific marketing and sales departments and thus marketing and sales operations are neither systematic nor centralized. This could be seen as a huge project opportunity for the IB students since the development of the marketing and sales operations in the small organisation involve a variety of activities from research to action, such as customer researches and actual selling projects. For example, in the company A the business potential of Russian customers has not yet been investigated. In addition, the company A mentioned that there are many firms that would need help serving better the Russian customers, for example, translating price lists and instructions into Russian language. The issues mentioned above could be seen as possible projects for the new operational model of the IB programme.

In the smaller companies the versatile duties of a single employee is also distinguished. Especially in a medium sized and specialized company, it is crucial to have certain special competences. For example the company C stated: *if you are good in sales, it isn’t quite enough, you must also have good* *technological knowledge because the product is so technical."* However, the comment can be interpreted as knowing the product is important, as the company B emphasized: "*in marketing and sales it is crucial to know the product, market, customers and the whole concept of the marketing and sales processes*".

The company B stated that "*selling is just communication, reading the other person"*. The representative B meant that sales and marketing persons have to apprehend the customers and interact with them, and through that the sales can *"find the golden message… that get the customers excited"*, as the company B affirmed. Thus graduates should have genuine experiences in client contacts in order to cope in these situations.

All of the companies emphasised the understanding of the whole process of a business operations. For example, knowing the marketing theories is not enough. Companies are looking for those people who know profitable marketing in practise. As the company B mentioned, it would be beneficial for students to go through the whole business operation through case studies; invent a product, find customers and sell it, as well as all the other activities around it, in order to know how the whole concept works. Company B also emphasised the competent of marketing in practise. This aspect needs to be planned and taken care of in the new operational model so that the students can learn to understand the whole process of marketing and sales.

All of the representatives also emphasized the value of information. Finding the right data about the markets and customers, for instance, has been mentioned in all of the interviews. For example the company B claimed that: *"nowadays the information is widespread so the methods to find the information are relevant"*.

7.6 R&D

In the big organizations the frames of research and development are defined in the headquarters and therefore the organizations have minor opportunities to develop their operations in one specific unit. Although, *"it is possible to work on* *some minor development activities locally within clear frames”,* as was stated in organization F.

In the small companies the R&D operations are more flexible since the organizations can decide on their own about the fore coming procedures. Nevertheless, the small companies may know their offering and what they do best but there might be challenges in the supporting elements and development work: how to reach the right customers and how to sell to them? These fundamental development issues are not taken into action due to the lack of resources, time or knowhow. As company A mentioned: “*small firms could be helped...they do business as business...they don’t understand how the business could be developed...they consider researches as humbugs“.*

In addition, the company A stated that proving the benefits of research and development activities for the small firms is beneficial and needed. Thus there is a potential for business students to carry out research related projects in order to increase the awareness of the importance of such operations, and also that way gain more customers.

7.7 Finance

In the large organizations there are separate finance departments whereas in the small organizations some of the financial activities might be outsourced such as payroll calculations. However, it was stated in the organizations that accountancy is a part of everyday business life.

Obviously the financial activities are versatile and if a graduate is applying for a specific finance related occupation, the special financial competences are needed. However, in everyday business life the financial skills are again related to practical needs. Salespeople need accounting skills such as cost and profitability calculations, as was stated in the company C.

So in other terms, the companies need people who understand profitable business: how much everything costs and where the money comes from. The new operational model should for this reason concentrate on facilitating the learning of practical finance competences.

7.8 Cross cultural competence

In all of the organizations three languages were valued in the following order: Finnish, English and Russian*.* Also German and Spanish were brought up by the companies D and E. The need of Swedish language skills was mentioned shortly only by the company B. The importance to know the language and culture of the target customers or markets was acknowledged in all organisations. *"Languages should be known according to the target markets",* was said in organization B.

In the company C the representative estimated that over a half of the communication in the administration is held in English. All the trade documentations are more and more in English and the corporate language might change into English in the future, for instance. The company C stated that at least good written English skills are required in order to communicate by email. However the employees, who are dealing directly with the clients, should have other language skills as well.

Though, it was acknowledged that even though the company has international operation and the corporate language might be English, the companies still wished for Finnish language skills from foreign students due to the practical matters that arise in the everyday office life. Especially in the smaller firms which are serving many local Finnish speaking customers it is rather mandatory to speak Finnish, as was mentioned in the company A.

All in all, the language skills are crucial. The graduates should know the languages of the target customers and markets. In general, the importance of English and Russian language skills was recognized in all of the companies as an asset for future.

In addition to the language skills also the cultural competences are appreciated. The company D emphasised the cultural knowledge: "*it is also required to understand the culture of the target market*. In addition, the company F brought up the value of mutual understanding: *"it is very important to understand the culture and the history of the target market country as well as the customers' need to understand these aspects of Finland."*

The company C also mentioned that when operating in the Russian markets they need native Russians because of the complex business environment. *“There is no use just for translators”* as the company C referred to the need of other special competences such as sales. Also in the company F the salespersons in Russia are native and the personnel in Russian operations need to have strong language and cultural competencies.

In the new operational model it is vital to concentrate on the cultural aspects as well. The operational model should support students cross cultural cooperation and interaction in order to gain cultural competencies. In Lappeenranta this means especially cultural knowledge of Russia and Finland.

7.9 Logistics

Logistics is one of the main business areas taught in the IB programme. However, in the interviews logistics was not mentioned before asked about. The companies may consider the importance of logistics self-evident and thus it was not underlined. In addition none of the interviewed companies were operating purely in the logistics sector which might be another reason why it was not acknowledged.

Consequently, the companies highlighted the importance of comprehending the whole supply chain activities. In the companies material flows are usually outsourced for transportation and forwarding companies. Thus the information flow was seen as the primary logistic operation in the organizations. In addition, the company B stated that one of the most important issues in the business operations is to know the distribution channels and how they work.

As already mentioned the company D brought up the significance of export related documentation which are covered in the operational logistics. However, it could be beneficial to focus the logistical studies more on the basic supply chain methods and also on the operational aspects.

The issues mentioned above indicate that there is a need for an operational model that could facilitates students’ basic theoretical knowledge and also operational skills also in logistics.

7.10 Management

Company E’s representatives said that: *“Human relationship management is extremely important in today’s business. People want to be treated as people, as equals, and to be heard. Therefore it is good to know how to handle different types of people. A lot comes down to an individual’s nature“*. In company D it was said that everyday life supervising skills as well as skills to lead by example are important to understand and handle in business.

However, in the company C the representative did not see importance in systematic Human resource management: *“you got hired to a job and you either accomplish it or not”*. However, later on the company C mentioned that the employee turnover has been rather high which is challenging. “*The pressure is quite strong and some people can’t handle it.”* The company has not investigated the issue but they have unofficial estimations. However, there could be a need for these kinds of investigations that student could carry out in their management studies.

In addition, the company A brought up an idea that smaller firms may have deficit in their own management activities, such as a general template of leadership, management or quality control. The representative of company A mentioned that smaller firms might have difficulties to hire foreign employees since all their contracts and documents are in Finnish. There is a potential for IB students to provide solutions for firms in recruitment of foreign employees by translating documents. There could be many other similar situations the smaller firms are struggling with which is a potential for the IB students when taking into consideration the possibilities of projects.

It was found out that in most of the organizations it is hard to proceed to management level positions. In the large organizations the reason is that many steps need to be taken through different job positions before having a thorough understanding of the occupation to work as a line manager. In the SME organizations’ one reason is family run business which means that the management positions are in the family. Therefore management positions for graduates of BBA most probably won’t occur right away after graduation. Thus the most important aspect to learn of management in school would be management of one self and the different types of people around one self.

A valuable idea would be that in the new operational model the ways to practise management skills would take place when executing projects in a smaller group. The idea would be to learn to work in a management position with different kind of subordinates, but also to work as a subordinate and in other positions in the group. This would provide broad management skills and understanding for the actual work life.

7.11 Generic skills

"You don't need to like everyone but you need to be able to work with everyone", was said by the representative of organization E. This mind-set cannot be taught in school, but it can be practised for example through group work related exercises. The representative of company B agrees and continues: *"Attitude is not a thing to be taught, but in school they should teach students of IB to think through business cases. If you learn specific methods through business cases it helps to survive and do business in the real business world. You learn to understand the whole."*

On top of the ability to work with everyone and the understanding of the whole business process the interviewers found out many other generic skills that were valued in the management level of the interviewed organizations': the importance of a proactive, self initiative and hard working attitude was mentioned in all of the organisations. For example, the representative of company E notified that: *"today it is important to be versatile; extroverted, able to work in a group with different kinds of people, be active, flexible, and able to perform, to make decisions, to take responsibilities, to be spontaneous and to finish businesses started. You need to take care of a whole lot more tasks than earlier."* Similar issues were brought up by the company D which stated that the work tempo can be fast and thus person's own activity, proactivity and communicational skills are important. The small companies underline that an entrepreneur like attitude is desired.

These findings signify that the companies are looking for employees who know how the entire business works in practise and what it requires. Furthermore the schools should encourage the ability to work with different kinds of people and to be innovative. This is an individual aspect to be thought about and solved in the future operational model.

7.12 Law and regulations

Understanding the international law and the specific regulations of the target market is central. For example the custom terms vary in different countries and may cause huge challenges for an export company if these issues are not been taken into account. As company E mentioned: "*the scale of import related documents and certificates can be rather wide, the more exotic country, the more paper work".* In addition the company F also pointed out that in their operation the code of commerce should be known. On top of this in organization B it was said that understanding of the target country's legislation when an organization is founded is very important. Identifying the legislations' concerning logistics is very important. *"Knowledge of the patent protection and the Finnish legislation is a valuable asset".* The representative said that case studies would be a suitable way to learn about these issues.

The aspect of law is going to be analysed and included in the new operational model. In the latest study plan there is only one course of law "*International Business Law and Contracts",* worth 3 credit points. This amount is not adequate compared to the importance given to the topic by the organizations.

7.13 Projects

All of the organizations have been associated in projects or thesis' involving students. There has been mainly separate students working in projects or generating thesis' for the companies. Only the company A has utilized the services of Saimaa UAS's cooperative Icaros. Thus the companies do not have much experience in students' cooperatives or systematic project operations but the experiences are based mainly on separate students' performance.

The main problem in the large organizations is that the resources are limited. They have no time to get involved in a project or to guide a thesis work. For example the companies D, E and F regretted that some of the theses have produced poor results because they have not been able to focus enough on the work. However, the large companies stated that there are needs for projects. The potential projects and assignments in the large companies concern mainly data acquisition, service and sales development and market researches. It is wise to point out that the large companies usually have separate departments for such operations and researches are outsourced, therefore, it is complicated for students to compete with those professional organisations. Secondly, the large companies are also cautious about their trade secrets which limit the participation of the external operators.

However, there are smaller “supporting research projects” that the large companies may need. And in this sector student groups could be agile and efficient. In addition, the company D mentioned that it is beneficial if the students have readymade proposal what they would like to offer for the company: *“it’s easier to sell if you have a readymade idea, a concrete thing to present.”*

In the smaller organizations the situation is different. Entrepreneurs and chiefs of smaller firms may only have resources to run the daily business. Thus there are many possible projects for students to be executed such as: marketing researches, data collections, development projects and, even actual selling projects. There could be many supporting assignments to be carried out in the smaller companies due to their possible lack of resources, or even interest. Such assignments could include for example HR development.

For the smaller organizations it can be easier to work in close cooperation with the students performing the projects. Hence the guidance on the organizations’ behalf towards the students is deep. The gained answers could be utilized better in the small organization than in the large firms as the answers most likely are read straight by the management level. Also one reason is that the whole picture of the business operations is in the hands and ideas of one person. Therefore he understands to which sector the answers can be made use of.

The organizations' might not have time to think about the needed projects so the students would need to know the needs of the organizations well in order to sell their service to them. Also it is easier to execute the needed steps in the SME organizations as it affects to fewer people than in the large organizations. The SMEs are more flexible in many ways.

7.14 Summary of the needs of working life

There were several basic skills that were underlined in all of the organisations. According to the interviews, the BBA graduates have to have certain basic competencies in business, IT and communication. The cross cultural competencies were highlighted as well. The culture and language should be know based on the target markets and customers thus Finnish, English and Russian language skills are appreciated.

The companies are generally satisfied with the level of competent the graduates have. However, they do not have high expectation towards the students. The "work will educate" attitude is common among the companies. They expect students to have some basic skills but the work itself will teach the needed skills to cope in the work life.

However, the companies call for overall comprehension about the business processes. It is crucial to know how the profitable business is run and what kind of activities and skills it requires. Thus companies underlined that theoretical guidelines are needed but the practical skills and experiences are advantages.

A good attitude is also essential for the companies. They value employees who are active and hardworking, who can adapt, take responsibilities and work in teams.

One of the goals was to find out the amount and types of projects the organisations have. According to the research findings there are many project related potential for the students. According to the research material many projects concern data collection, market research, acquisition of new customers and operational development projects.

On the other hand, there are five challenges in cooperation with the larger companies. Firstly, it could be hard to sell students competences to the large companies since they may have their own organisational departments and personnel operating already on the projects they need. Secondly, it would be hard to compete with the subcontracting companies (specialized professional organisations) that the larger companies are associating with. Thirdly, the large companies brought up the concern about the trade secrets that may be released outside in cooperation with any external party. All these three issues may be complicated to solve.

The fourth and fifth challenge should be taken into a closer discussion. The larger companies stated that they have very strict time resources to be involved in the student projects or thesis works. Therefore the outcomes of the assignments have been rather poor. Thus the students' offerings for the larger companies should be refined, promoted and sold better. The students ought to have a prepared solution to be sold so that the companies' participation is optimal and they feel that the students add value to their businesses. In addition, the organizations need to understand that the biggest guidance for the projects come from the university and teachers.

The fifth issue, which concerns also the cooperation with the SMEs, is that the students have been contacting and working with the companies separately. There is no centralized platform for students and companies to meet and discuss. The lack of a mutual forum between school and companies may undermine the value of students' development as experts and impairs the resources and results of the possible cooperation because the students' competencies are not fully utilized.

The smaller companies however, were able to name many assignments that students could implement. The operations of the SMEs can be less systematic and there might be a gab between the operations since firms focus mainly on the daily business making. Therefore many R&D assignments can be helpful for them. However, the challenge can be in convincing the smaller firms about the importance of research and development.

8 The new operational model

In this section the aim is to describe and justify the proposal for the new operational model. The proposal considers which kind of model would best answer to the needs of international organisations in South Karelia. The model is constructed by the three elements: the learning environment, the study plan and the teaching methods.

The chosen model is the cooperative model. Through this model it is possible to learn the competences required by the organizations. The cooperative model also facilitates learning the skills Saimaa UAS emphasizes. However the cooperative model is not formed solely by the principles of Fissio or Proakatemia but the models are used as examples for the new IB programme.

The other three operational models, Young entrepreneur Company Programme, JA-YE Start up Programme and LCCE® are not considered as relevant models to be applied in the new IB programme. The YE-Start up Programme is meant for younger students and to be used in the secondary degree education process. On top of this the programme's idea is to teach the students about starting up a business as well as winding-up the operation. In the new operational model the aspect could be longer-termed and include a wider array of operations than only the start and winding-up processes. The Company Programme is not chosen either even though the versatility of this programme was of good quality. The programme was aimed for primary school students and to be executed in one semester. The third option could have been the LCCE® model. The model has very good basis for integrating the theoretical and practical competences. However, the structure of the model is complex and the platform is ready made for the students. This means that the students do not have to acquire clients on their own but they are delivered on the LCCE® model by the KyUAS and the partner organisations. This of course is an easy way to operate but perhaps the students would not experience running a business in reality.

8.1 The cooperative model

Based on the needs of the international companies the new operational model could be a cooperative company. The learning should be contextual in a team company. The annual student intake in the IB programme is approximately 40 students. This would be a large group thus the IB programme could be divided in half, forming the traditional IB group and the new IB group in the cooperative. Both of the groups study the basic theories and courses during 1st year. In the end of the first year the students apply for the new cooperative model. 20 students are chosen to continue the studies in the new model. The other 20 students that are not chosen continue in the original IB programme. In the new model during the 2nd and 3rd year the selected students study professional studies and execute projects in smaller groups. In the cooperative the students operate also in different positions in order to learn about management and group dynamics. The exchange periods are set normally during the second period of the 2nd year and on the first period of the 3rd year.

In the cooperative model the basic business skills and the understanding of the whole business process could be learned. One of the most important aspects the organizations' required for, was the understanding of how everything; marketing, business, logistics, management and finance are linked in all of the operations of the organization. Considering these requirements the cooperative model could facilitate this kind of learning.

In addition, the organizations seemed to respect the knowledge of working in a group. In the cooperative model it is possible to learn to work in a group in different positions for example as a leader or as a subordinate. Simultaneously, as the team is international it is also possible to learn from different cultures and attitudes within the team. This creates the surface to the understanding of genuine international business. It is important to be kept in mind that the operational model aims for international operations. The knowhow of international culture and languages is a competitive advantage for the IB cooperative which differentiates the model from the rest of the cooperative models in Lappeenranta. In Lappeenranta area the operations will most likely head towards Russian trade.

In the cooperative model the students would also learn what it takes to actually establish an organization and get acquainted with all the paper work and legislation related to it, as was kept important in the companies. In addition, the entrepreneur like attitude will evolve as the emotions are attached strongly to the creation of the students' own organization.

In this model it is also possible to learn the basic studies: language lectures, IT skills, presentation skills and to learn actual skills to be used in work life by executing actual business life projects. The phrase "work teaches the worker" could be changed to answer to the organizations need. The aim should be that the cooperative operations teach students vital skills that are required by organizations already before they enter the working life.

It was stated by various organizations, that the project studies tell more about the capabilities of a graduate than the separate non contextual studies. Before the mentality has been that if a student gets to execute a project in an organization within his studies it is only positive. This model should aim for creating an opportunity to execute a part of the studies through projects given by the organizations. As was found in the analysis the organisations have many project opportunities such as marketing- and customer researches, customer- and data acquisition, sales & service developments and developing "supporting" tools for management. To carry out these kinds of assignment the team and the teachers require a wide range of knowledge. However, these can be accomplished in the cooperative company model.

8.2 The structure of the new model

The figure 3 illustrates the framework of the academic years in the new operational model. The academic years are divided into 3.5 years and each year has autumn and spring semester which are divided into two periods.

The first year all the IB students will study the basic, cross cultural and international business management studies. In the end of the first year the IB class will be divided into two groups: the original IB group and the IB cooperative.

In the first period of the second year the groups continue their basic, cross cultural and international business management studies. However, the IB cooperative will also start the cooperative studies, initiating the operations, studying professional studies and acquiring assignment related to the international business. Meanwhile, the original IB group continues the regular studies based on the current study plan.

The issue that will cause closer consideration is the exchange studies that interrupt the cooperative studies. This issue is solved by dividing the IB cooperative in half during the exchange periods. The group A will start the exchange period in the spring of the second year, while the group B continues the studies in the cooperative. Consequently, in the autumn period of the 3rd year the group B starts the exchange period and the group A continues the studies in the cooperative. In the spring semester of the 3rd year both A and B groups continue the studies in the cooperative together and later on in the 2nd period of the 3rd year it is necessary to start initiating the final thesis process.

	The academic years and periods							
	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
	Autumn	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn	
1st Period	**Basic Studies** **C.C.** **Business Management**	**Basic Studies** **C.C.** **Business Management**	**Starting the cooperative**	**Group A** Exchange	**Group B** Exchange	**Core A & B** Professional studies Projects	**Thesis**	EMPLOYMENT
2nd period	**Basic Studies** **C.C.** **Business Management**	**Basic Studies** **C.C.** **Business Management**	**Core A & B** Professional studies Projects	**Core Group B** Professional studies Projects	**Core Group A** Professional studies Projects	**Thesis studies**		
Credits								
							= 210cr	

Figure 3. The framework of the new IB operational model.

8.3 New learning environment

The learning environment should contribute the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical competences of international business thus the learning environment should be contextual and situational. The operational model resembles the structure and characteristics of the open environment.

The organisational elements are: the team company culture, individual and team work as well as the instructive and personal study plan. The learning methods are contextual and student centered. The physical environment includes the Skinnarila Campus facilities and the office space of the new IB programme.

During the first year the learning of the basic studies would happen in conventional lectures and class room environment. The other years would be carried out in the cooperative open learning environment. In the environment the interaction between the students and teachers is appreciated. The learning in the cooperative is comprehensive and contextual where the collected information is combined and utilized in the assignments for the client organisations. The environment ought to contribute individual and team working.

8.4 New study plan

As mentioned there are two fundamentals to view the study plan. The administrative study plan contains the learning subjects, allocations, working hours and the goals of the studies. The other aspect is the formulation of the student-centred curriculum plan to support the learning process.

The study plan is planned taking into account the research findings and the companies' needs. The framework of the new study plan is influenced by the Fissio's 2011 year's study plan. However, based on the research findings, and the nature of the IB programme it can be seen that the level of international business studies in the operational and cross cultural aspect must be increased.

The framework of the new IB study plan contains:

• Basic Studies:	Mutual studies, Basic business studies
• Cross Cultural Studies:	Language and Culture studies
• International Business	
• Management Studies:	Sales, Marketing, Finance and Supply Chain Management, Leadership, Management and Team work studies
• Elective Studies	Languages, etc.
• Core Competent Studies	
• Professional Theory	Elective Literature and other data
• Practice	Practical training and project studies
• Thesis studies	Thesis studies and the final thesis

It is vital that the study plans facilitate the students' learning of both theoretical and practical international business competences. The study plan has to be systematic and functional. It should link the educational levels and provide continuity. The plan ought to be flexible hence to be able to be modified along the development of the environment. Also the efficiency is important; the plan should lead students to their goals which are determined by them considering their individual needs. Therefore this study plan is an instructive plan. The realized study plan is usually more student orientated because of the self-direction and independent decision making concerning the studies.

8.5 New teaching methods

In the new IB group the teachers ought to act as counsellors and supporters for the students. The teacher's main role in a team organisation is to act as a facilitator, to prepare exercises and guide independent individuals.

For the first year the teaching would mainly happen through normal class room teaching as the basic courses are taught in normal classes. This means that the conventional teaching methods are also used.

The consultative role emerges in the new model. The teachers facilitate and support students to acquire theoretical knowledge which is then applied in the problem solving and practical operations. The project studies require cooperation between the students and teachers since the projects are planned, executed and evaluated together.

In the cooperative the team gatherings are also important. The students have the possibility to share information, knowledge and experience to each other. Thus the communality is essential in the new teaching model. In the team meetings the teachers have a consultative role in order to develop individuals and the work community.

The special teaching methods guide the projects and personal learning of each student. Selfdirection is one key concept of the new IB program. The students have independence to define, acquire and measure their learning. The idea is not to ignore the surrounding but to have dialogue with the other students and teachers.

8.6 The challenges

There are several challenges that the international cooperative will face as it is the first international cooperative model in Lappeenranta area. As the organizations are not familiar with the concept it might be hard to sell the service for them. This might lead to the situation that the gained projects possibly can start to repeat themselves as it can be hard to obtain really demanding or versatile projects. This scenario would lead to the point where the students' development stops. This challenge should be kept in mind already when recruiting students. The right personalities and people with right attitudes should be chosen in order to make the most out of the model.

It is also vital that the students recruited to this model are willing to search for new customers as it might be that in the beginning there are not that many projects available. This challenge is normal in the business life and therefore it gives a good understanding of the sales in every organization. How will the students find the projects? The students chosen to the program should be ones that are eager to sell their knowhow and search for the existing projects.

All in all it could be said that it is the attitude of the students' that counts most when choosing the right applicants to the cooperative model. The personality and preparedness are the key factors to perform well in this model.

The researchers' thought about a plan B in case there were not enough projects for the whole study period. Several ideas were created, one being the enhancement of cooperation between the cooperatives of Saimaa UAS. Also some of the normal IB class lectures might be sufficient for the cooperative students as well. And thirdly case studies should be inserted to the study plan as they reflect real business cases well and provide a thorough understanding of the whole business process.

9 The reliability assessment of the thesis

The assessment of the research is crucial since the reliability of the results is fundamental for the thesis. In this section the aim is first to discuss about the basic requirements of assessment and reliability of the research in general. However the main emphasis is on the reliability assessment of this thesis.

It is said that the qualitative research's standards of reliability are vague since the qualitative method enables the researcher to apply the analysis methods, data and interpretation more freely. This kind of applicability of the method might cause a misconception about the reliability concerning the qualitative method. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 208.)

However, the researchers have to constantly argue the made decisions and debate the coverage of the data and the credibility of the research. Since the qualitative method is basically subjective, the researchers have their personal pre-assumptions, basic -and theoretic knowledge involved in the thesis process. Thus it can be claimed that the interpretations are based on personal conceptions and interpretation, not on solid numerical facts. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, p. 208.)

The main criterion of the reliability is the researchers themselves, thus the reliability ought to be assessed along the whole research process, as Eskola & Suoranta (2008, p. 210) claim.

In addition, Eskola and Suoranta (2008, pp. 211–212) state that the assessment of the reliability can be based on four criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. The four measures can be defined further as follows. 1) Credibility; the research provides a versatile and accurate interpretation and a picture of the phenomenon which is confirmed also by the research object. 2) Assurance; the pre-assumptions of the researchers are taken into account. 3) Transferability; the research results can be generalized, 4) Conformability; the interpretations can be compared to other researches that have studied the same phenomenon to see that the results support each other. (Eskola and Suoranta, 2008, pp. 211–212)

However, as already explained the thesis is operational. This enables the researchers to interpret the analysed data to answer only to the present research problem. It is not necessary to provide universal answers.

In addition, Kananen (2010, p. 70) claims that resulting in the same conclusion by two researchers reinforces the credibility of the research. As mentioned earlier the saturation plays an essential role in the assessment, which also Kananen (2010, p. 70) and Eskola and Suoranta (2008, p. 62) confirm.

Based on these requirements the results of this thesis can be considered as reliable when 1) the made decisions and actions in the thesis process have been described, discussed and justified clearly, 2) the research material which is relevant to the research problem, reaches the saturation point, 3) the research results answer to the present research problem and finally 4) both researchers result in the same conclusion.

The thesis has clearly described all the critical factors in order to demonstrate the reliability of the thesis. Firstly, the substance, goals and the research problem have been defined. Secondly, the theoretical framework was studied and explained. Thirdly the methodology, principles of the operational thesis and qualitative research have been investigated and described. The research material has been analysed and considered to be relevant and reliable to the research problem. Moreover, the saturation of the research material has been considered and demonstrated. Finally, as the analysis is executed by two researchers, the interpretations have been discussed and agreed as applicable. In addition, all the made decisions and actions have been justified, described and documented along the thesis process

10 Summary and discussion

The research problem of the thesis was: how to form the new IB operational model so that it would answer to the needs of the international companies in South Karelia. In order to be able to create the new and suitable operational model goals for the research were set. The first goal of this thesis was to find out the needs of local organizations for international business competence in work life as well as did they have projects for IB students to execute. Secondly, the thesis investigated Saimaa UAS' action plan 2010–2012 and strategy 2010–2015. Saimaa UAS has stated that the challenge is to provide requisite expertise for students that they would be employed in their professional fields after the graduation. Thus Saimaa UAS is focusing more and more on the development of the education processes. Saimaa UAS has clearly declared that closer cooperation with the local organizations is needed which means that the university has to investigate and develop new learning environments.

These goals set the way to develop the IB program to an environment where teachers, students and organizations work closely together. In the new operational model the study plan, learning environment and teaching methods were precisely designed to meet the needs of local organizations as well as the needs of Saimaa UAS. The new model also needed to support students' learning of theoretical, practical and generic skills in international business.

In the IB study plan of year 2012 the students are able to study for 3.5 years worth 210 credit points. During the studies they get to learn about subjects of international business such as marketing, finance, logistics and management, foreign languages, culture and internationalization. These courses answer the needs of the labour market according to Saimaa UAS. However, closer cooperation between the students and the organizations could to be enhanced.

In order to find the information relevant to the thesis the methodology focused on the operational thesis, qualitative research, data collection and analysis methods. This thesis was conducted by an operational method, because of the goals set to the thesis and because it was a freer way to use methodology. The idea in the operational thesis was to use and apply already existing information to create the new model.

The methodology to the thesis was gathered from many books to describe the theoretical framework of the thesis. In order to find information about the existing models the Internet sources were searched and two representatives of Fissio were interviewed.

The theme interview method was chosen to collect information from the organizations. This method gave the researchers an opportunity to discuss specific themes profoundly to find the real opinions of the representatives of the organizations'. The theme interview assessed topics such as basic organizational information, amount of projects and the IB competence needed in the organizations.

The analysis of the gained data happened through a theme method. This method was chosen because it gave the opportunity to understand one phenomenon thoroughly. The research material did not need to be large in order to be scientific. It was enough that the quality and coverage of the data was adequate.

The success of the qualitative research is not tied to the size of the material. The size of the material needs to be thought about individually in every case. In this case the local phenomenon of the need for international business competence was investigated. As a rule of thumb it could be said that there is enough material when the answers reach a saturation point, meaning that they don't produce new valid information. The delimitation of the material was thought about when conducting the research. The material size was small in the beginning and the most important understanding was shaped from the corpus.

The thesis was performed by two researchers what means that the techniques and analyses of each can be different. The triangulation in this case occurred as an investigator and method triangulation. The aim was to create clearness to the data as well as to separate the new information of the objective researched.

This thesis was a pioneering in investigating the needs for international business competence in the South Karelia region. It researched and finally demonstrated the alternative operational model to be established in the IB programme. It also is a ground-breaking research for the Saimaa UAS integration schemes of the education, R&D and the economic life.

There are many possibilities for further studies related to the development of educational activities in the Saimaa UAS, and South Karelia in general. Also the

Russian business possibilities could be investigated even further as well as how the new IB programme could better exploit the international cooperation.

The thesis creation process is instructive in many ways. The researchers learn how to actually write a thesis: set goals for the research, justify the research, search for information about the affecting factors on the need charting meaning the needs of local organizations' and Saimaa UAS' needs. The researchers learn to understand the difference between methodology and theory and to search for information sources.

The methodology part is the hardest division for the interviewers to terminate. In the beginning it is not easy to understand the difference between methodology and theory. After carrying out the thesis it is clear that methodology includes all of the information retrieval methods: data about the operational thesis, qualitative research, data collection and analysis methods.

Theory includes the benchmarking of the new operational models as well as need charting and the elements of the new operational model: new learning environment, -study plan and –teaching methods.

All in all, in this thesis the set goals were met and a proposal of a new operational model was designed. The new operational model is based on the researchers' interpretation on the organizations' answers about the need for international business competence as well as Saimaa UAS' needs to provide requisite expertise for the students. The model is a cooperative model designed for the international business students. This model gives the students the ability to learn theoretical, practical and generic skills of international business. Most importantly it is possible to execute part of the studies through projects for the local organizations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Team Company Loiste study plan 2011

OPETUSSUUNNITELMA 17.12.2010

MARKKINOINNIN SUUNTAUTUMISVAIHTOEHTO		60	11	3	perusopinnot
2011 aloittavat	**op**	**1. vuosi**	**2. vuosi**	**3. vuosi**	**4. vuosi**
Perusopinnot	**74**				
Ammattikorkeakoulun yhteiset perusopinnot	**11**				
Orientoivat opinnot		2			
Suomen kieli ja viestintä työelämässä		3			
Svenska i arbetslivet		3			
English Communication at Work		3			
Kieli- ja viestintäopinnot	**14**				
Managerial English			3		
Affärskommunikation			3		
Yritysviestinnän työkalut		3			
Viestijänä kehittyminen ja esiintymistaidot			2		
Business correspondence and negotiations				3	
Liiketalouden perusopinnot	**49**				
Yritystoiminnan perusteet		12			
Yhtiöoikeus		3			
Kansantalous		3			
Liike-elämän matematiikka I		3			
Liike-elämän matematiikka II		3			
Tilastolliset menetelmät		3			
Tietojenkäsittelyn perusteet (toimisto-ohjelmat)		3			
Työvälineohjelmistot (taitto, julkaisuohjelmat, kuvankäs.)		3			
Kirjanpidosta tilinpäätökseen		4			
Kannattavuuslaskenta		4			
Budjetointi			3		
Markkinaoikeus		3			
Tiimioppiminen		2			
Ammattiopinnot	**45**				
Asiakkaan ja liiketoimintaympäristön tuntemus	5/10/15 op				
Innovointi, tuotteistaminen ja brändäys	5/10/15 op				
Tuottavien asiakassuhteiden luominen	5/10/15 op				
Johtaminen ja yrittäjyys	5/10/15 op				
Vapaasti valittavat	**15**				
Projektit	**40**				
Harjoittelu	**30**				
Projektit	**10**				
Tiimitoiminta	**21**				
Toiminnan käynnistäminen	**5**				
Tiimiytyminen ja työnjako	**5**				
Ammatillisen osaamisen rakentaminen	**4**				
Asiantuntijuus	**4**				
Valmistautuminen työelämään	**2**				
Työyhteisön kehittäminen	**1**				
Opinnäytetyö	**15**				
YHTEENSÄ	**210**				

Jokaisesta kompetenssialueesta opiskellaan **vähintään 5 op**. Opintopisteet arvosanoineen kirjataan Winhaan 5 pisteen kokonaisuuksina.

Ne sisältävät kirjallisuuden lukemisen, seminaarit, opintojaksot (muut) ja asiantuntijavierailijat. **Osaamisen todentavat CV, portfolio, referenssit ja verkostot.**

Ammattikirjallisuus vähintään 25 op (75 kirjapistettä) (2,5 op/periodi); vähintään 15 op muut opintojaksoista, solut, seminaarit yms.

Valmentajan tuntiresurssit:

1. vuosi Luotsissa	768
2. vuosi Luotsissa	768
3. vuosi (syksy) Luotsissa	336

Appendix 2 Interview brief for the companies (in Finnish)

Hyvä (*haastateltavan nimi*),

Etelä-Karjala kaipaa osaajia! Opinnäytetyössämme kehitämme Saimaan ammattikorkeakoulun kansainvälisen koulutusohjelman toimintamallia vastaamaan paremmin yritysten tarpeisiin. Haluamme tutkia, minkälaista kansainvälistä liiketoimintaosaamista paikalliset yritykset kaipaavat tulevaisuuden kyvyiltä. Kysymme mielipiteitänne muun muassa markkinoinnin-, myynnin-, finanssi sekä kieli- ja kommunikointitaitojen tärkeydestä kansainvälisessä liiketoiminnassa. Haluamme, että tulevaisuuden tradenomit osaavat juuri niitä taitoja, joita yritykset tarvitsevat.

Haastattelemme noin 10 kansainvälistä yritystä. Haastatteluun on hyvä varata aikaa noin yhden tunnin verran. Haastattelu suoritetaan teemahaastatteluna kahden haastattelijan ja yrityksen edustajan/edustajien kesken. Haastattelu on anonyymi eikä yrityksiä tai sen edustajia mainita opinnäytetyössä vaan haastattelut ja sen tulokset käsitellään tutkimusaineistona. Käyttäisimme kuitenkin mielellämme äänitintä tallentaaksemme haastattelun mahdollisimman tarkasti.

Suuri kiitos yhteistyöstänne.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Anu Forsback
Johannes Liuska
Ohjaava opettaja – Ville Lehto