11 Conclusions

The subject of this research was a global organisation undergoing considerable change. The principal aim of this research was to propose a bespoke competency framework of Organisational Learning (OL) in a large, global organisation.

The research in Studies One and Two identified six firm-specific and measurable core OL competencies that contribute to British Airways’s OL climate. These competencies were: Learning Ethos, Effective Feedback, Competitive Orientation, Creative Problem Solving, Empowerment and Systems Thinking. The approach taken to the research was qualitative and quantitative.

The qualitative study applied a semi-structured interview to cover the Organisational Learning Facilitators (OLF) identified in the literature, which were discussed in chapter 2. The quantitative study used a bespoke questionnaire. The Organisational Learning Questionnaire (OLQ) was developed and used to “...do more than simply add new information to the organization...” (Beer & Spector, 1993; p. 644). Indeed this research suggested that, when combined with other organisational diagnostics, such as organisational commitment questionnaires, the OLQ offered further insights into a specific organisation’s shortcomings, which may help to identify possible areas for intervention with regard to organisational learning. Continued development of the OLQ to include job satisfaction and psychological contract measures is recommended.

It has been demonstrated that OL can be measured at the global level, across departments and job grades. It is concluded, therefore, that the approach taken in this research could be applied as a corporate approach to OL issues throughout large organisations. However, it is pointed out that the OL competencies developed for British Airways in this research are firm-specific and it is not implied, therefore, that they be applied to other organisations. It is
suggested, however, that each organisation should seek to develop its own OL competencies applying the methodology of this research.

Affective and continuance organisational commitment can be predicted by the perceived level of OL competencies operating in an organisation. It is concluded that OL may have a far-reaching impact on an organisation. It is tenuously suggested that, as a result of the relationship with organisational commitment, there may be an indirect relationship between OL and organisational performance, which may be mediated by organisational commitment levels. Further research is recommended to investigate whether there is any direct relationship between the OL competencies and organisational performance.

Wright et al (2000) also suggest a learning systems mode, in which the organisation’s learning orientation or style consists of a common culture and a set of core competencies that endow it with unique competitive qualities. Studies One and Two of this research have developed a bespoke, core set of competencies (the Organisational Learning Competency Framework - OLCF) applied in a global context in a single organisation. Some differences amongst departments were identified, suggesting that an organisation’s OL climate may differ slightly across departments. These departmental differences in the OL climate may be due to the function and role of departments. However, the responses from across British Airways indicate a homogeneous perception of the OL climate and would suggest that there is a common perception of OL in company. Direct links between the OL competencies and competitiveness were not made in this research.

To develop the OLCF and its applications further, concurrent and divergent validity studies against other OL instruments (such as the OL Climate Questionnaire and Learning Climate Questionnaire) are required. Predictive validity studies are also needed to establish whether individual and team performance with regard to the competencies can be predicted. It has been shown in this research, however, that conceptually the OLCF might augment some
current models of Learning Organisations applied in British Airways. The OLCF also adds further dimensions to current models, in particular a behaviourally based dimension.

11.1 Application of the Research in British Airways

The results of this research are now being applied in the sponsoring organisation, British Airways. Some competencies of the OLCF have been incorporated into the Management Capability Framework to be used in selection, performance management and succession planning. These competencies include Systems Thinking, Empowerment and Competitive Orientation. Elements of the other competencies of the OLCF were included under current headings of the Management Capability Framework. For example Effective Feedback was placed under Communication; Learning Ethos under Capability Development; Creative Problem Solving under Problem Solving and Analysis.

The results with regard to employee perceptions of Organisational Learning in British Airways were noted and it was planned that they be addressed in the future. The results could not be addressed in their entirety at the time that this research was concluded because a number of high profile, corporate initiatives were already under way. Where possible British Airways will seek to use some of the research and make any necessary interventions. For example the results of perceptions on Systems Thinking are not only addressed in the Management Capability Framework, but have been used in communiqués to departments and employees with regard to its importance to success and that everybody should think of the airline as a whole and seek to avoid a silo mentality. In a further example, in management induction courses for new managers the results of employee perceptions during periods of change will be presented and how important the manager’s role is in avoiding such perceptions and how to maintain effective team performance to ensure that the organisation remains competitive. In coaching courses the aspects of Effective Feedback and Empowerment will be included. The results with regard to organisational
commitment unfortunately could not be addressed at the time the research was completed because of other corporate initiatives underway, even though British Airways recognised that this was an important finding. British Airways expressed interest in pursuing interventions where organisational commitment and performance was concerned.

Generally, the principles of OL and the six competencies of the OLCF would be used in project management to share knowledge, improve competitiveness and communication by having regular, scheduled post-project reviews. Also teams who were conducting projects would hold communications meeting for the rest of the department to introduce the project and provide regular updates and invite opinions and guidance from people not directly involved in order to promote systems thinking and a learning ethos.

Finally, British Airways expressed interest in undertaking research in the future similar to that of Huselid (1995), Huselid, Jackson & Schuler (1994) and Schuler & Huselid (1997) to investigate HRM practices and organisational learning and their relationship with commitment and competitiveness.