

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents (1) a summary of the study, (2) a summary of the findings, (3) a discussion, (4) conclusions, and (5) recommendations for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This chapter contains the following:

5.1.1 Objectives of the Studies

Owing to the fact that an online degree is quite new in Thailand, this study focuses on whether employees perceive the degree as having the same value as a traditional degree does. The findings will be helpful for interested people and the current students of online degrees, so that they can prepare to meet their prospective employers' expectations.

5.1.2 Subjects, Materials, and Procedures

The subjects of this study consisted of 77 respondents chosen from various graduate schools. They studied in the Master of Business Administration programs for executives (Ex-MBA) at the University of Thai Chamber of Commerce, Kasetsart University and Thammasat University.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

5.2.1 Demographic Data

The portion of males and females was almost equally distributed, 49.4% and 50.6%, respectively. The average age was 37 years old and most of them came from the private sector, such as manufacturing, engineering and import and export sections. The participants in this study were educated and experienced managers who had an authority to recommend and hire people. Their work experience at their present companies was equal to and/or more than 6 years. The average recruitment frequency was two times a year. However, only 11.7 % of the respondents had ever

met an applicant with an online degree. These very few people came from information technology sections.

5.2.2 RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDES

5.2.2.1 Background Knowledge with an Online Degree

When testing the knowledge of the respondents with an online degree, they understood that a degree could be obtained online and an online degree was available in Thailand. They understood the learners' motivations and benefits of an online degree. For example, an online degree would be beneficial for distant people and busy people who had difficulty to attend a physical campus. However, most of them (66.2%) did not understand well how the courses could be conducted and evaluated online.

5.2.2.3 Qualifications of Applicants with an Online Degree

The employers in this study mentioned that the competencies of online degree holders were doubtful. Most of them accepted that it was difficult to measure the quality of the degree. In their opinions, learners spent most of their time studying alone and rarely had much of a chance to socialize with other students. Thus, they preferred regular degree holders to online degree holders. However, more than half of them were indecisive that the quality of an online degree was unequal to a regular one. It is noticeable that most employers commented that socialization was deprived from online learning. In their opinions, the students had to study on their own and did not interact face-to-face with peers and instructors. Moreover, the recruiters had doubts about the degree quality and whether or not the degree would reflect the real attributes of a person receiving the degree.

5.2.2.4 Decision Making of Recruitment Towards Candidates with Online Degrees

Regarding the non-discriminatory basis with an online degree, most employers agreed that it should be applicable for all degree types, either a traditional or an online degree. The majority of the respondents believed that doubts could inhibit hiring a capable person. Nonetheless, 64.9 percent of the respondents hesitated to hire candidates with an online degree. Also, they wondered whether an online degree could promote equal job opportunities as much as a traditional degree could. Unsurprisingly, they were unsure of sending their staff to gain a higher

education online. As for positive attributes of candidates, 50 percent of participants were not sure that studying online would represent the individual's responsibilities. All things considered, the degree type the candidates earned still played a vital role in hiring decisions.

5.2.3 Suggestions Towards Candidates with an Online Degree

The managers in this study made a number of comments based on their attitudes towards unclear issues of online degrees, namely, socializing skills, team-working skills, and degree measurement. Their suggestions were that, in order to make the degree more acceptable, students should gain practical internship and join social activities with other people before they graduate. Additionally, the degree providers should publicize the online degrees offered and have a standardized measurement for the degree quality.

5.3 DISCUSSION

This section involves discussion on interesting aspects raised from the summary of the findings in this study.

5.3.1 Results

Even though more than ninety percent of the participants responded that they knew what an online degree was, they acknowledged that they were unclear with teaching delivery and quality measurements. It could be inferred from this that their background knowledge with online degrees is based on the fact that online degrees are a type of long distance education. Based on their experience with some existing long distance education in Thailand, an online degree is beneficial for people living in distant places and having difficulty going to a physical campus.

However, from the feedback, most respondents hesitated to hire candidates with an online degree because of following factors:

Firstly, the respondents were doubtful about the quality of an online degree. By studying in an outside classroom setting, the course delivery, knowledge gained and degree standards were all viewed by the respondents as somewhat less strict. More than fifty percent of participants thought that the degree might not reflect the real attributes of the applicants. The managers were asked whether they viewed the virtues of an applicant with an online degree similar to those taking other types of

distance education, namely, a degree from an open state-run university. The students from this university are not required to attend a physical campus. Nevertheless, they are often viewed as highly disciplined individuals who take responsibility for their own studies. On the contrary, the prospective employers did not view this virtue as being dominant for a person obtaining an online degree. Instead, the managers were doubtful that completing the degree would indicate that a person was responsible and self-disciplined. This might be because people did not clearly understand the course delivery, as mentioned before. Moreover, when comparing the two degrees, some participants commented that an online degree was easier than a regular one. Moreover, an online degree may not be suitable for certain fields, especially those fields that require much practice and close guidance from teachers, like engineering. Because of these reasons, the recruiters, unsurprisingly, hesitated to send their staff to study online. From this point, it can lead to another problem in the future, because university references for online degrees might not be convincing enough for their prospective employers since the students and references are physically at a distance.

Secondly, the managers indicated that the classroom setting was important because learners would have a greater chance to socialize and brainstorm with their peers and teachers. On the contrary, they perceived that people studying online spent most of their time studying independently. Hence, the students may have difficulty working as a team in a company. This is a crucial concern for hiring decisions. When considering the respondents' type of business, their business types were related due to having active communication with people, e.g. manufacturing, import and export, and engineering. Hence, it is understandable that one of the desirable qualifications for people working in that field is good interpersonal skills. According to Rodger (1952), he stated that a company would consider the candidates' communication skills as an important factor when making a hiring decision. This is because hiring the wrong person, who does not fit in the organization's climate, means the company will lose time and money to recruit and train a new person again and again.

The managers in this study who were currently students in a traditional degree program reflected their attitudes that an online degree was not compatible with a traditional degree. Two perspectives might have influenced their attitudes: the

employers' views and the students' views. That is, an employer' perspective influenced what characteristics they were looking for in an employee. Meanwhile, their direct experience as students themselves guided them in determining what contributes to a good educational attainment. Obviously, these two factors made the hiring people suspicious of the competencies of candidates with an online degree. Most importantly, the most concerning issues are the quality of online degrees compared to traditional degrees and social skills, as mentioned earlier.

Nevertheless, it is interesting whether the same standard will be also applicable to other types of work that requires less socialization. For example, a human resources manager from a finance section might view an interpersonal skill less important than other business types do, but put more emphasis on other qualifications instead.

In short, the result is similar to research conducted by Adam (2006). The type of degree that the applicants received is a significant hiring criterion. The highly competitive labor market, especially in the economic downturn, forces candidates to prove to their prospective employers that they are qualified and capable to perform a job. Employers opt to choose a traditional degree as the benchmark over online degrees.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

From the findings presented after analysis of the data, the following conclusions can be drawn.

5.4.1 The recruiters showed doubts when considering candidates' competencies and social skills.

5.4.2 Apparently, three quarters of recruiting managers preferred a regular degree to an online degree.

5.4.3 The results confirmed the earlier hypothesis that recruiters are more doubtful with the credibility of candidates receiving an online degree.

5.4.4 The study implies that the hiring people emphasized social interaction and practical quality measurements that were viewed as absent from online degrees.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Results of this study may serve as an introductory step towards another prospective research regarding the career opportunities of people with an online degree. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are drawn:

5.5.1 Since online degrees are somewhat new in Thailand, there is a small number of respondents who have met candidates with an online degree. Therefore, if online degrees were better known, further research may consider the number of people who have met candidates with an online degree. This will yield more accurate and reliable results.

5.5.2 The respondent number is relatively small, and represented only by small groups of executives from only three universities. Hence, it cannot generalize and represent managers' attitudes as a whole. Thus, further research with larger numbers and different populations from various sources is recommended.

5.5.3 Follow-up research can be conducted by researching the direct experiences from online degree holders when applying for a job. This will reflect what they actually have experienced and whether or not any double standards exist between regular and online degrees.

5.5.4 Hiring decisions are somewhat of a sensitive issue. The research on managers' attitudes could be done more effectively with qualitative research or in-depth interviews. This would reveal more details of managers' attitudes and concerns.