CHAPTER 5

FINDING AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this chapter, significant findings of the present study will be summarized followed by a discussion of the limitations faced while conducting the study and suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Major Findings

As we have seen the first business school in the modern sense was Wharton, founded in 1881, with the first MBAs awarded around 30 years later at Harvard. America still dominates the field, though a handful of overseas institutions are chasing hard. The 2009th edition of the Financial Times MBA league table, generally seen as the most authoritative, placed London Business School (LBS) with Wharton, sharing the top position the first for a non-US school. Perhaps more significantly, a Chinese school, the Shanghai-based Ceibs, made it into the top 10. Many MBA programmes are broadly similar; the uniform flavour increased by the global intake; at LBS 90% of the MBA intake typically come from outside the UK.

The material for this Chapter comes from a book 'Snapshots from Hell', by Peter Robinson (1994). It describes a first-year student's experience in the Stanford Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. Peter Robinson, formerly a speech writer for President Reagan, tells about his experiences in applying to business schools, living with other MBA students, taking courses, interacting with faculty, and interviewing for summer jobs. The experience was a hellish one for Robinson for a number of reasons. He found the transition from the White House to business school wrenching. He was, at first, quite lonely. Above all, he was a poet (weak mathematically) which made him feel vulnerable in the quantitative courses. But Robinson also lays a degree of the blame for the uglier aspects of his business school experience on Stanford Business School and, in particular, on the faculty. Much of the teaching was mediocre, Robinson says, and some of it was appalling. Robinson also suggests that the faculty was paying too much attention on research. Of particular relevance are his assumptions about the marketing concept: Who is the producer, who is the consumer, and whose needs are being served? Peter Robinson assumes that he is the consumer, professors are the producers, and the primary need is certification. These assumptions have been common in the redesigning of business schools over the past two decades. They have also been used in much of the research on education (e.g. Schneider, Hanges, Goldstein, & Braverman, 1994). Robinson's view seems to be that the professors are responsible for telling him what to do and ensuring that he does it. The faculty is not capable of telling him what to learn. Robinson gives the impression that he is a victim in a situation over

which he has no control. Yes, he works there, but he only does what he is told-at first. This environment makes him unhappy. When Robinson finds others who are also unhappy, he becomes a bit happier; he and his friends begin to view the classes as some sort of bizarre initiation rite for obtaining the degree. Robinson represents a growing proportion of MBA students who feel no responsibility for their learning. They do not believe that they can change their own behavior and skills.

Research teaches us much about the effect of teachers on learning. The findings are nearly always the same; i.e. apparently, instructors' classroom activities have negligible impacts on student performance, measured by multiple choice items tapping memory, application and simple analysis competencies (Browne, Hoag, Wheeler, & Boudreau, 1991). Many researchers have reached this conclusion. When teachers direct and evaluate learning, students feel less responsible. At least two psychological principles are related to acceptance of responsibility: Social facilitation and attribution theory. According to Zajonc's (1965) review of social facilitation research, done on rats and students, when subjects can observe the critical responses of others, their learning is inhibited. This led Zajonc to conclude that "students should study alone". He did not provide advice for the rats. This is especially important in the initial stages of learning a skill (Condry, 1977).

Attribution theory implies that when an activity is associated with a reward, such as grades from teachers, people conclude that the reason that they are performing the activity is to achieve the reward. Condry (1977) reviewed evidence on attribution theory and concluded that extrinsic rewards

decrease intrinsic motivation for learning. Boggiano and Colleagues (1992) show how extrinsic control over students leads them to feel helpless. Thus, formal education provides cures that lead students to feel less responsible for their learning, for example, Tough (1982) studied important self-reported learning episodes by adults and concluded that, though people were able to report many important things they learned, few learning episodes occurred in groups, especially if the group had a teacher. Langer and Rodin (1976) found that when health care clients were told that the staff was responsible for their welfare, they became less active and happy.

In general then, a system in which teachers are viewed as producers makes students helpless and irresponsible. It also puts professors in a futile position regarding students' learning, Not surprisingly then, there is little relationship between students' satisfaction with the professor (or the course) and their learning (e.g. Attiyeh & Lumsden, 1972).

Students as Producers

People learn most effectively when they feel responsible for their own learning. This means they perceive themselves as the primary force of learning, but does not mean being held responsible, which is a passive approach.

If students are to produce their own learning, they need to view professors as a resource, much as they view books and computers. For example, it is senseless to say that a textbook is responsible for one's learning. If professors were viewed as resources, students would change their orientation. They would decide what help or information they need and then

seek this from the faculty. We already know how to design and implement such systems but if students learn more effectively on their own, Robinson asks, why should they attend business school at all? He argues that the students attend business school primarily to become certified. By improving their credentials, they can improve their chances to obtain good jobs.

Robinson, similar to other students at prestigious MBA programs, complains that faculty spends too much time on research and not enough on teaching students. Robinson agrees with his friend "Professor Healy" who says about Stanford: "It's a great school but there's too much theoretical garbage and not enough decent teaching." and Robinson concludes, "Nor was the balance about to be improved.

In contrast to Robinson's view, many faculties at leading business schools believe they should develop knowledge (by doing research) as well as communicate it (by teaching and writing). Their assumption is that those who are at the cutting edge should have more content (consisting of findings and methodology) to contribute to students and others. Does the evidence favor Robinson's view that research interferes with teaching, or is research beneficial to students? First, I looked at prestige. Certainly it is in the interest of the student that his or her school be reputable or at the very least deemed influential in any way to the student.

Armstrong and Sperry (1994) examined data on 32 prestigious business schools. They had a measure of research impact for each school (obtained from a study by Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1992) that was based on the averages of the number of papers published from 1983 through 1987, citations in 1987,

and peer ratings for faculty members at each school in 1988. This was correlated against prestige as judged by deans, faculty recruiters, and prospective students. With the exception of Harvard University and The University of Virginia, which both emphasize on teaching, the prestigious schools are all research-oriented. A strong relationship existed between research impact and prestige even among the 32 elite business schools.

In general, it seems that prospective students are most interested in getting accepted to schools with the highest research impact, not those with the highest teacher ratings. In fact, a survey of potential MBA students concluded that the prestige of the MBA program dominated all other criteria (Yeaple, 1994). As research enhances the prestige of the school, and because it is valuable to know about research findings, it would be expected that research has a payoff to students. Ronald Yeaple of the University of Rochester presented data on the net present value to students with MBA degrees from 20 leading business schools.

He obtained his data by using Business Week survey estimates of pre- and post-MBA salaries at each school, in addition to a growth rate estimated from five-year follow-up surveys. Although these data have problems (e.g. Yeaple estimated that responses were received from only 25% of the graduates for the fifth-year-out, averages were used instead of medians, inflation produced illusory gains, response bias is common in such surveys), most of the biases applied to all schools.

The MBA value comes from two sources:

1. The jump in post-MBA pay relative to pre-MBA pay (typically 55%).

2. Yeaple's assumption that salary growth rate would be half as great if that individual did not have an MBA.

The latter assumption is critical to assessing the value of an MBA, but it is less of a problem when looking at differences among the schools. Data on the research impact for 17 of Yeaple's schools were available from Kirkpatrick and Locke's (1991).

It is clear from such research that salaries achieved by studying at the prestigious universities are higher, but the assumption that these salaries are high because these universities do research begs questions. One can also deduce other explanations from the data. For example, students at research-oriented schools may conclude that the classes are useless, and then spend all of their time on networking, thus helping their earnings in the years after graduation.

Robinson reports on the first year because it is the year of drama: "It is also the year of loneliness, self-doubt, and constant unyielding pressure".

This chapter has spent some time looking at Robinson's concerns as he implies that the MBA's are simply routes to better job prospects rather than for any serious academic studies. This research partly examines this claim by looking at the competencies and skills learnt in MBA courses within the public and private universities.

The overall conclusion is that the public university MBA's are evaluated better in terms of the skills and competencies learnt, whilst the private universities are seen as offering better job and promotion futures. Surprisingly the part time MBA courses are evaluated as better at imparting competencies

and skills, compared to the full time studies. However, this may be a reflection of the fact that the full time MBA sample came from the private universities.

As the literature review has shown the MBA is sold in terms of producing better skilled managers. The assumption, therefore is that the competencies and skills outlined in the questionnaire are taught and practiced. It appears that both the private and public universities do not fare that well in the respondents' assessment of what is learnt. Most of the responses are just above the average, indicating that many of the skills and competencies are not learnt. The skills referred to are important for managers (See Chapter 3 for skills and competencies used).

The other surprising finding is that the public university MBA students pursue MBA to satisfy personal desires of learning and acquisition of knowledge for its own sake, whereas the students from the private universities viewed their MBA's in more instrumental terms of obtaining a better job and or promotions.

Significance of the Study

This research looked at the values held by the final year MBA students and their motivation and experiences of pursuing MBA in Thailand. The significance lies in the fact that the universities can look at the results and review their curriculum to ensure that the MBA lives up to its original dreams. More important is to examine the pedagogy used as simply lecturing without any added pedagogical methods available such as case studies, discussion,

seminars and presentations would enhance the MBA experience.

The private universities may also want to look at their students' motivations to pursue the MBA. Whilst it is not wrong to seek better jobs, simply 'instrumental' approach to learning will not serve the students well in their future job prospects.

Limitations

The sample of MBA students came from Bangkok. It could be that selecting other districts or even other universities may give a different perspective. Running through this study is an assumption that the MBA is designed to enhance managerial skills and competencies but may be this assumption is not correct. A study of faculty members and their expectations would have validated this assumption.

Suggestions for Further Research

The MBA faculty assumptions of the philosophy behind their curriculum may be illuminating. One could also compare Thai MBA's with those from the UK, US, or somewhere else. However, given the findings from the literature review it will be surprising to find overseas MBA's to be different.

In this study the employers' views are sadly missing. What is it that they expect from the MBA graduates? How satisfied are they with their MBA

employees? Are MBA employees more capable compared to other managers or officers? What skills do they look for? These are all valid questions that need to be answered.