

EFFECTS OF ADVISORY MENTORING ON CAREER MATURITY FOR GRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS – A PERSPECTIVE OF ANTICIPATORY SOCIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the mentorship of thesis advisors in graduate business school, and its relationships with career maturity of MBAs. Three hypotheses are proposed and tested using a sample of 562 full time MBA students. Analytical results are summarized as follows: (1) MBAs perceive higher psychosocial function than other practical functions (instrumental, networking, career development) from their advisor. (2) Advisory mentoring functions are positively related to career maturity. (3) Gender moderates the relationship between mentoring functions and career maturity. The results are interpreted and implications discussed in terms of the assessment of MBA programs and the institutionalization of career counseling for MBAs.

INTRODUCTION

Graduate study in business administration represents a useful career starting point for students. Many college graduates who lack working experience enter the graduate business school to pursue advanced degrees based on the belief that graduate study will improve their competitiveness in the job market. However, after two years of study, the question of these young MBAs being cognitively and affectively ready is important. That is, do management educators effectively help them to prepare for real world careers?

Studies of career transition from school to work (STW) indicated that developing awareness of the choices and planning improve the ability of students to cope with the STW transition [5]. Preparedness and planning in career choices are termed career maturity..[6]. This study asserted that one of the main goals of business graduate education was to help students professionally and psychologically ready for their managerial career. This assertion is based on the stage model of organizational entry..[1]. The first stage, which is anticipatory socialization, encompasses all learning that occurred before the first day a graduate spent on the job, and influences subsequent stages such as the development of an initial psychological contract. Graduate study incorporating a planned intervention is a tactic used in anticipatory socialization. Such planned intervention is conducted by a formally assigned thesis advisor.

Furthermore, Leavitt [3] questioned the effectiveness of management education, and especially criticized the fact that faculty members in business school focused on educating MBAs rather than socializing them. Business education which is considered a form of anticipatory socialization should be oriented to cultivate the path finding abilities of students which include conceptual thinking and decision-making skills. This study thus addressed Leavitt's call for socializing MBAs in the Ph.D. direction by focusing on the one-year academic thesis writing process. However, most MBA programs in western society do not include the completion of a master thesis as part of the degree requirements. Taiwanese educational system, where graduate students must complete academic-oriented theses with

advisors, provides an excellent research context for the aforementioned apprenticeship model. How these prospective managers evaluate their advisory mentoring experiences, whether the experiences of advisory mentoring affect their readiness in making career choices, and whether gender of students makes any difference to advisory mentoring and career maturity. The purpose of the current study is mainly concerned with answering the above questions.

LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature review, this study proposes three hypotheses:

H1: MBAs will report a higher degree of psychosocial function than practical functions (instrumental, networking, and career development).

H2: MBA perceptions of advisory mentoring functions are positively associated with their career maturity.

H3: Gender moderates the relationship between advisory mentoring functions and career maturity.

METHOD

This study surveyed second year full time MBA students in all graduate business schools in Taiwan. Of the 930 questionnaires distributed randomly, a total of 562 completed and usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 60.43 percent. Of this number, 310 (55.16 percent) were men. The mean age is 26.35 years old (S.D. is 4.17, 22-45). Only 162 (28.83 percent) respondents had previous working experiences (average 1.71 years with S. D. equal to 4.18) including part time job and internship. Considering most full time MBA students enter the graduate school right after college, this sample characteristics reflect the nature of Taiwanese full time MBA students.

This study used three scales: advisory mentoring functions, career maturity, and internal locus of control. Each scale had satisfactory reliability with a above 0.70. Evidence of convergent validity is found in the parameter estimates and t-values.

RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

MBAs perceived higher psychosocial function than practical functions (instrumental, networking and career development). Students of this study valued less on practical functions such as exposure or visibility, information support, and championship, which business employees valued highly..[2]. Instead, students immediately recognized advisors who were concerned with student learning, and who provided encouragement and shared experience. In a sense this is good news. Providing opportunities for students to relate to advisors and discover shared experiences may help MBAs prepare for their career.

The direct impacts of mentoring function on career maturity are evident. Specifically, results demonstrate that psychosocial, career development and networking functions are positively associated with the four measures of career maturity. This implies that the advisor's support helps release tension of MBAs when facing career planning and management, and inspires students to adopt more positive attitudes regarding the prospective professional field.

As expected, gender exerts significant moderating effects on the relationships between mentoring and career maturity. The effects of psychosocial, career development and networking functions on career maturity are stronger for female MBAs than male MBAs. These results deserve attention. Women regard the mentoring function is beneficial for their career development [4]. Consequently, women may

expect advisors to offer more assistance in this area. Once they recognize the support offered by advisor, women tend to be more responsive to the assistance provided than do men.

This study maintains that advisors play two important roles in MBAs learning: educator of management theories and socializing agent of managerial careers. The study hypotheses are supported. In conclusion, the main contribution of this study lies in offering large scale quantitative data relating to MBA advisory mentoring experience in Taiwan and enhancing the generalization power of mentoring theory. The findings support our assertions. This study thus offers two suggestions regarding career development and management education. First the requirement of thesis writing with an advisor would be a good alternative for developing the conceptualization skills of MBAs, while simultaneously providing a special tactic for anticipatory socialization. Second, MBA advisors should pay increased attention to the needs of female MBAs in terms of career counseling and development.