

Organizational Socialization Process of MBA Graduates

(Proses Sosialisasi Organisasi dalam Kalangan Graduan Sarjana Pentadbiran Perniagaan)

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ABSTRACT

Extant literature on organizational socialization has not focused on the relation of education and learning with adjusting to work. As a result, little is known about the contribution of an MBA learning experience towards the process of organizational socialization. The purpose of this study is to understand the organizational socialization process of MBA graduates in their first six months of work. This qualitative study involved interviews with MBA graduates who had been employed within a period of one to six months. This study found that MBA graduates utilized their communication and analytical skills that were enhanced during the MBA education in support of their socialization tactics of relationship building, information gathering and learning. Graduates' skills and prior experiences were mobilized through the facilitation of immediate superiors and/or supported by mentorship and help by senior co-workers.

Keywords: Organizational socialization; socialization process; MBA learning; experience; training

ABSTRAK

Kebanyakan literatur sedia ada mengenai sosialisasi organisasi tidak menumpukan kepada hubungan antara pendidikan dan pembelajaran dengan alam pekerjaan. Kesannya, pemahaman tentang sumbangan pengalaman pembelajaran program Sarjana Pentadbiran Perniagaan terhadap proses sosialisasi organisasi adalah masih di tahap yang rendah. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memahami proses sosialisasi organisasi dalam kalangan graduan MBA dalam tempoh enam bulan pertama mereka bekerja. Kajian kualitatif ini melibatkan temu bual dengan graduan MBA yang telah bekerja bagi tempoh satu hingga enam bulan. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa graduan MBA menggunakan kemahiran komunikasi dan analitikal mereka yang telah diperkukuh semasa mereka mengikuti program Sarjana Pentadbiran Perniagaan bagi menyokong taktik sosialisasi mereka termasuk dalam menjalin hubungan dengan rakan kerja, mengumpul maklumat dan pembelajaran. Kemahiran graduan dan pengalaman terdahulu digarapkan melalui pertolongan dari ketua jabatan dan/atau mentor dan pekerja senior.

Kata kunci: Sosialisasi organisasi; proses sosialisasi; pembelajaran MBA; pengalaman, latihan

INTRODUCTION

Organizational socialization is an adjustment process that occurs when a newcomer obtains the attitudes, behaviors, skills, and knowledge that she or he requires in making transition from being outsider to becoming effective member of an organization (Van Maanen & Schein 1979). It is one of the determining factors that lead to job satisfaction, organizational identification and commitment, employee retention, turnover, job performance and learning (Bauer et al. 2007; Griffin, Colella & Goparaju 2000). The term is also used when organizations strategize to reduce newcomers' uncertainties and anxieties while they learn to adapt to their new workplace during the initial period of their employment (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006; Allen 2006; Cable & Parsons 2001). Hence, the first few months of employment can be considered a crucial socialization period since the quality of the newcomer's adjustment process may affect his or her decision whether

or not to remain as an employee at the organization (Porter, Crampon & Smith 1976; Schein 2003).

Moreover, organizations strive hard to prevent employee turnover since it could have a severe impact on organizations in terms of financial and productivity loss (Hausknecht & Holwerda 2013; Kacmar et al. 2006). In order to ensure employees' commitment towards organizations, the process of socialization requires the mutual effort of both organizations and newcomers (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006; Griffin et al. 2000). It is common for big organizations to have an orientation program for newcomers during the initial stage of employment. Newcomers, nevertheless, need certain tactics to adjust or adapt to their new work environment, colleagues and job roles. Individual socialization tactics include building relationships, seeking information and feedback, making observations, and being mentored (Griffin et al. 2000).

Research on organizational socialization is usually associated with a newcomer's adjustment tactics in an organization from the individual's perspective (e.g. Ashforth, Sluss & Saks 2007b; Griffin et al. 2000; Reichers 1987). Furthermore, research that examines newcomers' socialization tactics in organizations involves newcomers in general (e.g. Bauer & Green 1998; Major et al. 1995), as well as newcomers in some specific job positions such as accountants (Morrison 1993), engineers (Korte 2009) and mental health specialists (Settoon & Adkins 1997), and during the adjustment process itself (e.g. Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2005; Bauer et al. 2007; Fang, Duffy & Shaw 2011). However, there is a lack of research on the newcomers' socialization tactics that are utilized based on their previous experience such as the knowledge and skills that they gained from a postgraduate learning experience, especially the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. MBA education is a significant contributor toward the development of managerial and leadership competencies of the graduates (Dacko 2006; Kretovics 1999), but it typically involves large investment on the part of graduates, while organizations incur high costs in hiring and retaining the graduates. Hence, there is a need to further understand MBA education as it relates to organizational socialization. Specifically, the objective of this study is to understand the process of organizational socialization of the MBA graduates in their first six months of work. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What particular learning experiences or skills from the MBA program do new graduates bring to their new job?
2. How do they apply these learning experiences or skills in their new job?
3. What is the process of socialization that helps new MBA graduates to successfully adapt at their new workplace?

LITERATURE REVIEW

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

Organizational socialization is an initial phase of employment period in which newcomers develop a clear understanding of their job roles as well as the culture and politics of organizations (Rollag 2004; Van Maanen & Schein 1979). During this period, organizations are usually attentive to the newcomers' ability to fit in and, thus, try to enculturate and influence newcomers to contribute to the organizations (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006). Organizational socialization is a continuous and interactive process between organizations and employees (Allen & Shanock 2013; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006). The organization plays an important role in helping newcomers to understand and fit well in their new environment, job roles, and with their colleagues by using various socialization tactics on newcomers during the encounter

stage (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006; Allen 2006; Cable & Parsons 2001; Gruman, Saks & Zweig 2006). An organization's socialization tactic commonly used during newcomers' initial stage of employment is organizing orientation programs (Klein & Weaver 2000; Zahrly & Tosi 1989). These orientation programs, which can be formal or informal or a mixture of both, are mainly aimed at supporting the process of a newcomer's identification with his/her job role and its relations with the organization (Anderson-Gough, Grey & Robson 2000; Klein & Weaver 2000). Formal orientation programs are usually held in the form of classroom-based training, while informal orientation programs involve newcomers' communication and engagement in activities with their supervisors and colleagues (Zahrly & Tosi 1989). Besides, as discussed by Griffin et al. (2000), organizing group orientation programs and providing career path and interpersonal support, are other forms of an organization's socialization tactics.

The socialization process of newcomers usually takes at least six months, during which they embrace the organization's values and learn to adapt to their job roles (Schein 2003). The organizational socialization process consists of four stages: anticipation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization (Ashforth et al. 2007a). First, the anticipation or anticipatory socialization is the pre-arrival stage which consists of "all the learning that takes place prior to the graduate's first day on the job" (Garavan & Morley 1997: 119). During this first stage of the socialization period, newcomers already have certain knowledge, behaviors, skills, and competencies (Porter et al. 1976), and a set of expectations and beliefs about an organization, which might have been gathered through a job and company search, press releases, input from family and friends, and exposure during recruitment process (Ashforth et al. 2007a; Scholarios, Lockyer & Johnson 2003).

Second, the encounter stage is the introductory phase in which newcomers join an organization as employees. The newcomers usually have to deal with their feelings over their expectations and actual experience in the workplace, which often creates internal conflict and anxieties. Third, the adjustment stage is the phase in which newcomers focus on acquiring the necessary work behaviors and developing the competencies to perform and contribute to the group or organization (Reichers 1987). In this phase, the newcomers put their effort to resolve the conflict by trying to strengthen their relationships with their supervisors and co-workers and getting involved in work activities that would help them to adapt (Ashforth et al. 2007a). This stage is particularly crucial as newcomers learn whether they can cope with their job roles as well as with the organization's norms and culture. The effectiveness of socialization experience is vital during the adjustment stage because it may have the effect of lowering the newcomer's intention of leaving the organization (Peterson 2004). Fourth, the final stage of the socialization process is stabilization stage, which

occurs when the newcomers are able to adjust themselves to the new environment. In this stage, newcomers become integrated within the organization as experienced staff members and become valued employees as they go through the promotion stage and group assimilation (Ashforth et al. 2007a).

Meanwhile, for individual newcomers, the socialization process could be enhanced through several socialization techniques. Early literature on organizational socialization have identified several individual tactics that newcomers use to assimilate effectively; among them are making sense (Louis 1980; Settoon & Adkins 1997) and seeking feedback and information (Ashford & Cummings 1983). Later in the 1990s, socialization is further understood and more tactics were discovered, such as relationship building (Ashford & Black 1996), mentorship (Chao, Walz & Gardner 1992; Heimann & Pittenger 1996; Ostroff & Kozlowski 1993), observation (Saks & Ashforth 1997a; Saks & Ashforth 1997b) and social learning (Smith & Kozlowski 1994). Griffin et al. (2000) proposed an organizational socialization tactics framework that is based on pro-active tactics through an interactionist perspective. They summarized a newcomer's socialization tactics from previous studies and categorized them into nine newcomer's pro-active tactics, which are: (a) seeking feedback from supervisors, colleagues and mentors, (b) gathering information, (c) building relationships with co-workers, supervisors, and mentors, (d) having an informal mentor relationship, (e) negotiating job change, (f) adopting positive framing or perspective, (g) involving in extra-curricular work-related activities, (h) managing one's own performance and taking control of one's own learning, and (i) observing and modeling other employee's behavior. Post-2000s, Korte (2009) and Morrison (2002) suggested building relationships as one of the main approaches to induce socialization.

From the perspective of individuals, socialization is effective when newcomers experience positive outcomes during their employment period, such as career development and growth, as well as job satisfaction (Allen 2006; Korte 2009; Saks, Uggerslev & Fassina 2007). In addition, a newcomer's socialization into the workplace is the first step toward achieving organizational identification, employee retention, job performance, and learning (Bauer et al. 2007; Griffin et al. 2000). On the other hand, newcomers who have negative experience in the socialization process might feel stressed and decide to quit, which eventually leads to employee turnover. Specifically, the first six months is usually considered the critical period of employment since it could determine the effectiveness of the newcomer's organizational socialization process. According to Equifax (2014), about 40% of employee turnover usually occurs during the first six months of employment.

Therefore, from the managerial perspective, retaining employees is as equally important as recruiting the right employee for the job position and organization because it may lead to an organization's financial and productivity

loss (Hausknecht & Holwerda 2013; Kacmar et al. 2006). For example, a study by Fitz-enz (1997: 1) shows that organizations may lose approximately USD\$1 million on average "for every ten managerial and professional employees who leave their organizations". Employee turnover costs include costs related to hiring and training, termination or resignation, loss of productivity until the job is filled and the hiring and training a replacement (Fitz-enz 1997). Thus, it is crucial for organizations to aid newcomers in their socialization process as one of its retention strategies.

Overall, there is a considerable amount of literature regarding organizational socialization, but most of it focuses on the post-entry organizational influences (for example, the effect of orientation programs) as well as newcomers' tactics (during encounter stage and beyond) to adapt to their job, organization and colleagues (e.g. Ashforth et al. 2007b; Cooper-Thomas, Van Vianen & Anderson 2004; Griffin et al. 2000). There is also some management literature that emphasize on newcomers' pre-entry experience prior to their first day on the job (Scholarios et al. 2003). Nonetheless, there is still a lack of research that examines the contribution of anticipatory socialization, especially from the MBA learning experience, towards the process of organizational socialization. Hence, in this study, we focus on individual or interactionist perspective of the socialization process in which newcomers learn to incorporate their knowledge, skills, norms, attitudes, and behaviours to adapt and make sense of the environment at their new workplace (Griffin et al. 2000; Reichers 1987).

MBA EDUCATION

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) program is a formal management education for professionals who seek to advance their career. Having an MBA qualification is popularly considered as a ticket for better job opportunities, as well as higher income and managerial position (Carnall 1992). An MBA is also pursued for personal development, specifically related to increased confidence in work competencies, and increased career choice, thus indicating that in addition to financial measures, the MBA education is also treated as an internal dimension of career success (Hay & Hodgkinson 2006).

Baruch and Leeming (1996) noted that the MBA programs are aimed at developing graduates' competencies and skills in assuming managerial roles and providing greater understanding about business and its contexts. They also added that an MBA program is beneficial to both graduates and the organizations that employ them (Baruch & Leeming 1996). Several studies have shown that MBA graduates demonstrate positive qualities in their managerial skills (Boyatzis & Case 1989; Kretovics 1999). Employers perceive that MBA graduates gained the skills of communication, decision-making, analytical thinking, leadership and interpersonal skills (Dacko

2006). Generally students in business programs, including those in the MBA, are exposed to multidisciplinary subjects, which develop their ability to apply the various business subjects including finance, statistics, economics, accounting, management and marketing, and acquisition of integrative thinking skills (Bajada & Trayler 2013).

The learning outcome of MBA program in terms of skill acquisition and improvement has been widely studied in literature (e.g. Hay & Hodgkinson 2006). Boyatzis and Kolb (1991) developed a set of Learning Skills Profile (LSP), which is a typology of skill scales, as the basis to evaluate learning skills for populations in many areas, including those in business and management, education, and healthcare. These learning skills are: (a) relationship skill, (b) adapting skill, (c) information-gathering skill, (d) information analysis skill, (e) goal-setting skill, (f) action skill, (g) initiative skill, (h) planning skill, (i) quantitative skill, and (j) technology skill. Based on these skills set, Kretovics (1999) measured MBA learning outcomes against the skills that are learned by the students. His findings show that MBA graduates have shown improvements in many skills, which implies that MBA education programs have a positive impact on graduates.

Nevertheless, critics regarding the relevance and quality of MBA education and graduates have received attention in literature. For example, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) argued that there is a lack of fit between the business school curriculum and factors that are required for operating a successful business. This is further supported by Mintzberg (2004) who claimed that business schools do not produce sufficiently good and practical managers since the programs focus on business functions or purposes instead of the management practice itself. However, many business schools would counter the above through justifying the delivery of their MBA programs, which are built upon simulated industry realities. This approach involves giving students case studies, work-based assignments, and company-based projects, engaging them in work placements, and inviting guest speakers to campus (Paton 2001).

Although there is a mixed opinion regarding the MBA program, both employer and MBA graduates' perception of MBA education in developing managerial and interpersonal skills is high (Dacko 2006). Therefore, having an MBA education enables the graduates to contribute their learning experience from the program to their job position

and organization. However, little is known about the contribution of the MBA learning experience towards MBA graduates' organizational socialization process during their early employment period.

LITERATURE SYNTHESIS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

On the whole, we can see the importance of organizational socialization during the initial employment period since it can contribute to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and ultimately employee retention. Organizations and newcomers play their respective roles in ensuring that the socialization process is effective and successful for newcomers in their effort to fit in with the organizations. There is a considerable amount of literature that discusses organizations' tactics in helping newcomers socialize effectively (e.g. Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006; Klein & Weaver 2000) and newcomers socialization tactics upon entering an organization (e.g. Ashforth et al. 2007b; Cooper-Thomas et al. 2004; Griffin et al. 2000). Yet, research regarding specific contribution of the anticipatory socialization phase is still lacking in the organizational socialization literature, particularly from MBA education.

Meanwhile, MBA education is regarded as a valuable qualification for students and employers as the program is known to improve the graduates' knowledge, skills and ability, especially in the context of management and leadership (Dacko 2006). From the literature, we can see that MBA education makes a positive contribution during the graduates' post-MBA career as they apply certain skills and knowledge that they have learned in the MBA program. Nonetheless, there is still a dearth of study that focuses on the contribution of the MBA program (that forms a part of the anticipatory socialization stage), towards the assimilation process of the MBA graduates as the newcomers of the organizations, particularly in the types of skills that are developed from the program. Thus, the objective of this study is to understand the process of organizational socialization of MBA graduates in their first six months of work.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework that guides this study. The socialization of the MBA graduates occurs as a process, which involves MBA education as a part

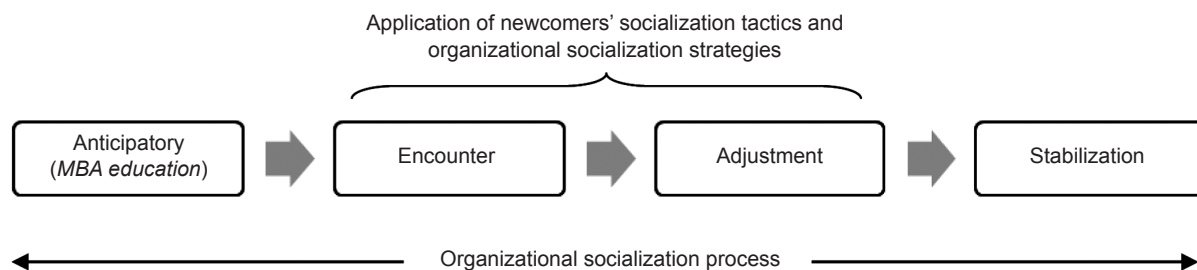


FIGURE 1. Study's conceptual framework on the organizational socialization process of MBA graduates

of the anticipatory stage. This process is facilitated by both newcomers' socialization tactics and organizational socialization strategies based on Ashforth et al. (2007a) four stages socialization process.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Existing organizational socialization literature has explored the factors that influence newcomers' adjustment tactics at their workplace through survey research (e.g. Bauer & Green 1998; Major et al. 1995; Morrison 1993; Settoon & Adkins 1997). In this study, the authors are interested in understanding the organizational socialization process of MBA graduates through the graduates' own experiences in adapting to a new workplace. Given the nature of this phenomenon, only the MBA graduates can validate if their previous experience in MBA could assist them in the socialization process. Each newcomer experience the socialization process differently, and no quantitative methods can explain unique socializing experiences of each employee undergone as measurable items in a survey. Therefore, to achieve this objective, this study adopted a qualitative research design since the method is an appropriate approach to gain a thorough understanding of a specific situation (Merriam 2009).

A purposeful sampling strategy was used in the

selection of participants, to ensure that the study was able to collect data from participants who can give the most accurate account of their experiences to achieve the objective of the study (Merriam 2009; Patton 2002). Data were collected from six MBA graduates from the graduating class of 2013 through interviews, using a semi-structured interview protocol that was developed based on the study's research questions and conceptual framework. The graduates spent four semesters as full-time MBA students at a graduate business school in one of the universities in Malaysia and they completed their MBA program in June 2013. The MBA graduates were chosen based on having been employed at least one month after completing their MBA program. The participants for this study were a mix of male and female, and they were selected based on three types: Type 1: new organizational entry with no work experience, Type 2: new organizational entry with work experience, and Type 3: re-entry into the same organization but in a different department.

By the sixth participant interview, some patterns emerged from the study's findings and the interview conversations began to give similar answers. Data collection was concluded after the sixth interview, as similar patterns in the participants' experiences emerged, indicative of the data gathering had reached the point of saturation (Merriam 2009). Table 1 shows the profile of the six participants and their pseudonyms used for this

TABLE 1. Profile of participants

Category	New entry with no work experience		New entry with work experience		Re-entry but in a different department	
Name*	Fifi	Diana	Salma	Azura	Adam	Mark
Education background prior to MBA	Bachelor degree in Business	Bachelor degree in Business	Bachelor degree in Engineering	Bachelor degree in Finance	Bachelor degree in Engineering	Bachelor degree in Business
Year of college graduation	2011	2011	2008	2010	2003	2004
Years of work experience prior to MBA	No work experience	No work experience	2 years	1 year	8 years	7 years
Work position prior to MBA	None	None	Sales Engineer	Executive	Senior Diplomat	Senior Diplomat
Type of industry	None	None	Engineering	Banking	Government Agency	Government Agency
Corporate attachment during MBA	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Current work position	Researcher	Executive	Senior Executive	Lecturer	Manager	Manager
Type of industry	Education	Cooperative	Engineering	Education	Government Agency	Government Agency
Employment period**	1 month	6 months	5 months	6 months	3 months	6 months

* All names are pseudonyms

** Based on interview date

study. The last row of Table 1 shows the length of time the participants employed at the time of the interview, and it shows that each participant was in a different stage of their organizational socialization process. The participants were asked to relate their experience at work up to the time of the interview. Interviews were held at a site chosen by the participants; two interviews were held at the participants' workplace during weekdays while others were done at restaurants during weekends. All interviews were digitally recorded then transcribed for data analysis.

The data from the six interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method, following the procedures of Corbin and Strauss (2007) and Merriam (2009). This method involves coding a unit of data from each interview transcript that is relevant to answering the research questions and then the data units were combined into categories. The categories from each interview transcript were then compared with other interview transcript within the similar type of employment, and followed by comparing across different type of employment, to identify recurring themes and categories, which constitute the findings of this study (Merriam 2009). The categories derived from the analysis include skills utilized during the early employment period; activities or approach that participants used to socialize at their new workplace; and the socialization process of each participant, which include background history of participants (previous education and work experience), activities on the first day and first week at the new workplace, the first task assigned at work, and the approach that they used to complete the tasks.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the qualitative analysis using procedures of Corbin and Strauss (2007) and Merriam (2009) to arrive at themes and categories as classifications of data. The categories were derived inductively from the data during the process of coding and analysis. Three themes emerged from this study, namely utilization of communication and analytical skills, relationship building and information gathering tactics, and organizational socialization process. The themes are discussed accordingly.

UTILIZATION OF COMMUNICATION AND ANALYTICAL SKILLS

All six participants admitted that the MBA program helped them improve communication skills, which was fully utilized during their early employment period. Improvement in this skill was due to their active participation during the MBA program, which involved a lot of oral presentations and written assignments in class as well as their intensive interactions with the lecturers and fellow students. Azura, who had a short working experience prior to her MBA, mentioned:

The MBA program had helped me to communicate better in English since there were some international students in the class. By talking to international students on a regular basis and working together with them in group projects, I gained more confidence in communicating with others.

Fifi asserted that the MBA had taught her "*the ability to speak to different level of people because my classmates came from diverse background, thus, talking to people in this new workplace was not a problem to me.*" Based on similar reasons, Diana said that, "*I use different approaches to talk to my co-workers who are fresh graduates compared to the experienced and higher positioned employees.*"

Salma, who worked in an engineering company, stated that:

During the first month of work, I always communicate with my supervisor and co-workers and try to be specific of what I want. Sometimes when I tell them something that is too general, they assume a lot. Therefore, I need to be specific so that they have the same thinking [pause]. I learnt this technique from my experience in leading group projects during the MBA.

Mark used the communication skills he learned from his MBA education by "*[...] talking to my customers and giving some briefing to them for my work purpose. There were a lot of presentations and interactions between students and lecturers as well as other students during my MBA.*"

Communication skills are also important when negotiating with other staff at the workplace. For example, Adam mentioned that:

My boss sometimes has a high expectation towards meeting a project deadline quickly. There was this one meeting, I used my communication skills that I learned during my MBA, to negotiate with him on the challenges and possible outcome if we had to finish the project quickly. I had to carefully explain to him in detail about the challenges that we need to face in achieving the outcome [...] I could just say, "no, it's not going to happen" in the first place without justification, but I believe that negotiating or discussing in harmony can lead to a win-win situation.

In addition to communication skills, the MBA program also taught students analytical skills that could be utilized in their post-MBA career during the organizational socialization process. All six participants said that the MBA program provided them with the skills to think analytically in solving problems and making decisions. Salma, for example, said, "*I still remember the five-step decision making process that was taught during one of my MBA classes and I would go through each step when I want to make a decision in my work.*" Diana, who worked as an executive at a medium-sized company, described how she used her analytical skill to complete one of the tasks assigned to her:

When my company was deciding whether to collaborate with another company or not, let's say company A, I had to do some research on company A's background. I also had to do some financial and market analyses to see the feasibility of the project [...] I used what I learnt from some of my MBA classes such as

accounting for decision making. I also added some inputs from the marketing perspective. So it's a little bit here and there.

Mark too used his analytical skill learned during the MBA in a government project that he was managing. He explained that:

One of the MBA subjects that gives me a significant impact is probably strategic management because I learnt about "core competency" because now I'm currently analyzing the core competency of the villages under this one program. Our goal is to identify villages with core competencies so that they can be transformed into high income villages.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND INFORMATION GATHERING TACTICS

On the whole, all participants agreed that they used their communication skills to build relationships with their managers, colleagues, and subordinates during their organizational socialization period. Participants also said that the things that they learned in their MBA program helped them to understand other individual's behaviors, which in turn helped them to communicate better with others. For example, Salma mentioned that:

I would say MBA helps me to understand why people act in certain behaviors because in MBA we learn about stereotyping, generalizing, etc. especially from the organizational behavior and consumer behavior courses. For example, now I know why this person acts like this and that, rather than me judging – what's wrong with this person? I would consider looking at that person's background, and I'm like, okay, that's why this person acts like this [pause] it helps me to understand people better.

Adam added that the organizational behavior class that he took during his MBA program was useful in helping him foster healthy relationships with individuals from different levels of organization during the first few weeks at the company. He stated that:

I noticed that what the organizational behavior course had taught us is really related to my work especially towards my relationship with the upper-, lower- and same- level of people that I work with as well as the customers. Usually, most of the people who come to see me are my subordinates. I do not want to create many layers between my staffs and me, I like to be flexible.

When our relationships with all levels are good, then our work will be easier definitely.

All participants mentioned that both the communication and analytical skills were useful in helping them gather crucial information in ensuring that they complete and deliver the tasks assigned to them. All six participants said that they would usually refer to their supervisors and more experienced colleagues for guidance. For example, Salma mentioned that:

During the first month of work, I asked a lot from my colleagues and my supervisor on how to prepare the technical proposal to follow the company's format. My supervisor did a one-to-one supervision and coached me and he would tell me the right way to do the tasks. It's basically learning while on the job.

According to Mark, during the first month of work he would occasionally communicate with people from "inter- and intra-department for tasks that require inputs from multiple sources."

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESS OF EACH PARTICIPANT

In this section, we provide the descriptions of the organizational socialization process for each participant in this study.

1. Fifi

On my first day at work, the head of the academic department introduced me to the faculty members at my office level {supervisory facilitation}. I already know some of them since I did my undergraduate degree at the university {encounter stage}.

[...] I was assigned to work with a senior lecturer and I was given a task to write a research paper on human resource management to be submitted for a conference {moving into adjustment stage}.

[...] During the first week, I wrote the research paper for the conference submission {early adjustment stage}. I had experienced working as a research assistant during my MBA, so it helped me a lot with the writing tasks {anticipatory stage}.

Fifi's organizational socialization process is summarized in Figure 2.

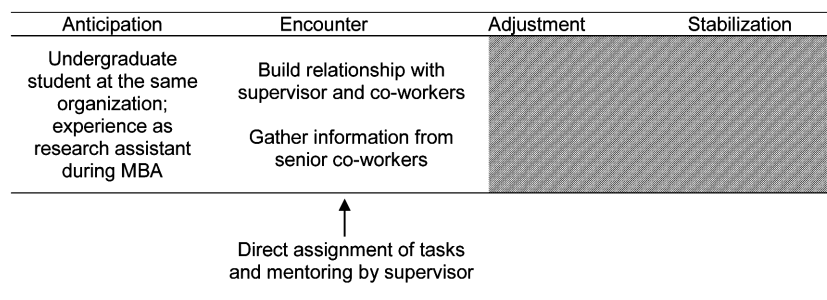


FIGURE 2. Fifi's organizational socialization process

Figure 2 shows that Fifi was still in the encounter phase and had recently entered the early adjustment stage as she had been employed only for a month. Fifi's socialization process is facilitated by direct supervisory involvement (supervisor assigned tasks to her and assigned her to work with a senior) and her experience as an undergraduate and as a research assistant during her MBA.

2. Diana

On the first day at work, I met with the COO of the company and I introduced myself to my co-workers. On that day, I was already given some tasks by my boss. I had to prepare a flowchart report to be submitted to the board of directors and another report on staff hiring {**encounter stage and supervisory facilitation**}.

[...] During the first week of work, I had to do index filing because the company is still new and no one was assigned to the record-keeping job yet. My role at the company includes some accountancy and HR work. For the accountancy work, I usually help the account executive to finalize the account; and for HR, I help to develop the company's policy and procedures, generate some reports and others. So my work involves multitasking {**adjustment stage**}

[...] My boss guided me a lot in helping me to perform my job {**immediate supervisory facilitation throughout**}.

Diana's organizational socialization process is summarized in Figure 3.

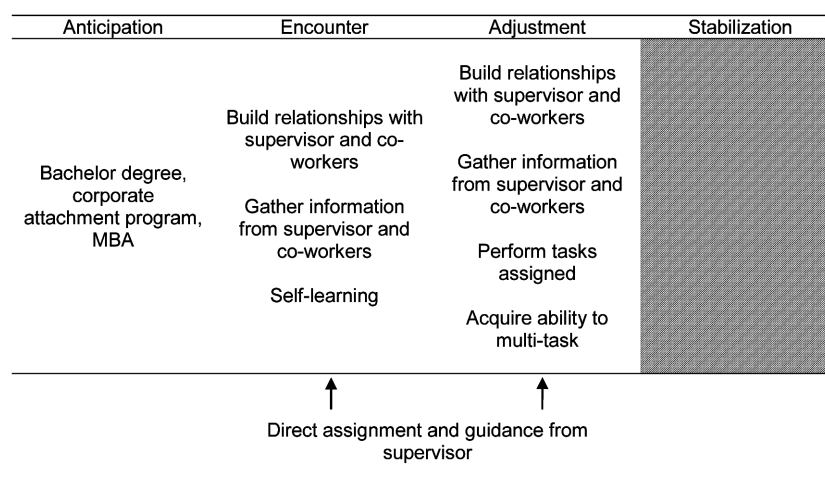


FIGURE 3. Diana's organizational socialization process

Figure 3 shows that Diana had already passed the encounter stage and was still in the adjustment stage but had not yet moved to the stabilization stage. At that time, she was already performing tasks other than those first assigned to her. Interactions with co-workers and self-learning were Diana's socialization tactics, which were facilitated by direct assignments and guidance from her immediate superior.

3. Salma

My supervisor already knew me from my previous job since the satellite telecommunication industry is very small. Then he arranged me for an interview and I got hired for the position {**anticipatory stage and supervisory facilitation**}.

[...] When I entered the company, I went for a one-week orientation, which was organized by the company for new hires {**encounter stage**} Then after the first week, my boss called me into his room, he briefed me about my job role and his expectations towards me, what I was required to do, and what I should be expecting from the job. And later after that, he introduced me to my colleagues in the department especially those who are relevant to my work because the department is huge {**encounter stage, supervisory introduction and facilitation**}.

[...] I received my first job assignment a month later because my boss was strategizing on the kind of specialization that I should undertake. Between that period, I did a self-training by trying to understand the process on how to do a business case and how to write a technical proposal [...] within five months of work, I learnt a lot regarding bidding strategies, prioritization and others as compared to my previous job [...] I got a lot of help from my supervisor and co-workers {**adjustment stage and supervisory facilitation**}.

[...] adapting to me, I learnt from my experience during my high school years at the boarding school. I know I can survive since I'm used to be left and thrown at the deep end {**anticipatory stage**}."

Salma's organizational socialization process is summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows that Salma had already gone through the encounter stage and was still in the adjustment stage but had not yet moved to the stabilization stage. At that time she was already performing many tasks. Her ability was developed from her past adaptation experience from her high school experience and perhaps her experiences prior to that. Supervisor directing work assignments and assuming the role of mentor help facilitate Salma's socialization process.

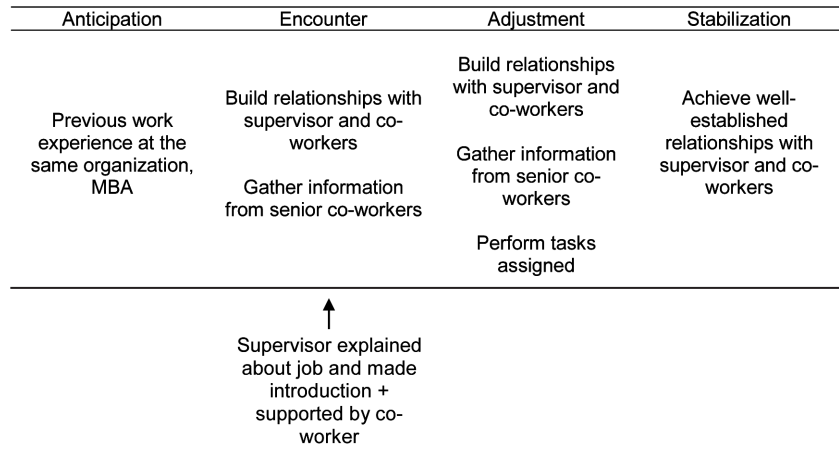


FIGURE 6. Adam’s organizational socialization process

co-worker, did not take as long as Fifi, Diana, Salma, and Azura.

6. Mark

When I joined the public service about eight years ago, I went through an induction program for about two weeks. We were exposed to how the government system works and we also built networks among each other {anticipatory stage}.

[...] There was an introductory session by the HR people during my first day at this department to get to know people here. And then I was given a briefing about my job description by both the HR people and my immediate boss {**encounter stage and HR and supervisory facilitation**} [pause] I started to read the implementation guidelines of the project that I’m currently managing now {**adjustment-stabilization stage**}.

Mark’s organizational socialization process is summarized in Figure 7.

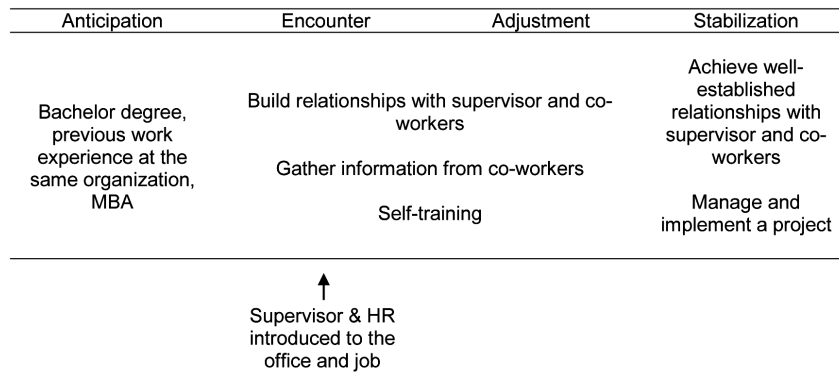


FIGURE 7. Mark’s organizational socialization process

Figure 7 shows that Mark was already in the stabilization stage of his employment period since he already had experience working at the same organization even though he was assigned to a different department after completing his MBA education. Similar to Adam, his encounter and adjustment stages did not require as much time as the other four participants. His socialization process was facilitated by his immediate supervisor and the Human Resource department.

Based on the finding presented, the two main skills that the MBA graduates applied during the early period of their employment were communication and analytical skills. These two main skills assist them in gathering information for their job purpose and building relationships with their supervisors and co-workers. The findings also indicate that all the graduates’ organizational

socialization process consists of four stages, even though the duration of employment and the types of entry into the organizations varies among the participants. However, re-entry into the same organization requires a shorter period of socialization process compared to new entry into an organization, with or without working experience.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study clearly shows that MBA programs contribute toward the improvement of communication and analytical skills that are particularly important during the organizational socialization stage. The use of English as a medium of instruction as well as their frequent

interaction with their classmates and instructors resulted in the increased likelihood of MBA graduates excelling in their oral and written communication skills. Frequent presentations as well as class discussion activities help MBA students build their self-confidence to communicate more effectively. In addition, the presence of international students as well as the diverse background of MBA students help enhance MBA graduates' abilities to socialize with people from all walks of life. With this kind of exposure during the MBA program, the communication skills that the graduates develop become useful in a new environment or workplace, which consists of people from different job positions, backgrounds, expertise, and experiences. These findings on the role of communication skills in the process of socialization enriched the existing socialization literature in which the role of skills are not explicitly emphasised; rather the focus is more on the tactics. Similar to Reichers (1987), our findings also indicate that frequency of newcomers' communication with their co-workers seemed to lead to a more rapid socialization process contributing to further understanding about the role of communication in facilitating newcomers' socialization.

Communication skills, together with interpersonal skills, have been discussed intermittently across the organizational socialization literature because these skills are the two skills necessary for newcomers need to effectively adapt in an organization (Saks & Ashforth 1997a; Saks & Ashforth 1997b). However, thus far there is a lack of discussion on the role of analytical skills in the socialization process. In this study, we found that the MBA graduates tend to use their analytical skills in support of their socialization process. These analytical skills were developed during their MBA education through taking many core business courses delivered through various activities or learning methods, such as class discussion, case study analysis, and group project assignments. During their MBA, the graduates also took integrated courses, such as strategic management, which specifically train skills in conceptual and analytical thinking. This set of learning experiences helped the graduates develop their ability in decision making and problem solving, which they utilized during their socialization into the workplace. Additionally, MBA graduates developed integrative thinking skills needed in the managerial positions, which are rarely acquired through other more specialized education programs. Hence, the MBA program prepares the graduates for entry into organizations as it provides the analytical skills that facilitates the graduates in completing their tasks. The program also prepares graduates with the analytical skills needed in building their profession.

One of the organizational socialization tactics that the MBA graduates used in their socialization process is building relationships with their supervisors and co-workers. Building good relationships at the workplace supports newcomers' adaptation to a new environment. Newcomers rely on these relationships to gather information about their job requirements and learn the details of the tasks

assigned to them because supervisors and co-workers have a better understanding and relevant experience regarding roles and responsibilities in the organization (Korte 2009; and Morrison 2002). Moreover, the MBA graduates seemed to have further developed their people skills, which allowed them to have better appreciation of others and a better understanding regarding the importance of managing human assets in organizations, which in turn improve their relationship-building capability. This is particularly beneficial for graduates with engineering or non-business degree backgrounds since they were not formally exposed to people-oriented subjects in their previous education, such as organizational behaviour or consumer behaviour analysis. Other socialization tactics utilized by the MBA graduates include self-learning and self-training, which support the performing of their jobs and support the need of their job to multi-task.

Besides their MBA experiences, the MBA graduates also brought into their post-MBA careers accumulated knowledge and skills from their previous work experiences, undergraduate degree and other experiences (including those in their childhood). This combination of experiences constitutes their anticipatory socialization stage. A similar discussion is presented in Garavan and Morley (1997). Furthermore, previous professional work experience or while pursuing their MBA education facilitates the socialization process of the MBA graduates in our study. Moreover, re-entry into the same organization helped expedite the socialization process, even though the graduates were assigned to new departments. It could be postulated that this is due to the graduates already understand the norms, politics, and cultures in their respective organizations. All these affirm the assumption of the role of previous experiences in socialization.

Interestingly, the mobilization of the graduates' communication and analytical skills and experiences are facilitated directly by the leadership of their immediate superiors and supported by access to mentors and/or more senior co-workers. This managerial and leadership role of immediate supervisors provides new insight into the process of socialization as existing literature have thus far focused on the organizational and newcomers' roles in socialization, but largely ignores the role of immediate management and leadership in integrating a new staff member. In all cases, immediate superiors play a significant role in newcomers' introduction to colleagues and tasks. This role is supported by mentors or senior co-workers who help the newcomers adapt to the new work environment. The appointment or introduction to the mentors or senior co-workers is also facilitated by the immediate superiors. Specifically, immediate superiors play a critical role in the encounter stage, although in some cases, they also assume leadership to the newcomers in the subsequent stages of the socialization process.

Based on the above discussion, the MBA education forms only a part of the anticipatory socialization of graduates. Since graduates often enter a new workplace or a new assignment immediately after graduating from

the MBA program, the program becomes the immediate contributor before the encounter stage of the organizational socialization process, as shown in the emergent socialization process framework in Figure 8. As the graduates enter the socialization process at the workplace, they bring along *all* their accumulated experiences, which includes childhood

experience, past educational background, including MBA education as well as previous work experience, to adapt in an organization. The graduates' overall experiences of organizational socialization constitute all previously accumulated experiences, up to the stabilization stage in the employment period, as shown in Figure 8.

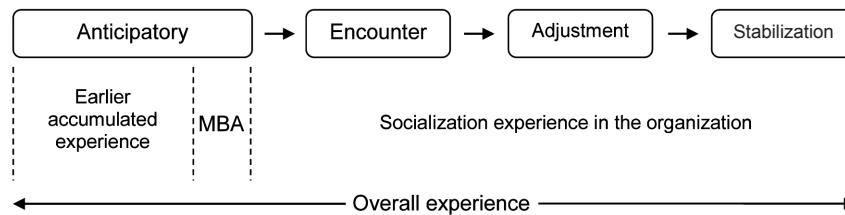


FIGURE 8. Emergent framework relating previous experience, MBA, and socialization process

Corroborating the above findings with the training and development perspective, organizational socialization can be viewed as newcomers' learning process in adapting to their job roles, co-workers, and work environment. We can view MBA as an education in which the graduates implement in their work the things that they have learned. MBA students can learn and gain certain knowledge and skills from the program, but in a sense, this is a form of anticipatory learning. When the graduates capitalize on the knowledge and skills that they gained from their MBA education at their workplace, that learning is reinforced. If the knowledge and skills are not transferred, then they are likely to remain as inventories, pending utilization

in the future (Bell & Kozlowski 2008; Holton, Bates & Ruona 2000).

The above findings indicate the convergence of the concepts of education and experience and that of training and learning. Figure 9 shows that socialization is a process in which all forms of learning (including during MBA education) and accumulated experience are mobilized during the initial stage of entry into organizations. The figure also shows that education, experience, training and learning are closely connected concepts. They all contribute towards one's "socialization", work and life experience.

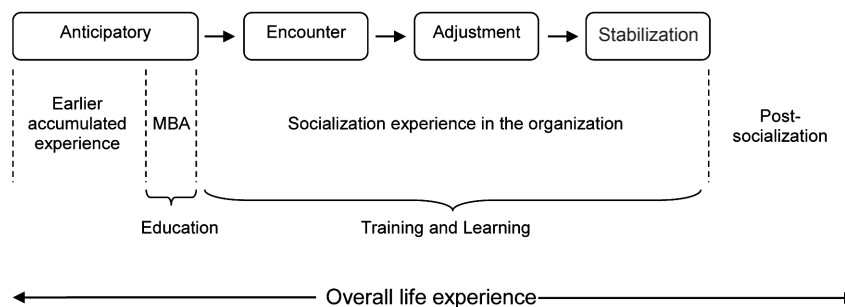


FIGURE 9. Consolidated socialization process framework relating previous experience, MBA, socialization process, training, and learning

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

On the whole, organizational socialization is a phase that all employees experience during their early employment period. The main tactics utilized during the first few months of work are relationship building, and information seeking and learning, although the approaches taken by each individual are influenced by their unique backgrounds and experiences prior to entering work organizations. The most important skills utilized in support of these tactics

are communication and analytical skills. These two skills, particularly in relation to the workplace, are enhanced through their MBA education.

Socialization is a continuous learning process that build upon all prior experiences. The MBA education constitutes only a part of the anticipatory socialization stage of the graduates before entering a new workplace, and thus forms a part of students' entire work and life experience. The MBA experience helps enhance and enrich students' existing knowledge and skills prior to entering business schools. These skills and prior experiences are

mobilized through the facilitation of immediate superiors and/or supported by mentoring and relationships with senior co-workers. Thus, obtaining an MBA qualification cannot be viewed as a separate experience (isolated from individual's overall experience) that is gained upon completion of the program. Rather, the MBA experience is influenced by student's prior life experience and in turn, the MBA education constitutes the interaction of earlier experience and the education received at the business school. The fact that MBA education constitutes one's experience, enhances our understanding of MBA education as it relates to experience, learning, and employment. Therefore, organizational socialization process is a part of a lifelong learning process that requires newcomers to build upon their previous knowledge and experiences and acquire new knowledge and skills to be applied in performing or delivering their work tasks as well as in adapting well in organizations. The learning process, which one begins from childhood, continues into the MBA education and into the organizational socialization process stage and one's entire life.

The MBA graduates being equipped with enhanced communication and analytical skills at the point of entry offers opportunities for future researchers to examine learning that occurs amongst the insiders (existing employees) as a result of interacting and working with the newcomers. Such research will provide a more comprehensive insight into the socialization process and address the gap of knowledge related to insiders' viewpoints within the socialization literature. In addition, it is noted that one of the key emphasis of MBA education is to prepare the graduates for managerial and leadership roles in their careers. Therefore, further study about the influence of the MBA education on the graduates' socialization as managers or leaders may provide some insights to the effectiveness of knowledge and skills gained from the program.

Understanding MBA education as a part of the anticipatory socialization stage and also the types of skills and knowledge acquired during the MBA program could help graduates and managers to further understand the MBA graduates' competencies as they enter their workplace. This insight serves as the basis for graduates to leverage on their strengths and be proactive in further training and learning in the organization. They could also take advantage of learning and developing certain competencies during their MBA program. Adapting effectively at a new workplace with an MBA degree should not be a problem to the graduates if they were able to incorporate what they have learned from the program with that of their earlier accumulated experience. Managers, on the other hand, can design a suitable socialization process for graduates and fulfil their training needs to ensure that they go through a faster and smoother adjustment period.

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