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Karim Saïd et Yas Alsultanny

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Résumé de l'article

En s'appuyant sur un échantillon d'étudiants à la fois d'une école de commerce française et d'une université établie à Bahreïn et recrutant des étudiants des différents pays arabes du Golfe, notre papier procède à l'analyse des relations entre les objectifs de carrière des étudiants et leur nationalité. Les principaux résultats montrent que la nationalité a peu d'effet sur les motivations des étudiants pour poursuivre leur formation, sur leurs perceptions des résultats qu'ils en attendent ainsi que sur leurs perceptions de leurs perspectives de carrière. En revanche, certains résultats font apparaître des différences en lien avec la nationalité; le plus significatif étant les critères de sélection de programme en relation avec les objectifs professionnels ainsi que les compétences souhaitées.

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KARIM SAÏD
Larequoi, Laboratoire de recherche en management,
Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines/
University Paris-Saclay, France

YAS ALSULTANNY
College of Graduate Studies
Arabian Gulf University

ABSTRACT

Relying on two diverse samplings of MBA students – one from an international French business school and the other from a university based in Bahrain that recruits students from the Arabian Gulf countries – our article analyzes the relationship between the MBA students' career goals and their nationality. Our key findings highlight that nationality has little effect on graduate students' motives for pursuing education, their perception of the expected program outcomes and their career perspectives. Other findings, however, reveal some differences based on nationality, the most significant being program criteria choices in relation to career goals and the expected skills students wished to acquire.

Keywords: Business management education, MBA, Career goals, Professional skills, Cross-cultural management, Gulf region.

RÉSUMÉ

En s'appuyant sur un échantillon d'étudiants à la fois d'une école de commerce française et d'une université établie à Bahreïn et recrutant des étudiants des différents pays arabes du Golfe, notre papier procède à l'analyse des relations entre les objectifs de carrière des étudiants et leur nationalité. Les principaux résultats montrent que la nationalité a peu d'effet sur les motivations des étudiants pour poursuivre leur formation, sur leurs perceptions des résultats qu'ils en attendent ainsi que sur leurs perceptions de leurs perspectives de carrière. En revanche, certains résultats font apparaître des différences en lien avec la nationalité; le plus significatif étant les critères de sélection de programme en relation avec les objectifs professionnels ainsi que les compétences souhaitées.

Mots-Clés : Formation au management des entreprises, MBA, Objectifs de carrière, Compétences professionnelles, Management interculturel, Région du Golfe

RESUMEN

Tomando una muestra de estudiantes de una escuela de comercio francesa y otros de una universidad de Bahreïn que recibe estudiantes de diferentes países árabes del Golfo, este artículo procede al análisis de las relaciones entre las metas profesionales de los estudiantes y sus nacionalidades. Los principales resultados muestran que la nacionalidad tiene escaso efecto en los motivos de los estudiantes para seguir su formación, en los resultados esperados y en su percepción de su perspectiva de carrera. En cambio, algunos resultados muestran diferencias en relación con la nacionalidad: lo más significativo se refiere a los criterios para la elección de programa en relación con los objetivos profesionales y las competencias deseadas.

Palabras Clave: educación en administración de empresas, MBA, metas profesionales, habilidades profesionales, gestión intercultural, Países árabes del Golfo

Pursuing advanced degrees is considered one of the key ways to enrich skills (Grubb, 1993) and acquire knowledge, both of which enhance employees' careers (Sparrow and Cooper, 2003). In this context, there is a general perception that an MBA can improve access to career opportunities as well as increase self-confidence, which is a valuable form of career capital (Sturges *et al.*, 2003). Baruch *et al.* (2005) found that employee status just before and just after graduate school increased more for MBA holders than for any other management master student. Thus, an MBA holder will gain leadership skills, which will enable him or her to manage organizations effectively (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000) and consequently join upper managerial ranks (Carnall, 1992).

The expected outcomes include, in addition to the knowledge and skills gained through the educational process, improvement in work outcomes (Naquinand Holton, 2003). Recognition by managers or peers, transfer of learning to the workplace

(Mathieu and Martineau, 1997) and career capital building of self-confidence open up opportunities for advancement as well as strengthen competitiveness in the job market (Hawkesley 1996, Luker, Bowers and Powers 1989). However, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) show that there is little evidence to support the view that the knowledge acquired in a business program can enhance job careers. In this regard, Mintzberg (2004) questions the ability of traditional MBA programs to enable any business skill development. Globalization also puts huge pressure on business schools which are expected to help build student global skills (Hunter *et al.*, 2006) which will enable them to work effectively and comfortably outside their environment. Career expectations can vary depending on cultural context and values; these can affect career goals and motivation.

In this context, cross-cultural management research can be very useful to better understand differences in cultural values (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars, 1994). However, very little research has been carried out on the impact of cultural values on the career goals of graduates in general, and business graduates in particular. And, what has been carried out has yielded contradictory results. Researchers state that cross-national data research is hard to acquire (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985) and intercultural researchers have clearly concentrated their efforts on only a limited number of world regions (Feghali, 1997). Gooderham and Nordhaug (2001) found no significant differences between European students in terms of cultural values, whereas Harzing (2004) identified specific differing patterns of career preferences and objectives.

By revealing potential differences in career goals due to nationality, our paper aims to assess the degree of similarity between career goals and job expectations in Europe and in a significantly unstudied region in the Middle East, i.e. the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman).

With the expected depletion of its oil and gas resources, the Arab Gulf States have made the choice to focus more and more on the development of knowledge economies; they are now the largest recipients of transnational higher education in the world (Wilkins, 2011). The greater accessibility of higher education for both students and trainees has created new opportunities for GCC nationals to acquire the new skills and knowledge required to successfully perform their work throughout their career. In addition, the need to rely less on foreign labor to meet domestic demand due to the implementation of labor market nationalization programs (Donnand Al Manthri, 2010) has contributed to the creation of new career and development opportunities for GCC nationals who can more easily target high income positions. Differences between Western and GCC labor markets may impact career goals and the related learning paths required to take full advantage of specific employment opportunities. Given that French and Arab managers score high on both power distance and uncertainty avoidance but that they differ on Hofstede's individualism/collectivism index, they might have different career development strategies for moving toward their professional objectives.

We analyzed these differences in career goals using a diverse sample of MBA students from a leading international French business school which recruits students from all over the world and from the Arabian Gulf University which recruits students from GCC countries. Gulf countries are attracting prestigious European and American business schools, and these are competing to recruit the best students from the region. At the time of our study, the leading French business school partnered with the Arabian Gulf University to offer an MBA program providing academic guidance and faculty members to teach some of the MBA courses.

The structure of the paper is as follows: we begin by linking literature related to career goals, professional skills development and national differences and we specify our related hypotheses; we then present our research protocol and follow this with a discussion of our results. We conclude by presenting the practical pedagogical implications of our findings and by suggesting future paths of research.

Linking Skill Building to Career Development

It is generally accepted that MBA degrees can lead to quicker track career success in terms of an improvement in salary, hierarchical position, and skills development (Martin and Stains, 1994; Hankinson, 2000). Career success can also be related to acquiring or developing the competencies that are closely linked to personal background characteristics and cultural contexts as well as the dynamics of the work environment (Aryee and Chen 2004). In this regard, Drucker (1985) defines competence at an individual level as the ability of an employee to offer superior performance in tasks. Katz (1955) distinguishes three types of competencies: technical, human and conceptual. Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) have introduced a block of managerial competencies, which involve problem-solving skills, social competencies, communication skills and personal competencies related to personality traits and reliability.

McCollin (2013) shows that business management employees tend to receive promotions at higher rates than their technical counterparts do, even when companies are facing competing demand for field-specific technical workers (Jung and Choi, 2009).

Rubin and Dierdorff (2011) highlight the importance of people management skills, which are highly valued by employers. Oblinger and Verville (1998) underline that problem-solving is important for business graduates. Billing (2007) introduces the concept of "forward reasoning" required to solve problems. The process required to solve a problem includes: retrieving knowledge of the subject, recognizing meaningful patterns and situations and applying general strategies to solve the problem. It is therefore important to develop pedagogical strategies in business higher education programs that will develop these competencies which are required by students.

Career goals or 'anchors' (Schein 1985) thus play a key role in the motivation and behavior of students seeking to enroll in an MBA program. Kuijpers *et al.*, (2006) make a clear distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic career success. Intrinsic career success is related to a person's own appreciation of his or her career actualization whereas extrinsic career success relates to external appreciation, qualified mainly in terms of salary or occupational status. This discussion led us to develop the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Career goals* have a correlational relationship with *business problem-solving skills, academic skills,* and *soft skills to be acquired.*

LINKING CAREER GOALS TO BUSINESS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM CHOICES

Stude interests and motivations for taking part in a graduate business program differ from those related to undergraduate degrees, which tend to rely on a broad knowledge base approach focusing on foundational intellectual skills and aptitudes. Mackenzie (2003) highlights that graduate students tend to concentrate on specialized and advanced programs to reach a higher professional level. More specifically, adult students are more concerned about the transferability of the acquired knowledge to their current organization (Aryee et Chen 2004). Mano-Negrin and Kirschenbaum (1999) show that an important motive for seeking a graduate degree in business can be related to a strategy that maximizes both advancement and learning and personal development objectives. Sturges, Simpson and Altman (2003) demonstrate that MBA students in particular seek career competencies and professional credibility that will enhance their careers. This is consistent with the Hawksley (1996) findings reporting that the primary goal of MBA students was to improve job opportunities. Indeed, business schools can play an important role in shaping the careers of their students and particularly those of MBA participants (Kelan and Jones, 2009) by helping them to progress to senior executive positions, enhancing their employability as well as fast-tracking their careers (Hay and Hodgkinson, 2006).

According to the study conducted by Wellman *et al.*, (2006), MBAs are generally considered better predictors of the managerial success of employees than technical degrees in terms of salary, promotion, and managerial status within an organization. This link is confirmed by the findings of Kochan *et al.*, (2012), which state that MBA holders have more influence and control over strategic decisions that affect their own organization. Increasingly, business schools are expected to build and leverage the capability of managers and leaders by developing their global competencies in the changing environment in which they operate (Stearns, 2009). We thus propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Career goals* affect *program criteria choices.*

MBA GRADUATE EXPECTATIONS AND GLOBALIZATION

Career goals can be defined as the primary end toward which an individual's effort is directed within a chosen profession or occupation (Colakoglu and Caligiuri, 2012). These goals can vary from one context to another based on national cultural differences (Hofstede, 1991), providing schemes that guide behavior (House and Javidan, 2004) and can be translated in terms of leadership styles, specific needs or motivation. Hofstede (1980, p 25) defines culture as '*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*'. He analyzes national cultures using four key dimensions: individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance. He (op.cit.) establishes a link between education levels and work

goals based on the correlation found between education and both individualism and masculinity indices. The formation of a career identity can thus be influenced by different values, needs and goals which are deeply embedded in a national culture (Den Hartog *et al.*, 1999; Feldman and Bolino, 1996). In a review of studies conducted in Arab environments, Rees and Althakhri (2008) highlight the fact that managers are concerned with losing their position and power within their organization and that there is a lack of trust in employees, which is partially related to ineffective communication from the top management. Organizations can help their employees to manage resistance to change by helping them to acquire or upgrade their skills and thus reach their professional and personal goals. The increased emphasis on career development appears to be related to the fact that it can lead to career success, recognition, and satisfaction (Nabi, 1999; Kuijpers *et al.*, 2006).

The success of MBA programs, originating in the USA and then spreading throughout the world (Paton, 2001), is largely due to the fact that the programs were adapted to cultural, geographical locations and individual mindsets (Saba *et al.*, 2011; Rubin and Dierdorff, 2009).

Brown and Jones (2007) highlight the importance of being exposed to other cultures and people to widen the range of a person's career options. This globalized environment forces business schools to reconsider the key skills and competencies expected from graduates. Thus, educators should clearly distinguish between the academic and non-academic outcomes related to a program (Hoff, 2008) and include assessment methods that allow the measurement of abilities such as critical and analytical thinking as well as abilities related to being able to work and collaborate with people from different cultures (Brunstein, 2006).

Haire *et al.* (1966) mention the fact that approximately one third of the variance in work goals and managerial attitudes can be explained by the employees' country of origin. In the Arab world, for example, people are characterized by a high degree of uncertainty avoidance and tend to feel comfortable with the status quo (Mellahi, 2003). Consequently, Jreisat (1990) highlights the necessity to implement a relevant evaluation of employee performance in order to successfully implement change management processes in that area of the world and help to close the gaps by identifying skills and competencies in need of further development. In this context, we can assume that specialized technical skills would be highly valued by Arab societies because they are seen as a way to catch up with Western knowledge and skills which are needed to cope with economic transformation. Based on this, we present the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There are statistically significant differences in demographic information (gender, nationality, age, and work experience) in the areas of: *business problem-solving skills to be acquired; academic skills to be acquired; soft skills to be acquired; program criteria choices;* and *career goals.*

Building on prior literature, our fieldwork assesses and compares both the relative importance attached to different career goals and the correlational relationship of an MBA degree and career goals among MBA students in relation to their country of origin.

Research Method

Our research is largely descriptive, providing insight into the effect of the MBA degree on career goals. The study population was students from an international French business school and The Arabian Gulf University based in a GCC country.

Drawing on the work of Suutari and Taka (2004), our research protocol aimed at identifying factors influencing MBA program criteria choices such as career goals, desired skill sets and student nationality. Figure 1 shows the schematic diagram of the conceptual model used to test the following hypotheses specified earlier:

H1: *Career goals* have a correlational relationship with *business problem-solving skills, academic skills,* and *soft skills* to be acquired.

H2: *Career goals* affect *program criteria choices.*

H3: There are statistically significant differences in demographic information (*gender, nationality, age,* and *work experience*) in the areas of: *business problem-solving skills to be acquired; academic skills to be acquired; soft skills to be acquired; program criteria choices;* and *career goals.*

Career goals were considered as independent variables for *business problem-solving skills to be acquired, academic skills to be acquired, soft skills to be acquired* and *program criteria choices.*

The demographic factors of *gender, nationality, age,* and *experience* were considered as independent variables for: *business problem-solving skills to be acquired, academic skills to be acquired, soft skills to be acquired, career goals,* and *program criteria choices.*

Our research used a self-administered questionnaire to collect data, based on a 5-point Likert-scale. Likert scales are primarily used in questionnaires to obtain participants' preferences or degree of agreement with a statement or set of statements (Cohen *et al.,* 2000). The scale used in this paper ranged from 1-5, with unimportant with a value of 1 being the lowest, and critical with a value of 8 being the highest. Bending

(1954) highlights that the rater's reliability is independent of the number on a scale, which starts from five and extends up to nine categories.

The respondents ranked their level of importance with provided statements on a scale of five (1 = unimportant, 2 = slightly important, 3 = important, 4 = highly important, and 5 = critical). The questionnaire was based on nine specific *career goals* identified by Suutari and Taka (2004): *working internationally, working with increasingly challenging tasks, reaching a managerial level, influencing corporate strategies, building a sound financial base, starting a business, becoming a specialist in a specific area, contributing to society,* and *balancing personal life and career.*

The design of the questionnaire of the study was:

Stage One

The initial drafts of the questionnaires were designed and based on the knowledge gained from previous research on the subject (Kelan and Jones, 2009; Sturges, Simpson and Altman, 2003; Hawksley 1996). The questionnaire consisted of two parts; the first part included demographic information questions and the second part covered the five following related themes: *business problem-solving skills to be acquired* (two statements), *academic skills to be acquired* (two statements), *soft skills to be acquired* (four statements), *career goals* (six statements), and *program criteria choices* (nine statements).

Stage Two

A preliminary version of the questionnaire was submitted to experts who were asked to evaluate items, syntax, accuracy and clarity. Adjustments were made based on the experts' feedback to ensure ease of administration of the survey and for validation purposes.

Five scale intervals were used to interpret the respondents' degree of agreement. The following formula was used to calculate the score interval:

FIGURE 1
Conceptual model with the hypotheses
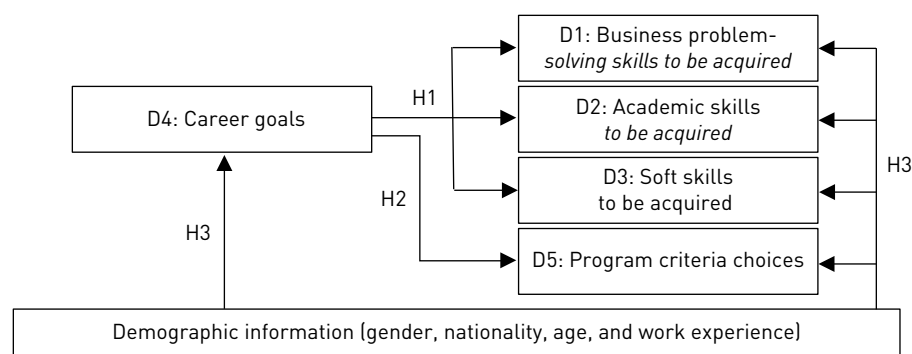
H1: *Career goals* have a correlational relationship with *business problem-solving skills to be acquired, academic skills to be acquired, soft skills to be acquired.*
H2: *Career goals* affect *program criteria choices.*
H3: Demographic factors (*gender, nationality, age,* and *work experience*) have statistically significant differences on *business problem-solving skills to be acquired, academic skills to be acquired, soft skills to be acquired, program criteria choices,* and *career goals.*

Score Interval = (Maximum Score – Minimum Score) / Number of levels   (1)

= (5-1) / 5 = 0.8

Statement average scores of less than 1.8 were considered *unimportant*. Statement average scores from 1.8 to less than 2.6 were considered *slightly important*. Statement average scores from 2.6 to less than 3.4 were considered *important* and statement average scores from 3.4 to less than 4.2 were considered *highly important*. Statement average scores from 4.2 to 5 were considered *critical*.

The correlations between the dimensions were calculated to measure the direction and the degree of correlation that was rated between -1 and +1. The positive value indicated a positive relationship, and the negative value indicated a negative relationship. The scale of correlation strength (Devore *et al.* 2013), was as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Correlation strength

Negative correlation			Positive correlation		
-1.0 to -0.81	-0.8 to -0.51	-0.5 to 0	0 to 0.5	0.51 to 0.8	0.81 to 1.0
Strong	Moderate	Weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong

Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the scales used for each key dimension as well as the overall reliability of the questionnaire. The test results showed the following alpha values for the dimensions: 0.747 for *business problem-solving skills to be acquired* (dimension 1), 0.721 for *academic skills to be acquired* (dimension 2), 0.932 for s*oft skills to be acquired* (dimension 3), 0.866 for *career goals* (dimension 4), 0.916 for the *program criteria choices* alpha (dimension 5). The overall alpha value was 0.967, which indicated that the data was reliable and acceptable for analysis (Pallant, 2008). Table 2 shows that all the values of inter-item correlation were greater than .51. This indicated a moderate coloration between the different dimensions of the study.

TABLE 2
Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5
D1	1.000				
D2	.717	1.000			
D3	.820	.718	1.000		
D4	.755	.796	.831	1.000	
D5	.780	.769	.814	.815	1.000

The questionnaire was distributed to the students enrolled in MBA programs both in France and in the GCC. We received 363 valid responses. There were 288 from the GCC (79.3%) and 75 from France (20.7%).

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for making a comprehensive summary of data and inferential statistics were used for research statement exploration and for variance analysis.

Results, Analysis and Discussion

In this section, we describe the analysis performed on the collected data to prove the hypotheses of the study and discuss the results.

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentages of the respondents' demographic information with two general questions. The gender distribution was 249 (68.6%) males and 114 (31.4%) females. The nationality distribution for the GCC participants numbering 882 students (79.3% of the sample) was as follows: 160 (44.0%) were Bahraini, 120 (33.1%) were Kuwaiti, 4 (1.1%) were from Saudi, 4 (1.1%) were from Qatar. The majority of the respondents (354) (97.5%) were over the age of twenty-five and had at least six years of work experience (71.9%)612).

Table 4 shows the averages and standard deviations for each statement of the five dimensions. The first dimension focused on the business problem-solving skills to be acquired by MBA participants. The average of the two statements of this dimension was 3.80 and standard deviation was 1.011 which was ranked highly important. The French students appeared to be interested in technical skills and in working internationally: the "*Understanding how to operate in the globalized world*" statement obtained 4.24, which ranked very high, while for the GCC students this item had a mean average of 3.44.

The second dimension focused on *academic skills to be acquired* by MBA participants. The average of the two statements of this dimension was 3.54 and standard deviation was 1.057, which was ranked *highly important*. The "*Technical skills*" statement had the highest mean value of 3.44, considered as highly important.

The third dimension covered *soft skills to be acquired* by MBA participants. The average of the four statements of this dimension was 3.76 and standard deviation was 0.968, which was ranked *highly important*. This dimension included the "*managerial skills*" statement which had the highest mean value of 3.96 (considered *highly important)*. A mean of 4.28 was attributed to this statement by the French students and 3.63 by the GCC students. This indicated that all the MBA candidates highly valued managerial skills through education.

The fourth dimension covered MBA participants' *career goals*. The average of the six statements of this dimension was 3.53 and standard deviation was 0.997 which was ranked *highly important*. The "*balance personal life and career*" statement had the highest mean value of 3.93, which was considered *highly important*, particularly for the GCC students who assigned an average mean of 4.35 to this item.

The fifth dimension focused on the *program criteria choices* for MBA participants. The average of the nine statements of this dimension was 3.56 and standard deviation was 0.957, which was ranked *highly important*. The "*university/school's reputation*" statement had the highest mean value of 4.52 for the French students and 3.56 for the GCC students. This indicated that the *university/school's reputation* was a key criterion for French and GCC students applying for MBAs. However, the statement "*university/school's research activities*" obtained the lowest average of 2.87 which indicated that research activities conducted by business schools were not considered as a key item by either group.

TABLE 3
Demographic Profile of Respondents

No.	Demographics Information	Type	Frequency			Percentage %
			GCC	France	Total	
1.	Gender	Male	198	51	249	68.6
		Female	90	24	114	31.4
2.	Nationality		288	75	363	100
3.	Age	Below 25 years	9	0	9	2.5
		25 – 35 years	189	48	237	65.3
		Above 35 years	90	27	117	32.2
4.	Work experience	Less than one year	9	0	9	2.5
		1 – 5 years	75	18	93	25.6
		6 – 10 years	108	12	120	33.1
		11 – 15 years	30	30	60	16.5
		More than 15 years	66	15	81	22.3

TABLE 4
Means and standard deviations of the five dimensions

Dimensions	No	Statements	Mean		SD*		Total Mean	Total SD*
			GCC	France	GCC	France		
D1: Business problem-solving skills to be acquired	S1	Understanding how to operate in the globalized world	3.44	4.24	1.232	0.723	3.84	0.978
	S2	Solving business and managerial issues	3.49	4.04	1.198	0.889	3.76	1.044
	Dimension 1: Average		**3.46**	**4.14**	**1.215**	**0.806**	**3.80**	**1.011**
D2: Academic skills to be acquired	S3	Building a sound financial base	3.37	3.92	1.057	0.909	3.64	0.983
	S4	Academic knowledge and technical tools	3.40	3.48	1.091	1.159	3.44	1.13
	Dimension 2: Average		**3.38**	**3.70**	**1.074**	**1.034**	**3.54**	**1.057**
D3: Soft skills to be acquired	S5	Communication skills	3.60	3.76	1.101	0.597	3.68	0.85
	S6	Leadership skills	3.59	3.96	1.282	0.790	3.78	1.04
	S7	Managerial skills	3.63	4.28	1.287	0.678	3.96	0.98
	S8	Building self-confidence	3.35	3.88	1.328	0.666	3.62	1.00
	Dimension 3: Average		**3.54**	**3.97**	**1.250**	**0.683**	**3.76**	**0.968**
D4: Career goals	S9	Work with increasingly challenging tasks	3.47	4.04	1.189	0.611	3.75	0.900
	S10	Start a business	3.26	3.08	1.163	0.812	3.17	0.988
	S11	Become a specialist in a specific area	3.25	2.99	1.041	0.880	3.12	0.961
	S12	Contribute to society	3.34	3.36	1.048	0.966	3.35	1.007
	S13	Balance personal life and career	4.35	3.52	1.183	0.969	3.93	1.076
	S14	Reach a managerial level	3.54	4.12	1.267	0.833	3.83	1.050
	Dimension 4: Average		**3.53**	**3.52**	**1.149**	**0.845**	**3.53**	**0.997**
D5: Program criteria choices	S15	University/ school's reputation	3.56	4.52	1.160	0.586	4.04	0.873
	S16	University/ school's network	3.53	4.24	0.924	0.663	3.89	0.794
	S17	University/ school's ranking	3.36	4.12	1.046	0.666	3.74	0.856
	S18	University/ school's research activities	3.14	2.60	1.064	0.866	2.87	0.965
	S19	Program relevancy to your company's sector or activity	3.23	3.52	1.213	1.046	3.38	1.130
	S20	Program's content	3.55	4.48	1.123	0.510	4.02	0.817
	S21	Program's faculty	3.32	3.48	1.128	1.122	3.40	1.125
	S22	Program's course delivery system	3.28	3.64	1.031	0.952	3.46	0.992
	S23	Program's partners	3.24	3.16	1.023	1.106	3.20	1.065
	Dimension 5: Average		**3.36**	**3.75**	**1.079**	**0.835**	**3.56**	**0.957**

Fig. 2 shows comparisons between GCC and French respondents to the five key dimensions addressed by the questionnaire. The figure shows that the French MBA participants had higher averages compared to those from the GCC for all the statements except for statements S10, S11, S18, and S23.

FIGURE 2
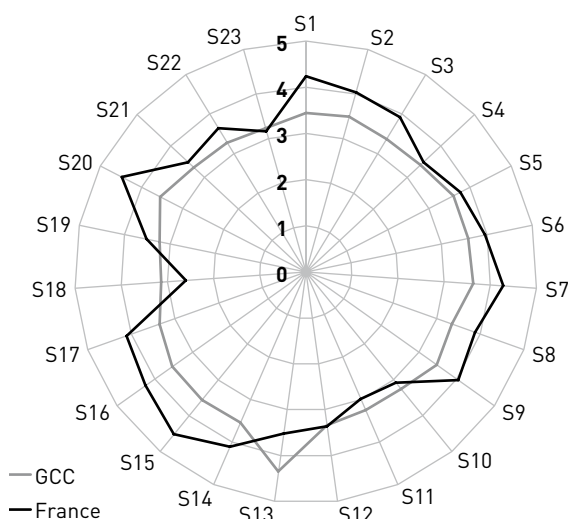## Respondent statement comparison between GCC and French students

Table 5 shows the testing of H1 by using a simple Pearson correlation. The results show that the correlational relationship between *career goals* and *business problem-solving skills to be acquired, academic skills to be acquired,* and *soft skills to be acquired* were significant for both GCC and French respondents.

For GCC respondents, career goals correlated significantly with *soft skills to be acquired* with a value of.831, while there was a moderate correlation relationship with *business problem-solving skills* and *academic skills to be acquired.* This indicates that the GCC MBA students valued *soft skills they wish to acquire* highly and this was directly linked with their career goals. The correlational relationship relationships between *career goals* and *business problem-solving skills to be acquired, academic skills to be acquired* and *soft skills to be acquired* were strong for the French students, which indicated that all these issues were very important to them as well.

Table 6 shows the testing of H2 by using a simple linear regression. The results show that the coefficient of determination r square = .707 was significant for the GCC students, and while it was higher than that of the French students, their coefficient of determination r square = .366 was also significant. This indicated that *career goals* had a higher explanatory power on the *program criteria choices* for GCC students compared to French students. The correlational relationship between *career goals* and *program criteria choices* r = .841 was significant, which showed a strong correlation for the GCC students, while for the French students the correlation relationship was r = .605, which was moderate and less than that of the GCC students.

In order to use a variance analysis, the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was applied to test the distribution of the dependent dimensions D1, D2, D3, and D5 on each statement (S9-S14) of the independent variable D4 (Career goals). The test results (see Table A1 in appendix) show that the Shapiro-Wilk test values were greater than 0.05. This indicated the normal distribution of the data for these dimensions.

H3 aimed to test the effect of demographic information: *gender, nationality, age,* and *work experience* on the following dimensions: *business problem-solving skills to be acquired; academic skills to be acquired; soft skills to be acquired; program criteria choices;* and *career goals.* Sample independent T-tests

TABLE 5
The Pearson correlation between D4 and (D1, D2, D3)

Dimensions		GCC			France		
		Correlation Coefficients	R²	Sig.	Correlation Coefficients	R²	Sig.
D1: Business problem solving skills to be acquired		.755**			**		
to be acquired		.796**			**		
to be acquired		.831**			**		

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).   ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

TABLE 6
Regression test for Hypothesis H2

GCC students			French Students		
r	r square	Sig.*	R	r square	Sig.*
.841	.707	.000	.605	.366	.001
Program criteria choices=0.716+.787(career goals)			Program criteria choices=2.33+.408 (career goals)		

Sig.*: Significance

were used to test the effect of gender (two groups) and nationality (two groups France and GCC) on the dimensions of the conceptual model. The test results showed that Levene's test for equality of variances of gender (see Table A2 in the appendix) were: .322, .115, .588, .198, .198 respectively for dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4, D5. All these values were greater than .05. For *nationality*, Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table A3 in appendix) were: .097, .336, .341, .089, .076 respectively for dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4, D5. All of these values were greater than .05. We concluded that the data distribution was acceptably homogeneous and that the results of the T-tests for gender and nationality could therefore be used for the analysis of this study.

The results of the two independent -sample T-tests are shown in Table 7. Gender was not statistically significant different in the five dimensions. While nationality had statistically significant differences in the *business problem-solving skills to be acquired* and *program criteria choices*, the averages of the French students were higher than those of the GCC students. This indicated that *business problem-solving skills to be acquired* and *program criteria choices* were more important to French students than to GCC students. This can be explained by the fact that French MBA candidates are increasingly aware that the needs of the business world have brought changes to MBA education. They expect business schools to define educational objectives and curricula content that will allow them to acquire cutting-edge business knowledge to adapt to a complex and open business environment in which they operate. A business school's international ranking and international network are seen in this regard as a driver for both interest in and demand for MBA programs.

To test the second part of H3, a one way-ANOVA variance analysis was used to test the effect of the demographic information items age and work experience on the different dimensions of the conceptual model. It is important to specify that age was divided into three groups (Below 25 years, 25–35 years, and above 35 years) and that work experience consisted of five groups (Less than one year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and more than 15 years). The Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality were applied for age on dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4. D5 (see Table A4 in appendix). The results showed that all the sig values were greater than .05. This indicated that they were not significant and therefore that the data distribution had acceptable normality. The same tests were applied for work experience on the same five dimensions: D1, D2, D3, D4, D5 (see Table A5 in appendix). The results showed that all the sig values were greater than .05 which meant that they were not significant and hence that data distribution also had acceptable normality.

Levene's test for equality of variances of age (see Table A6 in appendix) were: .121, .145, .091, .234, .111 for respectively D1, D2, D3, D4, D5. All these values were greater than .05 which indicated that the data distribution was acceptably homogeneous. For work experience Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table A7 in appendix) were: .073, .199, .082, .463 ,.074 for respectively D1, D2, D3, D4, D5. All these values were also greater than .05. This meant that the data distribution has acceptable homogeneity. Therefore, the one-way ANOVA test could be applied to test the effect of *age* and *work experience* on the dimensions of the study.

Type	Dimension	Gender	N	Average	Sd	T-value	df	Sig
TABLE 7 — Independent Sample T-tests for gender and nationality								
Gender	D1: Business problem solving skills to be acquired	Female	249	3.6024	1.03523	.177	361	.860
		Male	114	3.5658	1.10997			
	D2: Academic skills to be acquired	Female	249	3.4819	.87807	.840	361	.403
		Male	114	3.3289	1.03504			
	D3: Soft skills to be acquired	Female	249	3.6386	1.07865	.466	361	.642
		Male	114	3.5395	1.10056			
	D4: Career goals	Female	249	3.3454	.83690	-.532	361	.595
		Male	114	3.4386	1.00854			
	D5: Program criteria choices	Female	249	3.4940	.80297	.595	361	.222
		Male	114	3.2953	.87728			
Nationality	D1: Business problem solving skills to be acquired	GCC	288	3.4479	1.09419	-3.019	361	**.003**
		France	75	4.1400	.65383			
	D2: Academic skills to be acquired	GCC	288	3.3646	.95278	-1.620	361	.108
		France	75	3.7000	.79057			
	D3: Soft skills to be acquired	GCC	288	3.5130	1.17057	-1.901	361	.060
		France	75	3.9700	.50683			
	D4: Career goals	GCC	288	3.3455	.94876	-.704	361	.483
		France	75	3.4867	.62531			
	D5: Program criteria choices	GCC	288	3.3484	.88796	-2.199	361	**.030**
		France	75	3.7511	.42100			

Table 8 shows that there were statistically significant differences except for *academic skills to be acquired* between these dimensions based on MBA participants' *age* and *work experience*. These results highlighted that MBA student *age* and *work experience* significantly differed statistically in *business problem-solving skills to be acquired, soft skills to be acquired, career goals* and *program criteria choices*. Thus, an MBA program was perceived as a transformational experience that would help participants reposition themselves professionally and move into different roles and levels of managerial positions based on their experience and maturity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this paper was to study the ways in which the value of an MBA program was perceived by MBA students depending on their nationality in terms of *business problem-solving skills*

to be acquired, academic skills to be acquired, soft skills to be acquired, program criteria choices, and *career goals*. Employees need to regularly update their skills and competencies in order to improve their employability or meet their company's demands and enhance their career opportunities. In this context, MBA programs have been offered by many American and European universities, with the implicit assumption that they are passports to career success leading to higher job performance appraisals and quicker professional advancement.

We conducted a comparative analysis of the perceived effect of an MBA degree on career outcomes based on one sample of MBA participants in France and one in the Arabian Gulf Region to assess to what extent these participants shared common motives for pursuing education. Variance analysis was used to compare the MBA students and the way they connected their motives to

Type	Dimension	Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	df.	Means Squares	F value	Sig.
	TABLE 8 ANOVA tests for age and work experience						
Age	D1: Business problem solving skills to be acquired	Between Groups	10.492	2	5.246	5.032	**.008**
		Within Groups	123.008	360	1.042		
		Total	133.500	362			
	D2: Academic skills to be acquired	Between Groups	2.786	2	1.393	1.633	.200
		Within Groups	100.685	360	.853		
		Total	103.471	362			
	D3: Soft skills to be acquired	Between Groups	7.971	2	3.985	3.549	**.032**
		Within Groups	132.508	360	1.123		
		Total	140.478	362			
	D4: Career goals	Between Groups	8.003	2	4.002	5.409	**.006**
		Within Groups	87.290	360	.740		
		Total	95.293	362			
	D5: Program criteria choices	Between Groups	5.872	2	2.936	4.529	**.013**
		Within Groups	76.503	360	.648		
		Total	82.375	362			
Experience	D1: Business problem solving skills to be acquired	Between Groups	10.440	2	2.610	2.460	**.049**
		Within Groups	123.060	360	1.061		
		Total	133.500	362			
	D2: Academic skills to be acquired	Between Groups	4.795	2	1.199	1.409	.235
		Within Groups	98.676	360	.851		
		Total	103.471	362			
	D3: Soft skills to be acquired	Between Groups	13.393	2	3.348	3.056	**.020**
		Within Groups	127.086	360	1.096		
		Total	140.478	362			
	D4: Career goals	Between Groups	7.617	2	1.904	2.520	**.045**
		Within Groups	87.676	360	.756		
		Total	95.293	362			
	D5: Program criteria choices	Between Groups	8.042	2	2.010	3.137	**.017**
		Within Groups	74.333	360	.641		
		Total	82.375	362			

Means statistically significant at the level of significance $(0.05 = \alpha)$ *

the expected potential outcomes of their learning experience. Overall, MBA students tended to select their program based on the same set of academic and professional criteria including *expected skills to be acquired* and *career goals* regardless of their nationality. We also noticed that students had different expectations regarding the expected benefits from their training due to their socio-economic and personal environment, which might have influenced the level of attention given to specific dimensions. The French MBA students appeared to select the MBA program based on its perceived ability to empower them to seize employment opportunities internationally and to help them efficiently address business problems by relying on an integrated global set of skills (academic, soft, and business problem skills). The French business school's program reputation and international network appeared to be key program selection criteria supporting the French participants' international career development strategies.

On the other hand, the MBA students from the GCC states — mainly the Bahrainis— seemed to focus more on the soft skills they wished to acquire throughout their training, which could allow them to hold a managerial position. The alignment of the MBA with their organization needs was also considered a key factor in the program choice. Balancing the demands of their personal and professional lives was also clearly a concern for them and this could have, to some extent, constrained their career and professional development choices. The importance of the work/ personal life balance is deeply rooted in the group and family-oriented values attributed to Arab societies. This result corroborated Hofstede's index (op. cit.) regarding differences between individualist and collectivist societies.

One of the most significant findings was that business education should focus on providing professionals the expertise they lack, since broadening employees' skills was perceived as contributing to promotion to higher positions. The lack of business management knowledge and competence was perceived as a common obstacle to getting managerial promotions. This reality motivated employees to enroll in MBA programs to compete more efficiently for better positions in their organization. More specifically, managers in the Arabian Gulf region seemed to consider that, if they were able to demonstrate the appropriate level of managerial expertise, they could enhance their value to their organization.

Our research clearly highlights that students have different expectations regarding the outcome of their MBA depending not only on their personal and professional career choices, but also on the socio-economic characteristics of the business environment of their country of origin. Failure to meet these expectations could contribute, in turn, to fueling the skepticism of the added value of MBA programs in whatever part of the world they may be offered. Curriculum internationalization should therefore not only be considered from an academic standpoint but should also include expectations of prospective students in connection with their career development strategies.

Behind the focus on globalization, there is always an implicit need to customize programs to the professional and personal needs of students and this can vary from one country and/ or region to another. This is particularly important for MBA programs, which target students who usually already have significant work experience and a clear vision about their future professional development.

By identifying national culturally based similarities as well as generationally based similarities, our research provides insights on how international universities and business schools should adjust their curriculum design and expected learning outcomes to meet the local needs. This in turn has implications on how these institutions should market themselves internationally to potential candidates, and how they should enter strategic partnerships with corporations for training and research.

The research conducted was exploratory in nature and intended to encourage debate over cross-cultural management education, which is becoming increasingly international. The results cannot be applied to the wider population because of the small sample size. The participants in this study were French and from GCC states. Therefore, we cannot generalize the findings to all the Arab countries that may have more diverse career goals. It would be helpful to sample additional nationalities to improve the generalization of the results.

We suggest that future research look at how the various dimensions of career effectiveness, i.e. integrated performance management, career attitudes, adaptability, resilience and leadership in a global context can be translated into skills to be acquired through innovative curriculum development approaches. Most importantly, future research agendas for international and cross-cultural business curriculum development should include the key components leading to successful curriculum internationalization: academic requirements, global skills, career development strategies and program brand reputation management.

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APPENDIX / TABLE A1
Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of normality for dependent dimensions D1, D2, D3 and D5

Tests of Normality							
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
Career goals		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
D1: Business problem solving skills to be acquired		.287	27	.178	.820	27	.054
	Slightly Important	.268	42	.124	.833	42	.083
	Important	.243	69	.132	.897	69	.082
	Highly Important	.210	123	.098	.909	123	.123
	Critical	.224	102	.102	.754	102	.200*
D2: Academic skills to be acquired	Unimportant	.205	27	.200*	.912	27	.327
	Slightly Important	.320	42	.328	.679	42	.234
	Important	.250	69	.321	.897	69	.256
	Highly Important	.261	123	.321	.892	123	.278
	Critical	.211	102	.309	.870	102	.321
D3: Soft skills to be acquired	Unimportant	.186	27	.200*	.952	27	.709
	Slightly Important	.196	42	.148	.939	42	.408
	Important	.231	69	.162	.905	69	.132
	Highly Important	.191	123	.176	.944	123	.143
	Critical	.187	102	.188	.818	102	.145
D5: Program criteria choices	Unimportant	.125	27	.200*	.962	27	.817
	Slightly Important	.163	42	.200*	.921	42	.225
	Important	.153	69	.172	.941	69	.194
	Highly Important	.124	123	.116	.954	123	.097
	Critical	.110	102	.200*	.942	102	.072

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

APPENDIX / TABLE A2
Levene's test for equality of gender variances and t-test for equality of gender means for dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4 and D5

Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
						Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df				Lower	Upper
D1	E med	.987	.322	.177	361	.860	.03662	.20743	-.37411	.44735
	Equal variances not assumed			.172	202.524	.864	.03662	.21292	-.38831	.46155
D2	Equal variances assumed	2.524	.115	.840	361	.403	.15298	.18210	-.20760	.51356
	Equal variances not assumed			.790	187.038	.432	.15298	.19360	-.23398	.53994
D3	Equal variances assumed	.295	.588	.466	361	.642	.09908	.21262	-.32192	.52008
	Equal variances not assumed			.463	211.632	.645	.09908	.21423	-.32812	.52628
D4	Equal variances assumed	1.678	.198	-.532	361	.595	-.09321	.17507	-.43986	.25343
	Equal variances not assumed			-.497	183.777	.621	-.09321	.18763	-.46838	.28195
D5	Equal variances assumed	.412	.198	1.227	361	.222	.19865	.16194	-.12201	.51931
	Equal variances not assumed			1.187	199.251	.240	.19865	.16740	-.13552	.53283

APPENDIX / TABLE A3
Levene's test for equality of nationality variances and t-test for equality of nationality means for dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4, D5

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
D1	Equal variances assumed	7.597	.097	-3.019	361	.063	-.69208	.22920	-1.14593	-.23823
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.025	189.813	.000	-.69208	.17196	-1.03570	-.34847
D2	Equal variances assumed	.935	.336	-1.620	361	.108	-.33542	.20710	-.74550	.07467
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.807	192.712	.078	-.33542	.18562	-.70952	.03868
D3	Equal variances assumed	13.866	.341	-1.901	361	.060	-.45698	.24034	-.93287	.01891
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.917	276.282	.004	-.45698	.15668	-.76815	-.14581
D4	Equal variances assumed	4.892	.089	-.704	361	.483	-.14118	.20051	-.53822	.25585
	Equal variances not assumed			-.893	198.87	.376	-.14118	.15817	-.45799	.17563
D5	Equal variances assumed	13.677	.076	-2.199	361	.080	-.40273	.18313	-.76535	-.04011
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.256	250.512	.002	-.40273	.12370	-.64875	-.15671

APPENDIX / TABLE A4
Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnova tests of age normality for dependent dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4 and D5

Tests of Normality

Age		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
D1	Below 25 years	.175	9	.073	1.000	3	.072
	(25-35) years	.164	237	.087	.932	79	.087
	Above 35 years	.197	117	.074	.899	39	.092
D2	Below 25 years	.253	9	.143	.964	3	.637
	(25-35) years	.151	237	.086	.949	79	.093
	Above 35 years	.160	117	.094	.944	39	.053
D3	Below 25 years	.385	9	.321	.750	3	.075
	(25-35) years	.164	237	.076	.919	79	.086
	Above 35 years	.198	117	.097	.880	39	.081
D4	Below 25 years	.238	9	.091	.976	9	.702
	(25-35) years	.088	237	.200*	.977	237	.157
	Above 35 years	.137	117	.061	.953	117	.103
D5	Below 25 years	.346	9	.163	.837	3	.206
	(25-35) years	.086	237	.200*	.969	79	.053
	Above 35 years	.155	117	.079	.942	39	.075

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

APPENDIX / TABLE A5
Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnova tests of work experience normality
for dependent dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4 and D5

	Tests of Normality[b]						
	Work experience	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
D1	(1-5) years	.161	9	.060	.916	31	.088
	(6-10) years	.106	93	.200*	.950	40	.076
	(11-15) years	.180	120	.089	.906	20	.054
	More than 15 years	.190	60	.074	.882	27	.065
D2	Less than one year	.385	9	.064	.750	3	.085
	(1-5) years	.203	93	.082	.879	31	.082
	(6-10) years	.149	120	.066	.945	40	.052
	(11-15) years	.220	60	.062	.872	20	.063
	More than 15 years	.188	81	.086	.888	27	.077
D3	Less than one year	.276	9	.125	.942	3	.537
	(1-5) years	.172	93	.090	.857	31	.091
	(6-10) years	.196	120	.081	.909	40	.074
	(11-15) years	.226	60	.078	.924	20	.119
	More than 15 years	.181	81	.074	.882	27	.075
D4	Less than one year	.353	9	.064	.824	3	.174
	(1-5) years	.141	93	.122	.969	31	.503
	(6-10) years	.081	120	.200*	.973	40	.435
	(11-15) years	.174	60	.112	.946	20	.313
	More than 15 years	.153	81	.103	.904	27	.066
D5	Less than one year	.232	9	.087	.980	3	.726
	(1-5) years	.114	93	.200*	.956	31	.227
	(6-10) years	.116	120	.191	.965	40	.252
	(11-15) years	.097	60	.200*	.960	20	.539
	More than 15 years	.204	81	.085	.896	27	.071

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

APPENDIX / TABLE A6
Levene's test for equality of age variances
for dependent dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4 and D55

	Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
D1	4.726	2	361	.121
D2	1.967	2	361	.145
D3	6.937	2	361	.091
D4	1.470	2	361	.234
D5	2.238	2	361	.111

APPENDIX / TABLE A7
Levene's test for equality of work experience variances
for dependent dimensions D1, D2, D3, D4 and D5

	Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
D1	6.410	4	361	.073
D2	1.527	4	361	.199
D3	4.394	4	361	.082
D4	.906	4	361	.463
D5	2.492	4	361	.074

APPENDIX 1
Questionnaire for MBA participants

Thank you for filling this questionnaire. Please answer each question as completely as possible.
The information provided shall of course remain confidential.

Part One					

1.	**Gender:**	◯ Male ◯ Female			
2.	**Nationality:**	◯ Bahrain ◯ Koweït ◯ France ◯ Others			
3.	**Age:**	◯ Below 25 years ◯ (25 – 35) year ◯ Above 35 years			
4.	**Work experience:**	◯ Less than one year ◯ (1-5) years ◯ (6-10)years ◯ (11-15)years ◯ More than 15 years			

Part Two					
		Critical	Highly Important	Important	Slightly Important	Unimportant
D1	**Please indicate to what extend you consider that your program should help you acquire the following business problem solving skills?**					
	S1. Understand how to operate in the globalized world	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S2. Solve business and managerial issues	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
D2	**Please indicate to what extent you consider that your program will help you acquire the following academic skills?**					
	S3. Build a sound financial base	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S4. Acquire theoretical knowledge and technical tools	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
D3	**Please indicate to what extent you consider that your MBA program will help you acquire the following soft skills?**					
	S5. Communication skills	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S6. Leadership skills	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S7. Managerial skills	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S8. Build self-confidence	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
D4	**Please indicate to what extent you consider that your program will help achieve the following career goals?**					
	S9. Work with increasingly challenging tasks	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S10. Start a business	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S11. Become a specialist in a specific area	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S12. Contribute to society	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S13. Balance personal life and career	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S14. Reach a managerial level	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
D5	**Please indicate the criteria upon which you based your MBA program choice**					
	S15. University/ school's reputation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S16. University/ school's network	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S17. University/ school's ranking	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S18. University/ school's research activities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S19. Program's relevance to your company's sector or activity	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S20. Program's content	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S21. Program's faculty	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S22. Program's course delivery system	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	S23. Program's partners	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Thank you for your participation in this survey						