



DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE LEADERS THROUGH TRANSFORMATIONAL EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Abstract

The goal of executive education programs is to prepare the leaders to act in swiftly changing business and social environment. However, various research show that the program completion may not induce the expected change unless it has more transformational nature.

In other words, the program curriculum should put more emphasis on soft skills development and incorporation of experiential learning methods. Therefore, the quantitative, longitudinal research was conducted among participants of executive education program at a highly ranked university which met the criteria of transformational education program. The study aimed to measure the change at the level of basic motivators among 71 Executive MBA students that occurred during 2 years of studies at the executive program using REISS Motivation Profile®. There were discovered significant changes in 5 motivators: Acceptance, Social Contact, Status, Order and Tranquility. The results indicate that the program participants become leaders that are more oriented towards collaboration with others and value more planning and balanced approach to management. The results bring valuable indication for both university management and educators calling for changes in the executive education curriculum.

Keywords: executive education, leadership development, RMP®, quantitative research

Introduction

Research Problem

In the academic world, there is an ongoing discussion about the design of executive education programs that prepares leaders for the challenges of tomorrow. According to Datar et al. (2011), business schools focus too much on the knowledge component than on beliefs and attitudes. As a result, the completion of executive program does not induce an expected change in alumni behavior. Ket De Vries and Korotov (2007) has indicated that managerial education needs to have a more transformational character. Thus, there has to be conducted major change in both content and methods of executive programs delivery.

On the ground of this discussion, a pilot longitudinal quantitative research was conducted among participants of executive program at the university which is highly ranked in the Financial Times rankings. The program design meets the postulates of Ket De Vries and Korotov (2007) for transformational character by putting emphasis on soft skills development and incorporating experiential learning methods. The program is accredited by AMBA and meets the international standards of higher education.

Prior research that has evaluated effects of transformational executive education programs has applied solemnly qualitative methods (de Dea et al., 2009, Datar, et al. 2011). Therefore, for the purpose of research the authors applied qualitative methods of investigation using Reiss Motivation Profile ® questionnaire. The RMP® is a standardized assessment of human needs based on sensitivity theory (Reiss, 2004) which allows investigating an individual combination of 16 universal reinforcements. Prior research conducted by Reiss and Havercamp (1998) identified that people belonging to particular social groups and professions present iden-

tifiable pattern in respect to some of the motivators. What is more, according to Haverkamp and Reiss (2003) “basic desires are at least partially genetically determined, we also believe that the manner people choose to satisfy these motives is learned through culture and experience” (pp. 124). According to Reiss (2008), motivators are the drivers of human behavior and have significant impact on preferences towards development of particular competences.

The study aimed to understand whether completion of a transformative executive education program has brought changes at the level of basic motivators among program participants.

To examine the role of executive program experience among participants the authors divided the research into 2 phases of gathering with RMP® questionnaire: one at the beginning of the executive program and the second at the end of it. As a result, there were collected responses from 71 participants of the executive program who filled the questionnaire twice.

Research Focus

Managers decide to enter executive programs not only to get new knowledge but predominantly as they look for support to change their behavior and become more effective in their work and life (Ket De Vries & Korotov, 2007). They perceive such programs as a “chance for self-renewal” or “preparation for a new role.” Thus, managers can start developing a new work identity (Ibarra, 2003). The results of Ket De Vries and Korotov's (2007) research suggest that most executives strive with several personal and organizational issues. During interviews, they discovered that among common problems are: conflict at work, disappointment due to career setbacks, self-doubts about their managerial skills, fear of burnout on the job, or narcissistic attitude.

From the organizational perspective, an executive program aims to induce a strategic change in the company and strengthen the leader's ability to drive change (Buchel and Antunes, 2007). According to Datar, et al. (2011) who conducted extensive research on MBA programs from prestigious business schools in Europe and the USA, the change in managers' education process needs to be done. The main recommendations are: reassessing knowledge (frameworks, theories), paying more attention to the development of skills, and inducting the change at the level of values, beliefs, and attitudes. As a result of their inquiry, they identified eight unmet needs associated mostly with learning outcomes at the level of skills and values that should be met while changing the executive program curriculum. The learning goals that should be included in executive programs are:

1. The ability to look from a global perspective while managing organizations across different cultural, economic, and institutional contexts.
2. Developing leadership skills to inspire, influence, and guide employees; being able to deliver constructive feedback and being able to recognize the impact of one's actions and behaviors on others.
3. Perfecting integration skills that allow to look at issues from diverse perspectives and considering multiple even conflicting information
4. Understanding business from the perspective of its' responsibilities and purpose in between financial - nonfinancial objectives and in between various business stakeholders
5. Recognizing organizational challenges of change implementation from the perspective of political coalitions or hidden agendas
6. Acting creatively and innovatively in problem-solving and constantly experimenting and learning
7. Thinking critically and communicating using persuasive arguments and supporting evidence
8. Understanding the limitations of various models or markets and analyzing risks and acting in a way to diminish them.

According to De De'a Roglio and Light (2009) executive programs should encourage "deep reflections on sustainability, cultural diversity, systems dynamics, personal behaviors, and ethical issues that consider not only the individual but also how the social structures influence the decision-making process." (p. 171). Additionally, it should develop self-aware and reflective alumni.

Therefore, the aims of the research were to measure the change at the level of basic motivators that occurred after 2 years of studies on the executive program using (RMP®) and find whether executive program participants share any similarities in respect to motivation profile.

Research Methodology

Sample

The participants were students of the executive program conducted at the university which is highly ranked by Financial Times and accredited by AMBA. The participants enrolled for studies in 2017. Their age ranged from 32 to 55 years ($M=38$, $SD=5,5$). Whereas the range in years of professional experience was from 4 to 24 years ($M=12$, $SD=5,2$). The participants who occupied senior managerial positions, were business owners or CEOs.

Participation in the research was voluntary. The questionnaire was sent to 89 executive MBA students. The first phase of the research took place in November 2017 - 71 students responded to the RMP® questionnaire. The second phase took place in June 2019 with 89 students filling out the RMP® questionnaire. In the data analysis, the authors included only 71 responses considering only the results of participants who filled out the survey twice.

Instrument and Procedures

The RMP® is the standardized assessment of human needs which allows the measurement of 16 universal reinforcements by which everybody is motivated however not in the same way (Reiss, 2012). The level of experiencing each of the 16 motivators determines the individual's priorities. In other words, a desire profile is a person's unique priority ranking of the 16 strivings. The most important motivators are those with the highest/lowest (2,0; -2,0) results when compared to appropriate norms. They explain a person's behavior (Reiss, 2012).

To understand the practical application of RMP® results, it is worth analyzing the example delivered by Reiss (2004, pp. 187): "*Henry aims for a lower degree of social contact than does Jake. When the amount of social contact Henry or Jake experience is less than they desire, they are motivated to socialize. When the amount of social contact they experience is about what they desire, they are temporarily satiated. When the amount of social contact is more than they desire, they are motivated to be alone to balance out their experiences. Suppose that Henry and Jake attend a party that lasts 3 hours. Henry enjoys the party at first but then feels uncomfortable because he is experiencing much more social activity than he desires. Jake, on the other hand, still wants more fun when the party ends.*"

The validity and reliability of RMP® have been confirmed with Test-retest reliabilities with mean correlations of 0.83 (range 0.80 to 0.96) for 2-week reliability and 0.80 (range 0.69 to 0.88) for 4-week reliability (Havercamp & Reiss, 2003; Reiss & Havercamp, 1998). Therefore, it can be assumed that changes in the results over a longer time may be caused by gained experience Havercamp and Reiss (2003, p.124).

Table 1
Definitions of Selected RMP® Motivators

	Motivator	Description
1	Power	Desire to influence (including need to be a leader)
2	Independence	Desire to be autonomous
3	Acceptance	Desire for approval
4	Order	Desire to organize (including desire for repetitive actions)
5	Honor	Desire to obey a traditional moral code
6	Idealism	Desire to improve society (including altruism, justice)
7	Social Contact	Desire for peer companionship
8	Status	Desire for social standing (including desire for attention)
9	Vengeance	Desire to get even (including desire to compete, to win)
10	Tranquility	Desire to avoid anxiety and stressful situations

Source: Havercamp and Reiss (2003)

All respondents participated in the same course curriculum. By examining the entire population that participated in the executive program in 2017 and researching two phases, it is possible to assume the exclusion of random factors from the study. Also, since the same group of respondents filled out the RMP® questionnaire it is possible to conclude a small population size. An additional note should be considered that participation in the executive program associates with a relatively high level of the elitism both in terms of financial perspective and recruitment procedure.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis of data was driven from the individual scores of RMP® of each participant who participated in the two stages of the research. The data were then computed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. The data were analyzed with a focus on the aims of the research i.e., measuring the change at the level of basic motivators that occurred after 2 years of studies on the executive program and searching for similarities among executive program participants in respect to motivation profiles.

Research Results

Executive Program Description

The examined executive education program was a two-year program that put a high emphasis on the development of soft skills- 26% of contact hours cover topics directly aimed at this area. As declared by the Director of the program:

“The knowledge in the areas of finance, marketing or HR is quite well developed and embedded in companies. However, nowadays more and more attention is paid to the fact that apart from specialist knowledge in an organization, knowledge about people and from people is necessary. It turns out that the soft skills of managers determine the quality of management. (...) The leader’s role is changing. He/she ceases to be a commanding and dividing resources and become a supportive boss! Such a challenge, requiring leaders to change their minds and habits. In developed companies, work is already based on key values, and not on top-down communication.” (MBA Director, 2016)

The main educational outcomes in the area of competencies were:

- Building engagement to accomplish strategic goals
- Resolving dilemmas related to performing the function of a team leader
- Need for personal and professional development
- Recognizing the need for change in the organization
- Being able to manage conflictual situations
- Perceiving the importance of professional ethics

The admission to the executive education program was done based on GMAT test and the individual meeting with the Admission Commission that investigated the readiness of candidate to enter the studies.

Similar to the procedures developed by Ket De Vries and Korotov (2007) the examiners evaluate: willingness to learn and share knowledge, the willingness to be open and responsive, emotional management skills, a degree of intellectuality, the capability for introspection, responsiveness to observations of others. The evaluation process allowed faculty to estimate whether a candidate would fit with the group.

At the initial stage of the program, all participants took part in examinations using tools designed for self-awareness purposes. The goal was to build self-awareness and “facilitate the development of the connective, critical, and personal thinking at the center of the reflective executive concept.” (Ket De Vries & Korotov, 2007 p. 383). The first module of the program was focused on an understanding of obtained results and 2 individual self-reflective observations. The first one was focused on a 2-week observation of long tails of thinking style and the second was a 14-week program of reshaping the managerial habits. Each work was mentored and given individual feedback to a participant.

“One of the competencies that will surely be a big challenge is the ability to manage yourself in time. This applies to both work-life balances, but also to issues such as the ability to make choices, prioritize and select tasks. Against this background, many conflicts arise between bosses and their subordinates. Managers sometimes find it difficult to manage themselves in time, they try to do everything on the same day, and every issue is equally important to them. And they expect the same from employees”. (MBA Director, 2016)

At further stages of the program, students are equipped with various tools that allow them to conduct further changes in managerial behavior. In the curriculum, there are modules devoted to negotiations, networking, trust-building, ethics leadership, and change management (from the perspective of people engagement). Each module is designed to take into the current business challenges and equipped with relevant theories.

“We decided that in today's world, to understand conflict and deal with it, one must reach its deepest essence. Therefore, we focused on seeing how we create the conflict. A conflict does not arise by itself, it is inherent in the organizational structure of a company or between departments. It is in the values or interests of individual people. Discovering its 'roots' is the key to find the right agreement.” (Educational Programs and Development Director)

The predominant methods of teaching at those courses are case studies, role-playing (De De'a Roglio and Light 2009, Forrest, III, and Peterson, 2006) and experimental learning approaches. The emphasis is put on collective learning which plays an essential role in reflective practice development (Lissack & Ross, 1999). Thus, the role of a lecturer is different than in a traditional academic environment.

“The lecturer ceases to be a lecturer and becomes a coach. It acts as a discussion moderator and enables students to reveal their potential, extract knowledge that is often deeply hidden in their minds and not fully realized. This is the biggest change our higher education is facing. In today's world, the traditional "teacher-student" model no longer works. This can be seen very clearly in business education.” (MBA Director, 2016)

Lecturer acting as the reflective practitioner encourages dialogue and “creates a continuous dialogue of actions and words, of mutual reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action” (De De’ a Roglio and Light 2009, p. 170).

RMP® Questionnaire Results

In the process of analysis, the median values of each motivator were calculated in (t1) and (t2) to see whether motivators have changed. Based on knowledge about RMP®, the authors evaluated that a difference in the median between (t1) and (t2) was greater than 0,3 as significant change at the level of motivators among the examined group of participants.

Table 2
Research Results Presenting 10 RMP® Motivators

Motivator	Program entry (t1)		Program completion (t2)		Difference	
	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>
Power	0.24	0.93	0,35	0.92	0,11	-0.01
Independence	0.33	0.93	0,33	0.98	0	0.05
Acceptance	-0.19	0.94	0,28	0.85	0.47	-0.09
Order	-0.44	0.92	-0,12	0.92	0.32	0
Honor	-0.27	0.77	-0,10	0.80	0.17	0.03
Idealism	-0.42	0.73	-0,53	0.88	-0.11	0.15
Social Contact	-0.15	1.05	0,16	1.05	0.31	0
Status	0.12	1.1	-0,22	1.07	-0.34	-0.03
Vengeance	0.54	1.12	0,43	1.04	-0.11	-0.08
Tranquility	-0.22	1	0,08	0.95	0.3	-0.05

Additionally, the authors calculated the standard deviation of each motivator to analyze the cohort homogeneity. In other words, to observe the extreme cases of each motivator. All examined motivators in both (t1) and (t2) have high standard deviation - between 0.73 to 1.07 (Table 2). Participants presented significant differences in motivation profiles.

The first factor to be discussed was Power. The median of the motivator increased by 0.11, from 0.24 to 0.35, and the standard deviation from 0.93 to 0.92 decreased by 0.01. This indicated a relatively high number of extreme cases. The data analysis shows that the need to have an impact was still relatively important for the respondents, although the analysis of standard deviation indicated a more frequent occurrence of extreme units.

The second factor analyzed was Independence. As part of the analysis, the median did not change (it remained at 0.33) and the standard deviation changed by 0.05. The score - 0.33 indicated that personal freedom was important. Leaders preferred to frequently act alone however in some cases they decided to work in a team, and they did it effectively. The executive program did not bring change in this respect.

The third factor was Acceptance. The median of the motivator increased by 0.47 (from -0.19 to 0.28), while the standard deviation decreased by 0.09 (from 0.94 to 0.85). The result (-0,19) indicated that individuals were confident and considered mostly their own opinion and were insensitive to others. After the program, the result 0,28 showed that participants started to consider others' opinions and were more aware of the importance of delivering feedback.

The fourth factor analyzed was Order. The median of the motivator increased from -0.12 to -0.44 with an unchanged standard deviation. Such a result showed that respondents preferred to be pragmatic and plan actions but as well sometimes acted spontaneously in decision making. The change in the median by 0,32 indicated a greater need for planning actions.

The fifth factor was Honor. The median of the motivator increased from -0.27 to -0.10, with a practically unchanged standard deviation (0.77 in 0.8). Participants flexibly adjusted to the situation, they were usually open to innovative ideas, and they well balanced between rules and goal orientation.

The sixth indicator was Idealism which decreased from -0.42 to -0.53, with a simultaneous increase in the standard deviation from 0.73 to 0.88. The score indicated a moderate need to engage in affairs and preference of a rather pragmatic approach to social problems. A higher standard deviation in (t2) indicated that there was an increase in the number of extreme cases.

The seventh indicator was Social Contact. In the case of the respondents, there was a very clear change in this motivator. The standard deviation did not change 1.05, however, the median increased from -0.15 to 0.16 (difference=0,31). The result -0,15 indicated the preference towards spending time with known people rather than getting to know new ones. On the other hand, the result after the program completion showed (0.16) growing need for social contact and taking greater care for contacts with people.

The eighth indicator was Status. In the case of the examined group, the motivator decreased from 0.12 to -0.22 (difference = 0,34), with the standard deviation practically unchanged (from 1.1 to 1.07). The change in motivator can be interpreted by decreasing the need to stand out from the group.

The ninth indicator was Vengeance. In the case of the studied cohort, there was a decrease of the median from 0.54 to 0.43 with a high standard deviation (from 1.12 to 1.04). The results showed a moderate need to compete.

The last analyzed factor is Tranquility. The median of the motivator increased from (-0.22) to (0.08) (difference=0,3). The change in this motivator indicated a more conscious approach to risk-taking. The standard deviation decreased from the level of 1 to 0.95 which indicated the tendency to a more homogenous approach to greater stability and security.

Discussion

Watkins et al. (2017) explained that the current leadership role has changed in XXI century. Leaders are required to constantly adapt to environment which is complex and dynamically changing. Thus, they cannot take decisions based solemnly on their knowledge, but they need to collaborate with teams to maintain knowledge inflow. Such need should be reflected in the curriculum of management education programs. Leaders need to create the atmosphere of open communication and manage conflict at the early state of its' development. As indicated by Ket De Vries and Korotov (2007) such skill is extremely valuable to be developed by a leader. Our research indicated that the transformational executive education program can bring change in this respect. Research participants in the end of the program started to perceive greater importance of people surrounding them and started to look at others' opinions more often in their decision-making process. Additionally, they valued more the role of feedback, which was noticed by Datar, et al. (2011) as critical in people management. They were more eager to build social networks and thus build coalitions around themselves (Datar, et al. 2011). Another important finding is the fact that the respondents value less the role of status i.e., need to belong to a prestigious group. They become more egalitarian. According to Ket De Vries and Korotov

(2007), such change is an important outcome of the executive education program as it allows to collaborate with people despite their social status and focus more on other human qualities. The change toward more egalitarian and inclusive leadership is in line with recent finding about Millennial leadership expectations (McCleskey, 2018) that by 2025 will constitute the majority of workforce. Millennial generation expects the redefinition of relationships between supervisor and employee towards relationship build on trust, autonomy, and individual approach. The leaders need to understand the changing expectations of the workforce. Putting higher emphasis on diversity, inclusiveness and democratic leadership are vital for the executive education curriculum.

The research results indicated that after executive program completion the participants developed the need for greater planning and risk evaluation. Those qualities can be linked with the strategic thinking competency. Thus, leaders not only develop a long-term perspective but as well reflect on current situation, make sense of cues to manage risk. Due to complexity of the environment they need to develop macro perspective (Norzailan et al, 2016). However, those competencies cannot be developed merely getting to know strategic tools. The examined executive program they developed mostly by experience-based approach, reflective learning and life case studies where participants solved current challenges of experienced managers.

The results of research did not allow to indicate common motivator that is characteristic for a group of executive program participants. The respondents differ in respect to leadership styles which can be explained by a variety of sectors in which they operate. From the perspective of the goal of the program this is a valuable result as participants had the possibility to interact in a diversified group which broadens their experience in collaboration with peers having often different motives and approach to problem solving.

Conclusions and Implications

The presented study brings interesting contributions in the discussion about the design of executive education programs. The presented executive educational program was designed in line with concepts of transformational executive programs. The results of the inquiry among program participants bring light to the importance of designing an innovative practice-oriented curriculum with a strong emphasis on soft skills. The alumni profile presents a person who values feedback more, engages in networking, becomes more egalitarian and on the other hand is more cautious in his/her decision-making process. Considering the global challenge of executive education to keep up with the complexity and dynamism of business environment, the transformative executive education design seems to be adequate solution especially that the examined program was verified and accredited by AMBA.

In the future, there should be conducted further studies in this area with the application of RMP® to be able to draw statistical generalizations for a wider population. Focus on a single executive program with a limited number of participants creates a significant limitation in terms of the wider validity of the research.

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Declaration of Interest

Authors declare no competing interest.

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