

BUSINESS EDUCATION AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

Business education offers a wide range of opportunities and is clearly one of the most successful types of education in Romania and worldwide in terms of finding potential candidates. The potential „attraction” is higher, as a result of the wide range of opportunities that might appear after following such a path. However, measuring success in education means looking not only at inputs, but also at outputs, at students’ personal development during the educational process, at the success of graduates on the labour market and at their insights regarding their career. In this paper we aim to feel the „pulse” of the students from the economic fields (business higher education, including MBA programs), by taking into account their changed perceptions due to the continuous dynamics of the business environment.

It is hard to predict how education in general prepares present students for a future innovative and creative society. If we are talking about the system as a whole, it is even more difficult and unfortunately tending to lead to a quite pessimistic answer (although we are optimistic and we are sure some changes will be perceived soon). For the moment, we consider that our educational system – and we are referring particularly to Romania, since this is the place we live and work – is more likely mass-oriented, with a trend of liking mass in everything: a lot of students in order to cut costs (also believing it is easy to do that without lowering the quality), a very specialized way of dealing with everything, a preference towards performing the very same task over and over again and a general easiness for teachers to choose lectures with less interaction.

We do believe that some changes have already started to happen. We do have teachers that are more student-oriented. Students do appreciate them, and, as a result, some of these teachers received recognition or even prizes. These teachers appreciate creativity more, are closer to their students and are facilitators rather than transmitters of information. They know they can learn from students as much as students can learn from them. They value diversity and try to build on it. It is generally perceived that this is the only way business schools do attain their goals of developing well-prepared people.

Beyond our beliefs, this paper is one of the results of a study conducted in The Bucharest University of Economic Studies in 2012. It aims to present some ideas referring to our students’ perception on career. In order to find their main insights, we used a questionnaire for which we obtained 107 valid answers and accounts for 8 students and 2 graduates as a complementary qualitative approach.

Our results after processing the questionnaire led us to the general conclusions that the main factor to influence the career path is personal decision, that students generally do consider they should pursue a career abroad and that universities do have a major role in influencing students' career. Entrepreneurship is in many cases seen as a career path. However, only some of the respondents had already tried entrepreneurship, while most of them only indicated the attraction for such a career path.

Our paper also takes into account the current conditions of MBA programs in Romania and the general options graduates of such a program do have. We also analyzed the two different options of studying in our country or abroad. The analysis of our accounts also led to a series of interesting results with respect to these options. While there seem to be quite many reasons for studying abroad, most of the graduates of foreign business schools are also interested in coming back after a period of gaining experience in another country.

We strongly believe that the conclusions of our study can serve as a base for a series of actions aimed at improving the educational process. Further implications should consist in a better performance of the economy as a whole. We believe in synergy and in switching to a more creative, interactive and innovative education, in which standards might continue to exist, but they should be more flexible and student-sensitive. This way, the society as a whole would benefit.

Keywords: Business education, career, educational process, employment, labour market

Résumé

L' éducation de gestion offre de opportunités nombreuses et constitue, sans doute, un type d' éducation bien appréciée en Roumanie et dans le monde entier qui attire des candidats. Le potentiel „d'attraction” est fort grace aux chances de succès pour ceux qui ont suivi une telle formation. Pour l' évaluation de la reussite dans le domaine de l' éducation il faut prendre en compte non seulement les éléments d' entrée, mais aussi les éléments de sortie, c'est à dire, le développement personnel des étudiants pendant le processus d' éducation, le succès des diplômés sur le marché de travail et les évolution de carrière. Dans cet article nous voulons découvrir "l'état d'esprit" des étudiants des universités économique (étudiants de la faculté d'administration des affaires, y inclu les programmes Master of Business Administration - MBA), en tenant compte du changement de leur perception sous l' influence de la dynamique continue de l' environnement d' affaire.

Il est difficile de concevoir un système d' éducation capable de préparer aujourd' hui les étudiants pour la future société innovative et créative. Si nous allons parler du système en ensemble, il sera encore plus difficile et, malheureusement le pessimisme augmentera (malgré ces aspects, nous sommes optimistes et nous pensons que certains changements seront visibles bientôt). Pour le moment, nous considerons que le système d' éducation – surtout en Roumanie, l' espace géographique et culturel dans lequel nous vivons et nous travaillons – est plus orientée vers la grande

échelle: nous travaillons avec des groupes d'étudiants très grandes en vue de réduire les coûts (en considérant qu'il est possible de maintenir la qualité dans ces conditions).

Nous croyons que certains changements seront inévitables. Nous avons des professeurs plus orienté vers les étudiant, des étudiants qui les apprecient, des professeurs qui, grace à leur dédication, ont reçu des prix spéciaux. Ces professeurs apprecie plus la créativité, sont plus proches des étudiants et peuvent être plutôt des facilitateurs que de émetteurs d'informations. Ils savent qu'ils peuvent apprendre des étudiants dans la même mesure que les étudiants aprennent de leurs enseignants. Ils apprecient la diversité et ils cherchent construire sur cette base. Selon la perception générale, cette façon de faire l'éducation dans les écoles de gestion est la seule voie d'atteindre les objectifs de former des spécialistes très bien préparés.

Au-delà de nos croyances, cet article présente les résultats obtenus à la suite d'un étude fait dans l'Académie d'Études Économiques de Bucarest en 2012. Il présente des idées concernant la perception de nos étudiants sur la carrière. Pour obtenir les meilleurs résultats, nous avons utilisé un questionnaire qui nous a apporté 107 réponses valides. Elles ont été complétées par les approches qualitatives complémentaires des 8 étudiants et 2 diplômés.

Les résultats obtenus à la suite du traitement du questionnaire nous ont conduit à des conclusions générales qui ont souligné que: le facteur le plus important qui influence la carrière est une décision personnelle; en générale, les étudiants considerent qu'ils peuvent suivre une carrière à l'étrangère et que les universités ont un rôle majeure qui influence leurs carrière; l'entrépreneuriat est vue, souvent, comme un possible itinéraire de carrière. Il faut mentioner que seulement certains répondents ont déjà une expérimenté dans ce domaine mais, la plupart d'étudiants indique leur préférence pour une telle évolution professionnelle.

Notre article prend aussi en compte le rôle des programmes MBA en Roumania et les options des étudiants après avoir fini le programme. Nous avons aussi analysé les deux différentes options des étudiants de faire des études dans notre pays ou à l'étranger. L'analyse nous conduit à des résultats intéressants. Même s'il y a beaucoup d'arguments pour étudier à l'étranger, une bonne partie des étudiants qui ont étudié dans des écoles d'affaires étrangères sont aussi intéressés de revenir dans le pays, après avoir gagné une bonne expérience dans un autre pays.

Nous envisageons que les conclusions de notre étude peuvent servir comme base pour les actions destinées à l'amélioration du processus d'éducation. Les implications serront une meilleure performance de l'économie en ensamble. Nous sommes confiants dans les effets de la synergie et dans nos chances de devenir plus creatifs, interactifs et novateurs en éducation. Même les standards les plus importants seront gardés, ils seront plus flexibles et plus favorables pour l'étudiant. De cette manière, toute la société, en ensemble, aura des bénéfices.

Mots clé: Éducation de gestion, carrière, processus d'éducation, employabilité, marché du travail

JEL Classification: A23, F22, F66, I23, J24, J28, M53.

Introduction

Although sometimes appearing to be easy, measuring success in education is quite a difficult task, since results are measured in terms of knowledge, competences, behavior and final results at the workplace, and success depends on both inputs and the educational process. In terms of inputs, business education is one of the most successful types of education in Romania, as a result of the wide range of opportunities. There are many students interested in studying business, and this is true both for higher education and highschools. Despite seeming to perform better in terms of attracting new candidates, business education in Romania encounters a general demographics-related problem, in the sense that the number of potential students follows a downward trend.

In this paper we will focus primarily on higher education (undergraduates or graduates of bachelor and master degree).

In developing our ideas, we had in mind four research questions. The first one refers to finding the main factors that influence the career path. Of course, we were interested to see if there are differences between the general hints given by the market and the perceptions of our students. Our second research question was to what degree our students are interested into studying abroad and even following a career outside Romania. The third refers to entrepreneurship, to what degree entrepreneurship is considered as a valuable career path. Last but not least, we wanted to analyse the current conditions of MBA crisis and see if we can talk about a high impact of the economic crisis on the business education in Romania.

1. Teaching and Learning Business – are We Creative Enough?

We believe education in general should prepare students for a future innovative and creative society, therefore it would be important to teach business in such a way that allows the expression of creativity and its future development. The emphasis on the use of knowledge rather than on knowledge by itself is significant. Competition implies more information sources, fast changing technologies, new managerial practices, higher competences and shorter life cycles, which lead to an increased importance of the organizational change (Tseng, 2009). The culture of academic institutions should be driven by changes in the external environment (Grant, Hackney and Edgar, 2010), as methods of teaching should adapt easily to the dynamics observed every day in the work market. It is clear that alternative methods of teaching should be developed, as they are more relevant for students' future work than traditional lecture, seminar and computer laboratory formula.

Social-constructive theories (Woolfolk, 2001) consider social interaction an integrative part of the learning process. It is important to work in teams, as in this way the learning experience attains higher levels and active learning is promoted (van Offenbeek, 2001).

Good knowledge and capabilities are compulsory in order to achieve success (Rașcă and Deaconu, 2012). While capabilities are clearly better developed by action learning, action learning is also better for acquiring knowledge (Radu, 2012). Although many ideas are very well understood by simply reading a text or seeing a documentary, every process is really „felt” only when „doing things”. Students need to meet both the perspective of traditional learning and action learning, when, participating in games, after the debriefing process they would normally keep in mind for quite a long period a series of conclusions that were the aim at the class.

It is hard to define creativity. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, being creative refers to „having or showing an ability to make new things or think of new ideas”. Therefore, we consider that creativity has become one major objective of the business education process (and especially in the case of higher education, which should lead both to specialized knowledge and to skills of working in teams (Ramaswamy, Harris and Tschirner, 2001).

The question if we are creative enough is a tough one. We could take into account the system as a whole. In this case, it is even more difficult to answer and unfortunately it tends to lead to a quite pessimistic answer (despite our optimism, as we are sure some changes will be perceived soon in Romania, as small changes have already started to happen). For the moment, we consider that Romanian educational system is more likely mass-oriented, with a trend of liking mass in everything: we do need a higher number of students in order to cut costs (also believing it is easy to do this without having a negative impact on quality), we tend to prefer a very specialized way of dealing with everything in order to simplify, we tend to have a preference towards performing the very same task over and over again, of course, because of the same reason of simplifying, and there is a general easiness for teachers to choose lectures with less interaction.

However, we do have teachers that are more student-oriented. Students do appreciate them, and, as a result, some of these teachers received recognition or even prizes (for instance, there is a yearly event, Teacher Bologna, in which Romanian teachers receive recognition from their students, by being names as „inspiring teachers”. These teachers appreciate creativity more, are closer to their students and are facilitators rather than transmitters of information. They accept the fact they can learn from students as much as students can learn from them (mutual benefits in the educational process). They value interaction and diversity and try to build on them. Teachers who received these prizes said

that they were more happy with this than with graduating the PhD. studies, as this way they really saw the usefulness of their activities.

2. Case Study – General Perceptions of Career Development in Romania

Our research is mainly qualitative, by analyzing only answers from students and graduates from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies. We do understand big differences might appear for different university profiles (differences coming from specialization, size, organization, ownership, etc.). It was interesting to see some differences in the approaches of students that have not only the economic specialization, but also an additional one. In order to find their main insights, in 2002 we used a questionnaire for which we obtained 107 valid answers and accounts for 8 students and 2 graduates as a complementary qualitative approach.

Our results show that personal decision is the main factor in influencing career development, that students take into account the option of living abroad in order to invest in their career and that universities do have a major role in influencing career development.

The interest for a career abroad was quite a challenge in our research. We are convinced most of respondents took into account current economic conditions. However, we believe that further explanations come from a wrong interpretation of career. Even if most of the students consider personal decision is the main factor when choosing and developing a career, they also tend to think they could do more in other circumstances, including other countries (which is not necessarily true).

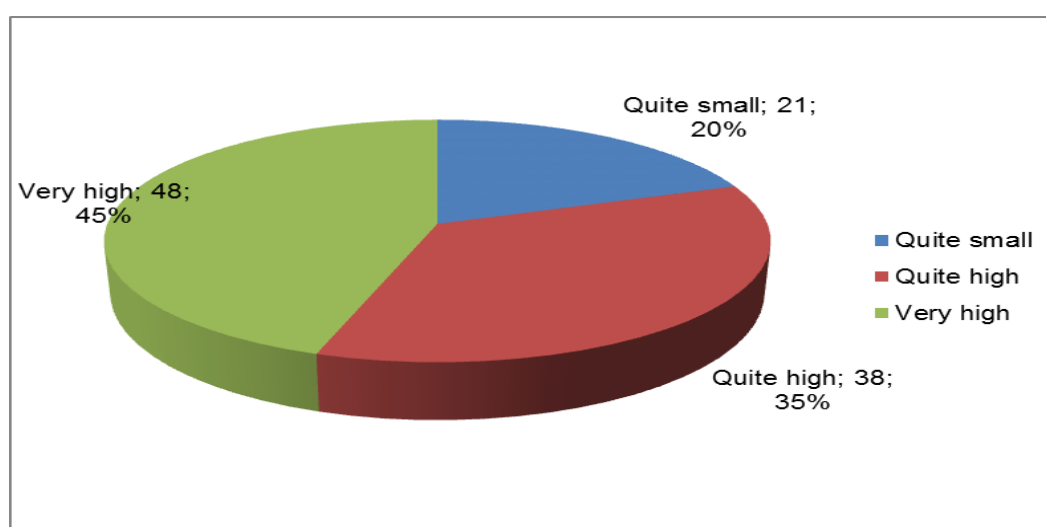


Fig.1-Romanian students' interest in a career abroad

In the following table we have presented the most interesting comments of our respondents, with respect to career perspectives outside Romania. We grouped the comments into two categories, reasons to leave and reasons to stay.

As it can be seen, there are quite many reasons for students (objective and subjective), both for leaving abroad and for staying in Romania. What we consider to be very important when taking into account the prospect of leaving is the fact that many of them have also in mind the prospect of coming back. They perceive their leaving as a justified sacrifice in order to obtain an immediate financial advantage or long-term better prospects as an advantage coming from their experience abroad.

Table 1-Romanian students' perceptions on career prospects abroad

Reasons to leave	Reasons to stay
<p><i>"I would leave for gaining experience, for interacting with people from different cultures and maybe just for seeing if I can manage alone in a foreign environment. It is like a test... and I am sure this way I will increase my self-confidence. Moreover, foreign opportunities are tempting and I think they also appear in a bigger number than in Romania."</i></p> <p><i>"A career abroad is tempting, because there work is respected and people do not guide themselves after the principle "it is alright anyway!"</i></p> <p><i>"I really take into account the option of leaving Romania, because outside wages are higher and is a wider diversity of career opportunities; people are well-rewarded for what they are doing; I am also studying journalism and I think in this field, as well as in others, such as theatre, for instance, the chances to succeed are higher."</i></p> <p><i>"My reasons to leave Romania are both personal and objective. Many domains are professionally treated and there are more opportunities than in Romania. Financial results would not necessarily be better, but work processes and attitude towards work are different. Another reason to leave comes from art: there are so many exhibitions there, music is also considered in another way there."</i></p> <p><i>"Firstly I would leave abroad for studying, because in Romania the field I would like to practice in future is not approached with the same complexity. Communication in Romania is not yet a very developed field and during faculty we don't have real practical stages, therefore it is very difficult to find a good job, with only theoretical knowledge. Secondly, I would prefer to work abroad because this way I would learn directly from professionals and I would develop a lot faster. Here, beside the fact that students employed do not have enough credibility, wages are low, and the working environment does not motivate you to work."</i></p>	<p><i>"I wouldn't leave, since my family and my friends are here. And maybe I wouldn't even integrate there. There is a risk I do not want to take, especially because I know I can succeed also in my own country."</i></p> <p><i>"I would like to be one of those that make a change in the Romanian mentality and I feel I can do this only from Romania. I don't think it would be a good idea to leave."</i></p> <p><i>"Even if an abroad experience might be interesting, I see many reasons to stay: for sure, the first one refers to the difficulties to integrate in another culture; then, I am thinking about the risk of ethnic discrimination, especially in the context of the current scandals with Romanian and Bulgarian emigrants; in Romania it is still possible to earn more in some fields; family support and friends near you cannot be omitted in such an analysis, as they mean a lot; I would also add our real implication as higher-educated people in building a new, more stable and more performing society; who is not interested into that?"</i></p> <p><i>"The support of my family and my friends is the main obstacle for my leaving, and the familiarity of Romanian society cannot be ignored. And for me the idea of failing on a foreign land scares me quite a lot."</i></p> <p><i>"What keeps me in Romania? Of course, friends and family. I prefer to stay here and to be close to them than to strive to adapt in a foreign country."</i></p>

Actually, if we look at the foreign students coming to study in Romania, the situation is more or less the same. In Romania we have a lot of foreign students coming especially from Tunisia, Bermudes, Guinea, Nepal, Oman, Zambia, but also from more developed countries such as UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Turkey, Italy and Greece.

Our questionnaire also explored the views regarding entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial spirit asks for accepting risks and uncertainty and a permanent search for innovation (Popescu and Drăghici, 2012), which is not a “natural” approach for all the people. In Romania entrepreneurship is more likely seen as a solution for the career path than in other countries, as for example in Portugal (we have studied the differences between these two countries). It is normal to have quite a big appeal of entrepreneurship for Romanians, at least because of two reasons. First, even if it is a riskier career path, it is more attractive in a country with lower economic conditions, especially as a result of many projects financed by the European Funds. Second, it appears that Romanians tend to be quite entrepreneurial as a general trait.

There are also quite many MBA programs in Romania, only some of them having an entrepreneurial perspective. The current economic crisis led to a substantial decrease in the demand of this type of programs.

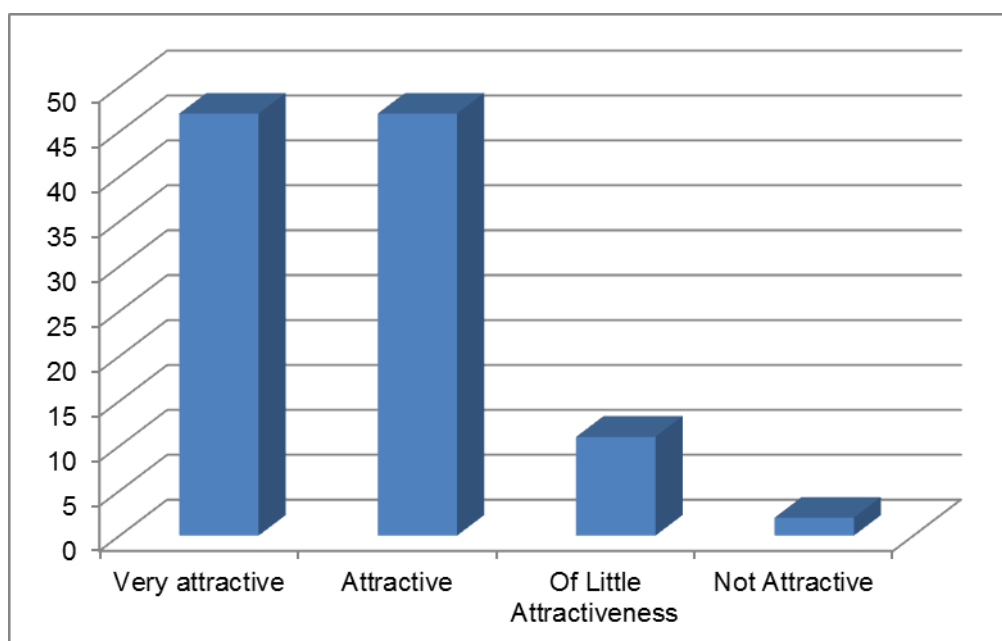


Fig. 2-Entrepreneurship as a solution for the career path

3. Conclusions and Implications

Career is not a clear concept for Romanian students, as for them it seems to be difficult to find a good indicator for measuring success – for some of them the only one indicated was salary, which proves quite a low level on intrinsic motivation.

We do believe creativity should be encouraged more in our educational system, for a better fit between supply and demand on the work market. Teachers should use more teamwork than they presently do and / or use it differently, without giving up to individual work.

The interest for a career abroad seems to be high, even if we encountered quite a big number of good reasons to stay. Reasons to leave refer especially to higher financial perspectives, while reasons to stay are related especially to family, friends and culture. Most of students interested in leaving do want to come back.

Most of Romanian students and graduates seem to be interested in an entrepreneurial career, which can be partly explained by our culture, and partly by potential funds to be accessed.

Of course, further research should find factors that explain future performances of students in their professional life, in order to lead to a series of recommendations for increasing these results.

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