Strategy Execution: An Empirical Analysis of Obstacles Faced by Master of Business Administration Executive Students

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Abstract: Problem statement: This study examines obstacles faced by MBA executive students, regarding five dimensions of obstacle management. The purpose of the research is to assess the relative importance of these dimensions and to establish empirical linkages among obstacles and factors such as overall perception of the organization in terms of obstacle management, span of control of the best management practices, age and success, in order to better understand the influence of those obstacles in light of organizational strategy execution. **Approach:** A survey questionnaire was administered to 512 managers to study the five pre-defined dimensions regarding obstacles in strategy execution faced by MBA executive students. We used Principal Component Analysis and then ANOVA analysis to examine the empirical linkages between the dimensions of strategy execution identified in previous research and socio-demographic variables such as age, span of control, success, tenure and experience. **Results:** We found that the dimensions that came first in order of importance, were the obstacles related to emotions, followed by the immediate action, integrity, initiatives and finally the obstacles related to rules. This study also found a linkage between the Emotions dimension (getting a commitment for your objectives) and the variable $Eval_1$ (How would you score your organization in terms of managing the five obstacle dimensions?) and $Eval_2$ (What would be the score of your organization if the management of the 25 (Obstacles) practices had been mastered?) Moreover, our results reveal a connection between the immediate action dimension and $Eval_2$. The integrity dimension highlighted the linkage with the $Eval_1$. We showed the tie-ins between the initiatives dimension and the $Eval_2$. The rules dimension reveals three linkages with the socio-demographic variables such as age, $Eval_1$ and $Eval_3$ (I believe that my success in work-related activities is often a matter of luck). We also found that the younger the MBA executive students were, the more their perception of obstacles related to the rules dimension was important. This research found many connections between the five dimensions regarding obstacles in organizational strategy execution. The set of obstacles faced by MBA executive students did not register the same impact according to strategy execution. However, additional work is necessary in order to generalize our findings. **Conclusion:** This study proves a contribution by identifying a set of specific obstacles for each facet of strategy execution faced by MBA executive students in the execution of their organizational objectives.

Key words: MBA, executive education, strategic management, strategy execution, Revised Decision-Square Model (RDSM), managerial obstacles, rules dimension, key factor, executive students, strategy execution

INTRODUCTION

The challenges of setting up a modern and effective management in the business world today require the need for executive managers to make good decisions in a minimum amount of time, without extensive mutual consultation. Thus, as the world continues to evolve in this era of contemporary management, more managers are seriously and swiftly taking charge of acquiring the relevant skills and knowledge necessary in their professions. Most of these managers are attending their studies, while working simultaneously.

Research problem: MBA executive students will continue to be a key part of the future of a managerial team of a company and their competency is highly coveted for a company to succeed its strategy implementation. The performance and career orientation of future managers do not only depend on the external and internal career anchors, which induce

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career satisfaction (Jiang *et al.*, 2001), but also on career commitment, induced by proper mentoring and training (Colarelli and Bishop, 1990). It was noticed by Heisler and Gemill (1978), that the commitment and the motivational aspect of executives are very similar to the perceptions of MBA executive students. Schein *et al.* (1989), in a related context, have clearly mentioned that MBA students have roughly similar perceptions concerning the required managerial skills and abilities as middle level managers in organizations. As stated by the authors: "The most notable outcome of the study is the similarity in the pattern of attitudes between management students and managers in today's corporations" (Schein *et al.*, 1989). So, it can be said that MBA executive students' perceptions of organizational factors are relevant and worth studying.

While discussing the perceptions of MBA students of managerial challenges, Reinsch and Shelby (1996) identified a lack of communication skills, self-confidence and persuasiveness as the most important challenges faced by MBA graduates in strategy execution in their job life. As added by Roberts *et al.* (1998), even in the age of globalization, managers found it challenging to manage the global workforce as communication and understanding are significant obstacles to policy implementation. Pinard and Allio (2005) also suggested that creativity training in MBA curricula can help future managers to adapt to the changing business environment. Given the above literature, a study of the perceptions of MBA students regarding the future obstacles of their job life in strategy implementation highly needs to be studied.

With regards to this context, different dimensions were considered by these managers in dealing with their jobs. Some of these dimensions include rules, emotions, initiatives, immediate action and integrity (Kolb, 1984; Sabourin, 2009). Strategic management means that for them to realize immediate tangible results, they have to be equipped with modern execution strategies and skills (Mintzberg, 1994). While it remains true that companies exist primarily to create shareholder value, today's best business leaders see their companies as part of an 'enterprise' -a rich, growing and continually evolving network of mutually-beneficial relationships (Drucker, 2007). They value the role that their organizations can and should play in enriching those enterprises and as a result, they consistently gain positive results for their companies (Mintzberg, 1994).

Research objectives: The objective of this research was to analyze the obstacles faced by MBA executive student managers in the execution of their objectives.

The two specific objectives of this research were the following:

- Assess the relative importance of categories of obstacles faced by MBA executive students in research on managerial obstacles
- Assess linkages among categories of obstacles faced by MBA executive students with factors such as the overall score of the organization, the degree of control over the best management practices, success and age

Literature review: A review of the literature on management and on the model Kolb (1984) and subsequent empirical work Sabourin and Ayande (2011a) has led us to support the existence of five dimensions adapted to strategy execution. We labelled these dimensions as follows: the dimensions of rules, emotions, initiatives, immediate action and integrity. In the following lines, we review the literature according to these five dimensions.

In searching for the key elements to better understand management execution practices and strategies, Bruns and Bruns (2007) studied factors influencing the human resource management performance of first-tier managers and the vital importance that a holistic strategic framework can have in this regard. Others investigated the role of management support in the execution of organizational goals and objectives (Elbanna and Younies, 2008). Therefore, the following systematic order to review the literature based on these five dimensions was adopted.

Rules dimension: One of the categories of the obstacles faced by MBA executive students in their job context has to do with the lack of conceptual skills, such as planning and analytical skills. In this regard, several studies have identified obstacles that are fairly specific to management and even more specific to MBA executive students.

Rules are strategies that are related to set facts, which seek to explain and analyze organizational situations, thereby setting up a more coherent and rational system that is stable (Sabourin, 2009; Sabourin and Ayande, 2011a). These are a set of procedures that are designed to act as guiding pillars which are necessary to enable a manager to remain on course in achieving their predetermined objectives and goals (Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Viola and Vrangbaek, 2008; Shetach, 2010; Puvanasvaran *et al.*, 2008; Cheong *et al.*, 2008). The rules dimension recommends that in

order for actual results to be realized, rules have to be incorporated during the implementation of rational rules of functioning (Kolb, 1984). According to Cole *et al.* (2006) and Mintzberg (1994), the strategy involving the dimension of rules contributes to an effective and efficient "programming" of the results which have to be reached or achieved in the long run.

Rules establish the economic planning of organizational goals and objectives and clarify them for an easy understanding and interpretation, thus rendering them more expansive and detailed (Elbanna and Younies, 2008; Bruns and Bruns, 2007). As a means of economic planning of their objectives, clear and open rules of functioning can be set and spelt out to act as guiding pillars for task management (Mankins and Steele, 2005; Speculand, 2009). This strategy allows executive managers to organize a hierarchy of the objectives of the organization to be distributed between its top management and its distinct departmental units (Mintzberg, 1994).

This dimension of rules allows for the proper setting up of decomposed objectives and their communication to all sectors of the organization (Elbanna and Younies, 2008). This often leads to the establishment of a business model resulting from an analysis and from a rational reflection (Sabourin, 2009). According to Kaplan and Norton (2009), rules are the basis for building the organization's success which the modern manager, undertaking their study, is expected to develop into competent strategies to be used in ensuring their implementation, so that the organization does not deviate from its predetermined objectives and goals.

According to Kolb (1984) this strategy has to do with abstract conceptualization and leads to the forming of concepts and formulation of generalizations, which integrate the observations and the reflections. The concepts are to be clear and simple so that most managers, when bestowed with responsibilities, can understand them and quickly make informed decisions and choices, which can lead to the actualization of the objectives (Cole *et al.*, 2006; Elbanna and Younies, 2008).

Emotions dimension: The dimension of emotions is concerned with the commitment and the developing of convictions of employees in the context of organizational transformation (Sabourin and Ayande, 2011a). Kolb (1984) labelled this reflexive observation. This strategy transformation can bring about a commitment by defining the problems, classifying them, reconciling the conflicting and divergent points of view and establishing consensus (Drucker, 2007). In the context of this strategy, the divergent and conflicting points of view are approved and finally accepted. Several authors have underscored the role played by management practices in relation to emotions as being relevant to strategy execution (Allen and Carifio, 2007; Hassan *et al.*, 2009; Farzad *et al.*, 2008). According to Vrakkling (1995), there should be an emphasis on management practices and on activities falling within the purview of the dimension of emotions. Argued that resistance to change represents a key factor in strategy execution and it should also take into account resistance from managers. This resistance can consist of: resistance as a response to the attack on the interests and power position of the manager. A key aspect of execution is the specific support of line managers who must support the change. It was argued that there should be sufficient leading officials in key positions who completely endorse and extend their co-operation to the changed project.

Regarding the research on the implementation process, discerned several forces. Often the most important one is the force aimed at co-ordination, which can be traced back to two causes: the idea that implementation must necessarily take place on the job floor and the idea that many different aspects (components) have to be further developed and co-ordinated, especially during implementation. Vrakkling (1995) described in detail the processes related to the resistance to implementation. He showed that this group, instead of resisting openly, can also manifest itself by taking advantage of every opportunity and every concrete step to be made to have the implementation postponed, in particular, by creating procedural delays.

The research also found support for improved communication in the organization attributable to the lean implementation (Worley and Doolen, 2006). Grey *et al.* (2004) inferred that the psychosocial dimension of learning is a process that spreads across multiple levels and units of analysis. The analysis of the relationship between individual and organizational learning highlights the multiple and interlocking contexts that define the content and learning process in organizations, the politics of learning at work and the institutional identity of individuals' learning as a reflection of organizational learning (or lack of it). Drucker (2007) examined the relationship between quality of leadership and attitudes and presented evidence of: the validity of a new leadership instrument; the differential relationship between leadership qualities as well as staff attitudes toward work and their sense of well-being at work; and a predictive relationship between leadership quality and

organizational performance. Grey *et al.* (2004) explored the linkage between nurses' levels of optimism and performance outcomes.

Argued that even well prepared and sound plans die if the implementers fail to confront difficult organizational and political obstacles that stand in the way of effective implementation. A specific factor that represents obstacles for MBA students and managers has to do with the lack of trust. It was found by the authors that one of the most common culture-related problems in companies is a lack of trust, which usually results in poor or inadequate information and knowledge sharing between individuals and/or business units responsible for strategy implementation. According to, this problem was, for example, ranked as one of the largest obstacles to strategy execution by American managers. This second dimension of emotions has to do with the commitment and the developing of convictions of employees in the context of a service transformation (Sabourin, 2009). This is what Kolb (1984) labelled reflexive observation. This strategy transformation can bring about commitment by clarifying the problems, reconciling the divergent points of view and establishing consensus. In the context of this strategy, the divergent and conflicting points of view are comfortably accepted.

Initiatives dimension: The dimension of initiatives relies on the active experimentation of initiatives, the realization of projects and the continuous improvement of existing activities (Sabourin and Ayande, 2011a). According to Kolb (1984), this is the process of active experimentation. Various authors demonstrated the significance of the learning function in the organization based on innovation and projects as the way to execute organizational objectives (Buijs, 1987; Senge, 1994; Vrakkling, 1995; Rose *et al.*, 2006; Minetaki and Takemura, 2010).

Many practitioners and academics now endorse the view that strategy execution is based on decentralized initiatives and small-scale improvements and individual innovations that help to attain organizational success (De Ven, 1986; Amabile, 1998; Chen *et al.*, 2011). De Jong and Hertzog (2007) showed how an inventory of leader behaviours likely to enhance managers' innovative behaviour and that initiatives and projects of managers are a factor in the execution of objectives. The manager's function is more explicit and takes on a more general responsibility in the department and the professions. Some authors examined the role of decentralization and initiatives as management and

organizational practices in the execution of objectives (Byrkjeflot and Neby, 2008).

MBA executive students have to face obstacles in this dimension as both their superiors and subordinates might be less than willing and less motivated towards initiatives. This is what Kolb (1984) called the process of active experimentation. In this context, the hypotheses then generated in new situations are verified by making projects. Results are obtained by an active experimentation of new methods. This strategy involves creativity and ideas supporting initiatives and their implementation. With such a strategy, decisions are made after feedback is obtained about the project. Gregory *et al.* (2009) mentioned one of the important aspects related to organizational changes is the change of the recipient's active participation in the overall change effort.

Immediate action dimension: The dimension of immediate action is carried out through swift action and allows for an immediate implementation to obtain results quickly and to adapt effectively based on feedback (Sabourin and Ayande, 2011a). According to Kolb (1984), results are obtained by means of immediate actions. There is an opportunity for fast decision-making without respect to an established plan (Drucker, 2007). Interaction with others is favoured only insofar as an immediate action yields results quickly. This perspective is partially inspired by the theory of the contingency school (Pugh *et al.*, 1968; Mintzberg, 1994) which advances that strategic execution depends on the immediate context. This perspective meets itself, mainly in works intended for the practitioners and often outside the sphere of university research. These works present a voluntarist perspective rather than a determinist one. According to this perspective, the success of the execution rests on the leadership of managers (Blanchard, 1996) and on the capacity to take action in a concrete and immediate way in difficult situations. Covey (1989), with his various books, is a good representative of the perspective. He emphasizes the problems of the urgent matter as a symptomatic element of the lack of control by the administrator in the execution of organizational objectives. For Covey, the immediate action and the implementation of action are the key elements of the execution of a strategy. Mintzberg (1994) in his study of CEOs found, even at this level, that more than half of their activities lasted less than nine minutesperiod (Newstrom, 1986; Tannenbaum and Yukl, 1992) identified short-term work pressures as an obstacle to strategy execution. Botta (1862) studied the prioritization process in order to derive a set of obstacles dealing with too many conflicting priorities in terms of customer needs, capabilities risk, directives,

initiatives, issues and activities. In terms Management engineers are the hostages of short-term immediate action and recurrent short emergencies that impede long-term efforts. Refer to the practice as a unified approach to development versus a piecemeal approach. They argue in favour of a unified approach (rather than regarding development as a separate and isolated process) as a key practice for HRD managers. Their argumentation is also based on the work of Beardwell and Holden (2003), who contend that when managerial development is not linked to business strategy and when activities are unrelated and fail to reinforce each other, they reduce the potential for improving organizational effectiveness. In this regard, Botta (1862) demonstrated the benefit of a prioritization process developed and used at Network systems of BAE Systems. This system has allowed for better immediate actions and facilitated trade-offs, prioritized goals, customer needs, capabilities and technical performance with a better prioritization process. This strategy is pragmatic and acts based on the first results obtained. Gregory *et al*. (2009) mentioned that a relevant topic is the assessment of reactions to organizational change.

Fourthly, MBA executive students in their job context may face obstacles due to the lack of insight or decision-making power on short notice. Thus, the dimension of immediate action is carried out through immediate action and allows immediate implementation on a small-scale level in order to obtain results quickly and adjust on the basis of feedback. A modern Knowledge Management practices highly depend on technology, individuals ('organizational members') intention to be involved in KM process plays a major role in the success (Razi and Karim, 2011). Mentioned that a common cultural problem is the domination of the short-term orientation of a company. In this regard, two independent studies conducted by

Alexander (1985) and Al-Ghamdi (1998) reported that competing with short-term activities distracts attention from strategy implementation in 64 and 83% of companies, respectively. As added by Shetach (2009), team members are "often unaware of their precise roles and the way in which they should synchronize with the roles of other team members. For instance, last-minute alterations are often only partially processed and adapted to roles and/or tasks of the concerned individuals within the team."

There is an opportunity for fast decision-making without respect to an established plan. Interaction with the others is favoured only insofar as it yields results quickly. This strategy is pragmatic and acts based on the first obtained results. Gregory *et al*. (2009)

mentioned that a relevant topic is the assessment of reactions to organizational change.

Integrity dimension: The dimension of integrity deals with discipline and the capacity to achieve objectives within the core values and set principles of the organization. Executing an objective in the context of integrity has to do with the ability to achieve objectives without compromising the values and principles in the functioning of the organization. Several authors put an emphasis on the integrity of values and principles as the way to execute objectives. Mentioned that one of the forces in implementation is the organizational force to redefine its identity. Berggren and Bernstein (2007) identified transparency and wholeness as key values linked to strategy execution and organizational success. Achieving team goals in an organization (Fitzgerald and Davison, 2008; Kloppenburg and Petrick, 1999; Sabourin and Ayande, 2011b) suggests that project leaders have a role in developing team characteristics into a collective set of virtues, including: Ethics, Respect and Trust of others, Honesty, Prudence, Courage, Responsible use and sharing of Power.

In conclusion, the research on MBA executive students and strategy execution has put into perspective the following research questions:

Question 1-Q_1: Are there any obstacle dimensions that are more important than others when MBA executive students are implementing organizational objectives?

Question 2-Q_2: Would there be a tie-in between the MBA executive students' perceptions of their own organizations and the obstacle dimension related to rules?

Question 3-Q_3: Would there be a linkage between the MBA executive students' perceptions of their own organizations and the obstacle dimension related to emotions?

Question 4-Q_4: Would there be a link between the MBA executive students' perceptions of their own organizations and the obstacle dimension related to initiatives?

Question 5-Q_5: Would there be a connection between the MBA executive students' perceptions of their own organizations and the obstacle dimension related to immediate actions?

Question 6-Q_6: Would there be a bond between the MBA executive students' perceptions

of their own organizations and the obstacle dimension related to integrity?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is a part of a broader research on managerial strategy execution and was conducted in four major steps:

Step 1: Empirical validation of the dimensions of our conceptual framework:

- Data were collected by managers through structured training in countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Three regions of the world, namely, Europe, North America and Australia, were selected. A group of 512 MBA executive students completed the questionnaire
- The measuring instrument of Kolb (1984), which is the 'Learning Style Inventory', was used since the initial variables were related to the modes of learning. We validated the questions during an executive seminar with three managers of the organization
- To make sure that each of the questions was properly understood, the validation was preceded by a pre-test conducted on 15 referees of the Belgian Management Training Association. All questions were suitably understood and adjustments were made to clarify their understanding by the respondents
- Descriptive analyses were completed to identify certain characteristics of the sample. Frequency analysis and the test of Cronbach Alpha were completed. The results of R-square (degree of explained variance by the model) and factorial analyses were used to verify the hypotheses. As shown in Table 1, reference is made to the Cronbach Alpha-an indicator of reliability with the scale of measure between 0 (not reliable) and 1 (reliable)
- Four of the five dimensions of our conceptual framework had been validated in previous research. The first four dimensions had a positive Cronbach Alpha and the fifth dimension was added afterwards following focus group feedback. Table 1 below presents the concept definition and the variance and reliability obtained in previous work (Sabourin and Ayande, 2011b)

Step 2: Focus groups to identify managerial obstacles: Twelve (12) focus groups were conducted with an average of 15 managers per group to identify obstacles faced by managers. The obstacles identified were used as input to elaborate the measurement instrument related to obstacles.

Step 3: Development of a measurement instrument: We further developed an instrument tool to measure the role of the 25 obstacles that were identified by the focus groups. The questionnaire was administered and the questions were sequentially adjusted with five groups of approximately 25 managers per group. For each of the 25 variables (Table 2), the indications of intensity were measured by using a five-point Likert-type scale. All the constructs were measured by using multi-item scales anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree).

Evaluation questions:

Evaluation 1: How would you score your organization in terms of managing the five obstacle dimensions? ($Eval_1$)

Evaluation 2: What would be the score of your organization if the management of the 25 (Obstacles) practices had been mastered? ($Eval_2$)

Evaluation 3: I believe that my success in work-related activities is often a matter of luck ($Eval_3$)

Table 1: Concept and definition

Concept definition	Variance and reliability
Rules (abstract conceptualization): theoretical conceptualization by means of rules, postulates and models to systematize information	Variance explained: 53.5% Alpha of Cronbach: 0.799.
Emotions (reflexive observation): problem recognition and capacity to develop convictions and to get a commitment	Variance explained: 60% Alpha of Cronbach: 0.831.
Initiatives (active experimentation): select a model to test the possible consequences. Learning by trying, finding new ways to put new ideas into practice. Support initiative to responsibilize employees.	Variance explained: 53% Alpha of Cronbach: 0.8
Immediate action: action oriented that is immediate and concrete. Oriented towards direct contacts and apprehension rather than comprehension. Quick adjustments resulting from feedback.	Variance explained: 52.6% Alpha of Cronbach: 0.740
Integrity: ability to meet organizational objectives respecting the integrity of its/the/ mission. Active and deliberate construction of the organization's values into the structure of the organization's everyday actions.	Not applicable

Table 2: Description of measurement questions in the dimensions

Obstacles	Dimensions and variables	Measurement-questions
	Rules Dimension	
Obs_1	V1- Lack of clarity in expected results	The actual results I am expected to achieve with my manager and my organization are not clear.
Obs_2	V2- Too much emphasis on financial and compliance rules	We have goals to meet financial expectations and establish rules to be followed, but we have not established goals for better customer service.
Obs_3	V3- Lack of understanding of the results to be achieved by the employees	Even though they were informed, my employees do not clearly understand the results to be achieved.
Obs_4	V4- Lack of clear expectations of other departments	The expectations of other departments are often not clear.
Obs_5	V5- Lack of clarity in the procedure of rewards	I notice that many issues I deal with involve costs that the organization pays little attention to.
	Emotions dimension	
Obs_6	V6- Lack of commitment to established goals from employees ("buy-in")	My employees do not contribute to my goals (do not "buy-in").
Obs_7	V7- Lack of awareness of the importance of objectives by employees	My employees are not fully aware of the importance of my objectives.
Obs_8	V8- Lack of motivation from employees to outdo themselves in achieving goals	My employees are not very motivated to outdo themselves in achieving my goals.
Obs_9	V9- lack of trust among employees	There is a lack of trust among my employees.
Obs_{10}	V10- Lack of clarity among members	There are team members who complain that we are Sometimes not fair.
	Initiatives dimension	
Obs_{11}	V11- Lack of accountability from employees for their actions	My employees are not generally held accountable for their actions.
Obs_{12}	V12- Lack of willingness and capability of employees to take initiatives	My employees are not entirely able and willing to take initiatives.
Obs_{13}	V13- Lack of autonomy from employees	When I am absent, my team members are not able to address problems on their own.
Obs_{14}	V14- Lack of sense of initiative and improvements from employees	Initiatives are not often undertaken because there is a tendency to leave things as they are.
Obs_{15}	V15- Lack of team coherence and common objectives	We represent a group of individuals rather than work as a team with clear, common goals.
	Immediate action dimension	
Obs_{16}	V16- Difficulty planning for and dealing with emergencies	We have difficulty planning for and dealing with emergencies.
Obs_{17}	V17- Too many emergencies and last-minute requests	We handle too many emergencies and last-minute requests.
Obs_{18}	V18- Urgent issues unresolved without finding durable solutions	Urgent issues go unresolved without ever finding durable solutions.
Obs_{19}	V19- Difficulty creating profitable action plans with long-term results	We have difficulty creating profitable action plans with long-term results.
Obs_{20}	V20- Too many meetings and non-productive activities with no concrete action taken	We hold too many meetings and non-productive activities with no concrete action taken.
	Integrity dimension	
Obs_{21}	V21- Lack of shared organizational values	At times, I don't think we all share the same values in my organization.
Obs_{22}	V22- Lack of process compliance	When under pressure, we do not always follow the procedures and work methods.
Obs_{23}	V23- Gap between personal and organizational values	Sometimes, I notice differences between my values and the values of the organization.
Obs_{24}	V24- Lack of focus on building the organization's reputation	Sometimes, in my work, I don't feel I am actively working towards building the organization's reputation.
Obs_{25}	V25- Capacity to achieve objectives within the values and principles of the organization	At work some employees do not seem to have a sense of obligation

Step 4: Sample: We surveyed a sample of 512 MBA executive students who can be described as follows: In terms of age: 4% were less than 29 years old, 66% were between 30 and 49 years old, 28% between 50 and 59 years old and finally the 60 and more years old represented 2% the sample. By tenure: 13% had less than two years, 16% had between 2 and five years experience, 17% had between 5 and 10-year experiences, 30% had between 10 and 20 years of experience and 24% over 20 years of experience.

Data analysis: Table 3 describes the percentage of responses; the median and standard deviation of each variable in the sample we surveyed.

Step 5: Surveys of managers to identify the five dimensions with PCA analysis: Once the instrument was validated, we surveyed 512 managers to better understand the obstacles they face in the execution of their organizational objectives. The objectives empirically assess the existence of five categories of

obstacles. The number of factors was reduced from 25-22 after examination of the empirical findings. Table 5 presents the dimensions and the variables.

To get a perspective of the five dimensions that gather the 25 variables of our conceptual framework, PCA was employed using SPSS analysis tools. The raw scores were standardized to allow for a uniform unbiased distribution of all variables. The correlation matrix was derived and the eigenvalue of these variables from the matrix was used for multivariate principal component extraction and the eigenvalue. The first five significant principal components with a cut-off of >1.0 were selected. More than 63% of total variance was attributed to these five principal components. Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was used to obtain a simple obstacle model. Table 4 shows the rotated component matrix of how each dimension variable loads onto each component. For our study, the factor loading cut-off of >0.5 was used. As seen in Table 4 that gives the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity results on the reliability of the data set, the KMO value of 0.925 is closer to 1.0 and thus statistically very significant. This adds good confidence and weightage to our PCA analysis.

Table 5 summarizes the PCA and reveals in order of importance the weights for each obstacle. We also observed the variance of each dimension and the cumulative variance. The total variance explained by these five components was 63.66%.

We noted that 23 obstacles were selected out of the 25 that had been previously identified. In following the results of the PCA, our study is based on these 22 obstacles in terms of management obstacles.
The total variance explained by these 5 components is 63.66 % (Table 5).

The dimensions, in order of importance, are: the emotions dimension (getting a commitment to the objectives), the immediate action dimension (value added actions and dealing with urgent matters), the integrity dimension (executing within the integrity of values and principles), the initiatives dimension (translating the objectives into projects) and finally the rules dimension (clarifying and aligning the objectives).

Findings: They section present in order of importance the five dimensions of strategy execution previously identified by our PCA and the ANOVA analysis using socio-demographic variables.

Part A. PCA analysis: The MBA executive students and the dimension of strategy execution regarding obstacles: Component$_1$ (Fac$_1$): Obstacles from the Emotions dimension: A higher loading of variables from the dimension of emotions marks the first component$_1$ (Fac$_1$) in terms of importance.

This dimension addresses the reflexive observations such as: problem recognition and capacity to develop convictions and to get a commitment. These variables concern Obs$_6$, Obs$_7$, Obs$_8$ and Obs$_9$ and Obs$_{10}$, (Table 5). This component explains 36.763% of the internal variance and screens an eigenvalue of 9.191 (Table5). The V$_9$: lack of trust among employees, accounts for the highest factor loading with 0.850.

Component$_2$ (Fac$_2$): Obstacles from the immediate action dimension: The second component (component$_2$ or Fac$_2$) in our management/leadership obstacle model is the immediate action dimension and it concerns the Obs$_{16}$, Obs$_{17}$, Obs$_{18}$, Obs$_{19}$ and Obs$_{20}$ (Table 2). These are defined as taking immediate action to respond to urgent matters or to take value added actions. With an eigenvalue of 2.28, the total variance explained by this component$_2$ was 10.3% (Table 5). The V18: Urgent issues unresolved without finding durable solutions accounts for the highest factor loading with 0.831.

Table 3: The Variables observation (V$_1$-V$_{25}$)

Obstacles	Dimensions	(%) Positive responses	Median	Std deviation
Rules				
Obs$_1$	V$_1$	98	4	1.227
Obs$_2$	V$_2$	99	4	1.271
Obs$_3$	V$_3$	99	4	1.022
Obs$_4$	V$_4$	98	3	1.142
Obs$_5$	V$_5$	99	3	1.296
Emotions				
Obs$_6$	V$_6$	98	4	1.061
Obs$_7$	V$_7$	98	4	1.087
Obs$_8$	V$_8$	97	4	1.176
Obs$_9$	V$_9$	98	4	1.155
Obs$_{10}$	V$_{10}$	99	3	1.239
Initiatives				
Obs$_{11}$	V$_{11}$	98	4	1.206
Obs$_{12}$	V$_{12}$	98	3	1.164
Obs$_{13}$	V$_{13}$	98	4	1.207
Obs$_{14}$	V$_{14}$	99	3	1.188
Obs$_{15}$	V$_{15}$	98	4	1.229
Immediate action				
Obs$_{16}$	V$_{16}$	97	3	1.176
Obs$_{17}$	V$_{17}$	97	2	1.286
Obs$_{18}$	V$_{18}$	97	3	1.218
Obs$_{19}$	V$_{19}$	97	3	1.151
Obs$_{20}$	V$_{20}$	97	3	1.265
Integrity				
Obs$_{21}$	V$_{21}$	98	3	1.208
Obs$_{22}$	V$_{22}$	97	3	1.129
Obs$_{23}$	V$_{23}$	97	3	1.217
Obs$_{24}$	V$_{24}$	96	4	1.256
Obs$_{25}$	V$_{25}$	97	3	1.159

Table 4: KMO and bartlett test

Kaiser-meyer-olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.925
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	6788.794
	DF	300.000
	Sig.	0.000

Table 5: Obstacles output summary by PCA Model

Descriptive statistic			Communalities		Components				
Obstacle	Mean	Standard deviation	Initial	Extraction	Emotionns	Immediate action	Integrity	Iinitiatives	rules
Obs_9	3.81	1.137	1.000	0.742	0.850				
Obs_6	3.72	1.060	1.000	0.800	0.844				
Obs_7	3.66	1.088	1.000	0.749	0.818				
Obs_8	3.41	1.174	1.000	0.716	0.704				
Obs_{10}	3.37	1.238	1.000	0.530	0.660				
Obs_{18}	3.00	1.220	1.000	0.765		0.826			
Obs_{17}	2.64	1.280	1.000	0.726		0.810	-		
Obs_{19}	2.98	1.144	1.000	0.635		0.706	-		
Obs_{16}	3.11	1.178	1.000	0.591		0.679			
Obs_{20}	3.10	1.259	1.000	0.432		0.606			
Obs_{23}	3.18	1.214	1.000	0.745		-	0.841		
Obs_{24}	3.52	1.248	1.000	0.648			0.696		
Obs_{21}	2.88	1.211	1.000	0.674			0.685		
Obs_{25}	2.95	1.159	1.000	0.605			0.567		
Obs_{22}	3.20	1.134	1.000	0.507			0.556		
Obs_{12}	3.00	1.167	1.000	0.721				0.780	
Obs_{14}	3.14	1.194	1.000	0.623				0.606	
Obs_{11}	3.46	1.206	1.000	0.685				0.573	
Obs_1	3.43	1.242	1.000	0.629					0.742
Obs_4	3.22	1.154	1.000	0.628					0.704
Obs_2	3.59	1.271	1.000	0.523					0.578
Obs_3	3.49	1.030	1.000	0.572					0.742
Eigenvalues					9.191	2.766	1.571	1.365	1.022
% Var. explained					36.763	11.066	6.286	5.460	4.087
Cumulative % var. explained					36.763	47.828	54.114	59.574	63.661

Component₃ (Fac₃): Obstacle from the integrity dimension: The component$_3$ (Fac$_3$) takes into account the variable related to integrity and concerns: O_{21}, Obs_{22}, Obs_{23} and Obs_{24} and Obs_{25} (Table 2). This third component$_3$ (Fac$_3$) represents the integrity dimension. It clarifies and aligns the objectives which define this dimension. Unlike our conceptual framework, the dimension of integrity seems halfway important with an eigenvalue of 1.571 and accounts for 6.286% of the total variance (Table 5). The V_{23}: The gap between "my values and the values of the organization" has the highest factor loading with 0.841.

Component₄ (Fac₄): Obstacles from the Initiatives dimension: The component$_4$ (Fac$_4$) is the Initiative dimension. It is defined as "translating your objectives into concrete projects". The variance explained by this component$_4$ was 5.46% and the eigenvalue 1.365. The component$_4$ (Fac$_4$) takes into account the variable related to taking initiatives and concerns Obs_{11}, Obs_{12} and Obs_{14} (Table 5). The V_{12}: "Lack of willingness and capability of employees to take initiatives" has the highest factor loading with 0.780.

Component 5: Obstacles from the rules dimension: The component$_5$ (Fac$_5$) of our obstacle model is the rules dimension. This dimension is defined as theoretical conceptualization by means of the organization's rules. The variance explained (Rotation

Sums of Squared Loadings) by this factor was 4.08% with an eigenvalue of 1.022. The component$_5$ (Fac$_5$) takes into account the variable related to Integrity and concerns Obs_1, Obs_2, Obs_3 and Obs_4 (Table 5). The V_1: Lack of clarity in expected results has the highest factor loading at 0.742 (Table 5).

Part B. ANOVA analysis of strategy execution regarding obstacles: MBA executive students and socio-demographic variables: The ANOVA analysis allows comparing the means among the MBA executive students and the variables. In the case study, the five groups of variables are dispatched within the five dimensions. These variables are the $Eval_1$, $Eval_2$, $Eval_3$ and Age.

Emotions dimension: Interestingly, a linkage was found between the MBA executive students regarding the emotions dimension (getting a commitment for your objectives) and the ability of their organizations to deal with these categories of obstacles. The level of perception $Eval_1$ (How would you score your organization in terms of managing this five obstacle dimensions?) shows an F-value = 2.421 and significance of 0.021. This level of significance is greater than 0.05. Therefore, a significant level of differences in terms of their organizations' perception of obstacles was perceived (Table 6).

Table 6: Summary of MBA executive student skills in management obstacles

Components (FAC_)	Means	St. Dev.	F-value	Sig.
FAC_1 (Emotions)				
Eval $_1$	0.311	0.839	2.421	0.021*
Eval $_1$	0.031	0.959	2.132	0.003*
FAC_2 (Immediate Action)				
Eval $_2$	0.085	0.991	2.174	0.038*
FAC_3 (Integrity				
Eval $_1$	-0.170	1.224	2.409	0.022*
FAC_4 (Taking Initiatives)				
Eval $_2$	-0.105	1.016	3.150	0.004**
FAC_5 (Rules)				
Age	-0.054	1.031	3.766	0.015**
Eval $_1$	-0.054	1.031	2.449	0.020*
Eval $_3$	-0.054	1.031	3.168	0.030*

*: Significance level: Sig. < 0.05 or Sig. = 0

These perception differences could be examined at the level of the emotions dimension. In fact, 69% of the respondents qualified that their organization did not master the category of obstacles related to the emotions dimension very well.

We also found that MBA executive students consider that their companies did not very well master the obstacles management related to the 25 practices we identified. In fact, we found a connection between the emotions dimension and the level of perception Eval$_2$ (What would be the score of your organization if the management of the 25 (Obstacles) practices had been mastered?) We found a Sig = 0.003 and an F-Value= 2.132. More than 80% of the students considered the mastering of the 25 obstacles management as beneficial to their companies.

Immediate action dimension: There are some links between the immediate action dimension and the perspective of mastering the 25 practices related to the management of obstacles. These links are emphasized by the Eval$_2$: what would be the score for your organization if the management of the 25 (Obstacles) practices had been mastered? The result provided by the MBA executive students organization, shows a level of significance Sig=0.038; and F-Value= 2.174 (Table 6). In fact, 61% of the MBA executive students considered that their organization would be more efficient if it took into account huge issues such as the capacity to deal with urgent matters.

Integrity dimension: We found ties between an MBA executive student's perception Eval$_1$ (How would you score your organization in terms of managing these five dimensions of obstacles?) and the integrity dimension. These ties are emphasized by Sig= 0.022 and an F-Value= 2.409 (Table 6). 49% of the respondents considered that integrity has to play a key role within the framework of the promotion of the policies'

improvement with regards to their organization's capacity to: have the ability to meet organizational objectives while respecting the integrity of its mission.

Initiatives dimension: We found linkages between Eval$_2$ (What would be the score of your organization if the management of the 25 (Obstacles) practices had been mastered?) and the MBA executive student's level of perceptions related to the initiatives dimension. These linkages are emphasized by the level of Significance: Sig=0.004 and an F-Value= 3.150. However, 80% of the respondents qualified their organization as lacking the organizational skills to put new ideas into practice and to support initiatives regarding the employees' sense of responsibility.

Rules dimension: There is a significant connection between the age of MBA executive students and the rules dimension. These linkages are highlighted by a level of significance Sig=0.015 and an F-Value= 3.766 (Table 6). Paradoxically, 43% of the respondents, i.e., the 19-39 years old and the 60 and over years old, had a negative perception of their organization's rules.

The result reveals a linkage between the MBA executive student's perception of the rules dimension and Eval$_1$ (How would you score your organization in terms of managing these five dimensions of obstacles?) The linkages are highlighted by a Sig=0.020 and F-Value= 2.449 (Table 6). 55% of the MBA executive students consider that their organization's rules are not so efficient in comparison with our concept of 25 practices in management.

We found significant tie-ins between the MBA executive student's perception of success (Eval$_3$) and the rules dimension. This linkage is revealed by the level of significance Sig= 0.030 and an F-Value=3.168 (Table 6). More than 70% of the MBA executive students believe that their success in work-related activities is not a matter of luck, while 25% qualify their success as a matter of luck.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our conceptual model shows that the obstacle dimensions in relation to the implementation of organizational strategies are different in terms of importance. In response to the question Q$_1$, we confirm through our hypothesis H$_1$ that there is, in order of importance, such a difference in importance for each dimension of obstacles in the achievement of organizational goals.

Emotions dimension: Indeed, the study shows that the emotions dimension has a crucial impact when MBA

executive students are achieving their organizational objectives. In response to the question Q_3, we confirm through the hypotheses that:

H_{3a}: There are connections between $Eval_1$ and the emotions dimension
H_{3b}: There are links between $Eval_2$ and the emotions dimension

These results also confirm the studies of many other authors who emphasized the organization's ability to define problems and classify them (Drucker, 2007); to tackle resistances to change and to improve the co-ordination. All these abilities must be seen as one of the key factors, which can impact on an employee's level of perception.

Immediate action dimension: The majority of young MBA executive students are not capable of taking an immediate action in their organization. This could be explained by the pressing need to enrol in vocational training such as an MBA and the urgent need to have greater responsibilities within the organization. However, they also have the ambition to fill in the gap, as they perceive the managerial operations of their organization.

Q_5 confirms our hypothesis H_5: There are tie-ins between $Eval_2$ and the immediate action dimension. This result reveals the importance for an organization to implement efficient rules and procedures in order to grow. As argued by Botta (1862), a prioritization process allows prioritizing the goals, customer needs, capabilities and technical performance. Other authors highlighted the organization's immediate context within the framework of strategy execution (Pugh *et al.*, 1968; Mintzberg, 1994), the organizational leadership (Blanchard, 1996) and the lack of control (Covey, 1989) which can be decisive in the promotion of the organization.

Integrity dimension: The lack of integrity is perceived as a fear that could hamper the development of their organization. Indeed, companies need to be more proactive in defining their mission values and objectives in an ever-changing business environment.

The research question Q_6 confirms our hypothesis H_6: there is a linkage between $Eval_1$ and the integrity dimension. This result is consistent with the studies by Fitzgerald and Davison (2008) and Kloppenburg and Petrick (1999), who argue the need to create within an organization a collective set of virtues such as Ethics, Respect and Trust for others, Honesty, Prudence, Courage, Responsible use and sharing of Power.

Initiatives dimension: Risk-taking is a critical factor in the development of a business and in the cohesion of the working groups. This risk-taking is often very carefully calculated so that the company and its employees are given some leeway to act in the direct interests of the organization.

Q_4 confirms our hypothesis H_4: There is a link between the Eval2 and the integrity dimension. Indeed, translating the organizational objectives into concrete projects means to develop, at the employee level, a cycle of organizational learning process and innovation (Buijs, 1987; Senge, 1994; Vrakkling, 1995; Gregory *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, the organization cannot dissociate itself from its ability to offer managers some latitude for action and indulgence for errors related to changes in its organizational learning policy.

Rules dimension: The rules remain a significant dimension in the implementation of the objectives of an organization. As such, the ability of managers to master the rules of procedure in conjunction with the development needs of the company is sometimes associated with the work experience and entrepreneurial culture, which have been implemented.

Q_2 confirms our hypothesis H_{2a}: There is a linkage between the rules dimension and the age of the MBA executive students.

Q_2 confirms our hypothesis H_{2b}: There is a linkage between the rules dimension and the $Eval_1$.
Q_2 confirms our hypothesis H_{2c}: There is a linkage between the rules dimension and the $Eval_3$.

Compliance with the rules of operation of the business requires a rather unique attention when the implementation and application of clear and tailored standards for the company is lacking; thus, the entire organizational structure of the company wavers. Authors such as Mintzberg (1994); Kaplan and Norton (2006); Viola and Vrangbaek (2008) and Shetach (2010) discussed the importance of these rules as a basis of success for the organization.

Implications for management: In this study, we identified links between the dimensions of each of the five obstacles and the levels of perception among MBA executive students. Other studies may be necessary to know more precisely what causes underlie those linkages. This would also allow us to identify the conditions predetermining the alternatives of a student to opt for such training above any other. This opens onto prospects for the improvement of partnerships between

business schools and companies that are always looking for more qualified staff capable of making decisions based on the interests of the organization.

The MBA executive students provided the framework perceptions of their organizations in terms of management obstacles. It would have been appropriate to collect the perceptions of other members of their organizations, in order to conduct a thorough review of such organizational behaviour. For instance, collect the perceptions of the other members of lower or higher levels of hierarchical organizations. This approach of seeking information on each hierarchical level would indeed take longer to achieve. Nevertheless, it would provide a more precise diagnosis of the organizations concerned. It would, however, draw a parallel between two or more categories of perception based on different hierarchical levels of an organization. And finally, this approach related to the gathering of such information would move even closer to a more impartial judgment in terms of organizational effectiveness.

Limitations and further research: The study does not allow to state or to evaluate the root causes of the linkages observed between the five dimensions of obstacles and the socio-demographic variables. It does not assess the depth of each connection between the different dimensions and variables that were identified. Thus, the development of more refined tools is needed to determine to what those links are due. At this stage, consideration should be given to effectuate more research in order to identify more precisely the direct causal links.

Indeed, the context of a company's evolution is ever-changing and grappling with several other factors, both structural and cyclical, that do not offer, within the framework of this study, a close monitoring of the evolution of organizations involved through a time-interval more or less lengthy.

It would be the same for the MBA executive students. Because the study does not allow ex post, to assess the impacts of their management training and to define the changes in the perception of these executive students after they graduate and join their respective organizations. However, it is generally accepted that the type of MBA training courses often positively change the perceptions of students on business and industry. It would be interesting to evaluate this change in perceptions and the impact on award recipients and on their organizations within the framework of the management of obstacles that are related to the execution of organizational strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the MBA executive students' perceptions of obstacle management within the framework of their respective organizations, by revealing the links between the five obstacle dimensions and the socio-demographic variables such as age, success $Eval_3$, span of control $Eval_1$ and $Eval_2$. We examined the importance of each dimension within the framework of obstacle management. Respectively, the study found, in order of importance, that emotions are one of the huge issues in terms of the perception of obstacles by the MBA executive students. This is followed by immediate action, integrity, initiatives and finally the rules dimensions. This result confirms most of the previous findings regarding MBA executive students in relation to the appropriate skills needed to tackle the practical aspects of strategically running a business (Mintzberg, 1994; Drucker, 2007). As such, vocational training suited to business needs is a prerequisite to allow executive officers to better decrypt the challenges an organization might face in light of the development of its business.

However, the identification of challenges is not in itself sufficient to master the obstacles during the deployment of efficient managerial activities, which will thereafter be beneficial to the company. Additionally, the links observed are not absolutely identical across the five obstacle dimensions and socio-demographic variables. Within the particular framework of the business environment, MBA executive students perceived obstacle management related to their organization differently. These differences justify additional work to replicate these findings and also to test other socio-demographic variables such as performance, tenure, experience and different decisional process influences at any hierarchical level.

Future research might also test multiple matching between course training and company needs for talented employees. It would therefore be interesting to examine within another framework of study, the impact of the MBA training on the companies' recipients.

The present study contributes to this line of research on vocational training and offers insight into the uniqueness of MBA course training and the future executive managers who will be in command of organizational strategy execution. Thus, the focus on MBA executive students is an important part of the needs and concerns of companies and business schools. The nature of this focus on MBA training is characterized by this endeavour that sets it apart from other management training models and finally allows for executive managers to step out of the practical strategy execution norms and provide the most appropriate organizational performance leadership for employees.

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