

**SWP 70/91 SOCIALISATION AND  
EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAMMES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the socialisation processes experienced by MBA students entering business schools. Reports from MBA students at the Otago (New Zealand) and Cranfield (United Kingdom) university business schools are reviewed using the Pascale<sup>1</sup> model of socialisation. The common experience of business school students is then compared with the corporate experiences reported by Pascale. Implications for the socialisation process at business schools and for the teachers of organisational Behaviour are discussed.

## SOCIALISATION AND EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAMMES

For an executive leaving a managerial role and entering a postgraduate business school the culture shock can be great and the process of coming to terms with a business school and its culture difficult.

Business schools seek to manage this socialisation of students to avoid disruption both to the school and the students learning experience. Leavitt<sup>2</sup> urges the expansion of our view of MBA programmes to include the conscious socialisation of students, both in and out of the classroom. He asks business schools to consider whether they should be designing, where feasible, total immersion programs intended to inculcate managerial attitudes and values. Even if schools do not wish to develop a convergent culture in this way; they need to consider how to prevent the inadvertent development of a strong unintended culture.

Some acculturation is inevitable. Coming to business school represents leaving what Leavitt describes as the supportive cocoon of friends, jobs and families to move to a new setting, join unknown peers and confront unknown standards. Being "unfrozen" students will be easily influenced and "refrozen" with new values.

New students enter a buzzing chaos from which they try to extract some understandable and controllable order. They look for prominent clues; listening to faculty, the memories of the recruiters promises and senior students. The more congruent and consistent the cues in the environment, the quicker the culture will be shaped and adopted.

While students are undergoing socialisation processes themselves, they often come across the concept in Organisational Behaviour and Human Resource Management papers. It is included so that students understand the processes to which they will be exposed as they enter new organisations, and be able to make interventions concerning the socialisation of others. There is growing acceptance of the importance of early organisational experiences to future performance. Berlew and Hall<sup>3</sup> in their study of a major public utility report a very strong and consistent relationship between the Company's initial expectation and a managers's subsequent performance.

Many OB teachers try to integrate the process of learning and the content of their learning programmes. For example Kolb, Rubin and McIntyre<sup>4</sup> make this desire to integrate process and content explicit in their "Experiential Approach to Organisational Psychology". It commences with exercises for students to consider their own socialisation within the new class as a way of exploring socialisation.

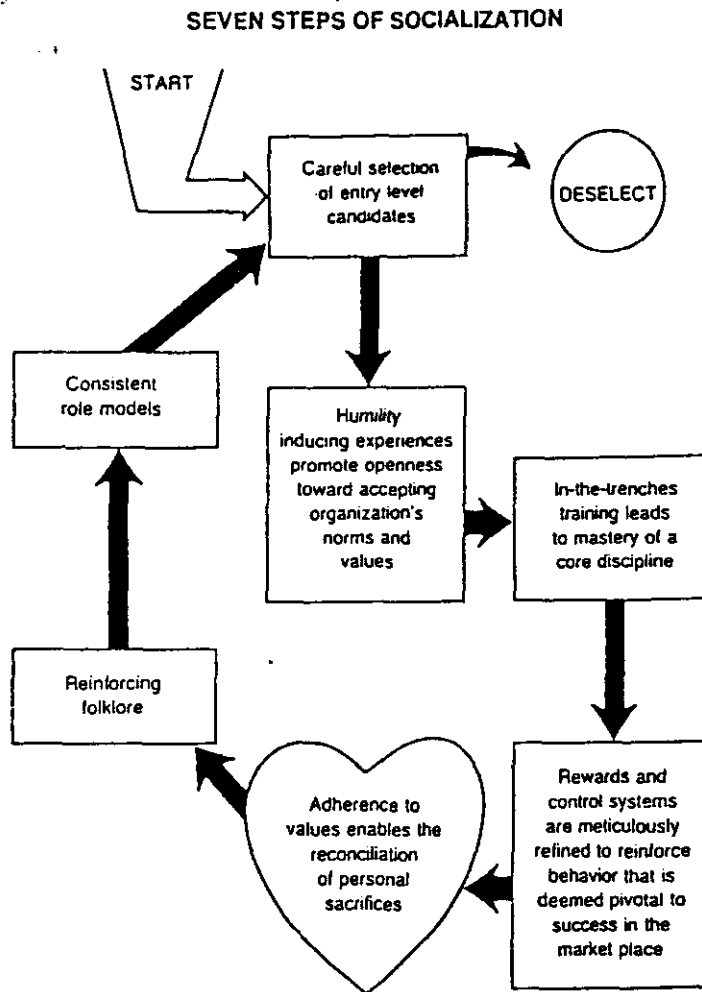
If the socialisation experience of MBA students is similar to the experience of graduates joining organisations at the conclusion of their programmes, then the socialisation experience at business school can be used implicitly or explicitly as part of the learning strategy.

## SOCIALISATION AND THE PASCALE MODEL

Socialisation can be defined as *"the process of being made a member of a group, learning the ropes, and being taught how one must communicate and interact to get things done. It is the process of coming to share the common culture:- the shared values, beliefs and attitudes, that give consistency to the way an organisation is or is experienced."*

Pascale argued that a common pattern can be seen in the experiences of those who join a number of well known US success stories. (including IBM, Bain and Co, Proctor and Gamble and Morgan Guaranty).

He identifies seven steps (Fig 1) in the experiences.



### Step One: Careful selection of entry level candidates

Many organisations state explicitly, or imply by their selection methods, that only very special people will be able to join the organisation. Recruitment literature; batteries of tests and interviews, assessment centres and other procedures leave the successful candidates with the belief that they are special because they have been chosen.

### Step Two: Humility Inducing Experiences

Graduate recruiters have written extensively about the difficulties MBA recruits provide from an organisations point of view. Newly hired MBAs also report difficulty in becoming part of an organisation.

Many newly recruited managers are often dismayed by their early experiences of their new employer. The events seem to deny the very specialness that led to their selection. They report large amounts of work of a low level; unending new experiences and pressure that brings them to the end of their endurance. Often the tasks are seen to be inappropriate due to their low level; or impossible due to their inexperience of the individual. The underlying message according to Pascale is *"You may be smart in some ways but you're in Kindergarten in this company."*

Humility inducing experiences in the first months on the job lead to the self questioning of prior behaviour, beliefs and values. Individual self-comfort and self-complacency are lowered promoting openness towards accepting the organisations norms and values.

### **Step Three: In the Trenches Training.**

Having attracted candidates predisposed to the company culture and then instilled humility and openness to new ideas, the next phase is to engage in long training which brings success in a core area of the firm and ensures acceptance of the firm's way of doing things. Survival is linked to the acceptance of the company way. A shared basis of 'hands on reality' is built for the future.

Pascale cites IBM as an example: All new entrants start at the same level whether or not they have an MBA or no tertiary education. It then takes 6 years to grow a marketing representative and twelve years for a controller. He claims that if all trainees understand that there is only one career path and that it is 'step by step', the politics are reduced. Cutting corners in the short term is counterproductive when the evaluation is very long term.

### **Step Four: Rewards and Controls to Reinforce Key Behaviour**

Meticulous attention is often paid to rewarding behaviour that really counts in terms of the organisations survival and corporate values. Procter and Gamble measure three "*what counts*" factors. They are "*building volume, building profit and planned change*". IBM use climate surveys to track adherence to its "*respecting the decency of the individual*" value and rewards managers on the percentage of performance appraisals carried out with subordinates.

### **Step Five: Careful Adherence to the Values of the Enterprise to reconcile sacrifice**

This step is the key one as individuals come to identify with the values of the organisation in order to reconcile the sacrifices they make as a result of membership of the organisation.

The US corporates discussed by Pascale impose real costs on individuals for their membership and success. There are long hours, missed weekends; bosses one has to endure; criticism that seems unfair; and job assignments and rotations that are inconvenient or undesirable.

### **Step Six: Reinforcing folklore**

Stories and tales about the founders of the business and watershed events, provide legends and interpretations which validate the firms culture and encourage conformity to it.

House of Fraser is a U.K company that at one stage owned Harrods and 300 other stores and shops in Europe. The strong commitment to trading and '*making the bottom*' line by doing deals was reinforced by stories of the founding Chairman (Lord Fraser) buying and selling stores in strange circumstances (including the Monte Carlo casino) A sharp eye for a deal was reinforced by stories about his son as subsequent chairman and as a young man. A whole mythology grew up into a heritage of culturally reinforcing values encouraging cutting corners.

### **Step Seven: Consistent Role Models:**

Pascale believes nothing communicates as powerfully to younger professionals within an organisation than peers and superiors who share common qualities and are seen to be winners. However, behaviour from successful models which is at variance with the espoused values can cause great confusion. It may imply that success does not come from the espoused values.

Sharp deals done by House of Fraser managers were often against all the procedures that the company laid down in terms of ethics and risk. Managers reprimanded for unorthodox behaviour found it hard to take from a top team who were legendary for their own tendency to behave in a similar way.

That the Pascale model has utility in cultures other than the US is clear from experience in the UK and in New Zealand. The work of Hofstede<sup>5</sup> suggested that the three countries share similar national cultures and their enterprises engage in broadly similar activities.

This experience is not confined to US multi nationals. For example, during 1986 and 1987 an enormous growth took place in foreign exchange dealing in New Zealand. Because of time zones and the location of key Asian, European and North American markets, dealing rooms in New Zealand were open at a minimum from 7 am to 7 pm in New Zealand.

Individuals spent 12 or more hours each day in what were effectively large glass boxes. In the late evening, and sometimes in the early hours, they would be expected to check on the opening of overseas markets. During the working day they were unable to leave the workplace for meals. Because the time and energy demands of the job made house work and shopping impossible, some employers provided shoppers and cleaners.

A culture stressing dynamism, money and success grew up. Individuals were very highly rewarded materially. What little time was not consumed by work was spent with others in the same business. Conversation and lifestyle reflected an apparent belief that forex success was the centre of meaningful existence. This belief justified the inability to live a normal social or family life.

From the outside the requirements of the organisation may seem outrageous and undesirable. A strong sense of identification with the mission and values of the enterprise allows individuals to accept the demands.

### **THE STUDY**

The study was concerned with whether the socialisation process at post experience business schools is similar to the corporate experience and so useful in understanding the latter within business schools. It also tested the descriptive utility of the Pascale model. Interest in the Pascale model arose at Otago when during a quasi-legal appeal against exclusion after failing papers, an MBA student previously trained in educational psychology alleged systematic use of the Pascale model by the business school effected his performance - and claimed he was disadvantaged. On the face of it, there was some apparent match between the model and activity of the Business School - although no systematic attention had been given to the issue of socialisation.

The Otago University Business School (New Zealand) and the Cranfield School of Management (U.K) have much in common. They are both clearly separate as post-experience management schools from undergraduate and postgraduate academic study. Both cater for executives in midcareer and require a minimum

of 550 on the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT). Their size is very different. Cranfield is 5 or 6 times as large as Otago.

The students in the sample were all well into their MBA programmes or had recently graduated from them. All were full-time students and previously held executive roles.

The students were asked to read Pascale's commentary on his model and then to rate how true each step of his model was in their own experience of MBA study. On a scale from 1 (Not true) to 5 (Very True) was used. Students were also asked to provide evidence and examples to support their ratings.

The mean, median and modal responses were calculated for the whole sample and for the two sub-sets from the different business schools. T tests were carried out to explore the difference between the means for the two groups. Factor analysis was carried out for the whole sample. Content analysis of the supporting free form statements gave explanation and clarification of the results.

73 results were usable. 37 from Otago and 36 from Cranfield. The Cranfield students are from one cohort entry and the Otago from two.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results for the total sample (73)

**TABLE 1**

Step	TOTAL SURVEY (73)			CRANFIELD (36)			OTAGO TOTAL (37) (36)		
	Mean	Median	Mode	Mean	Median	Mode	Mean	Median	Mode
(1) Selection	3.726	3.34	4	3.72	3.35	4	(1) 3.73	3.32	4
(2) Humility	3.127	3	4	3.40	3.3	4	(2) 2.86	2.5	4
(3) Training .	3.07	2.57	3	3.26	3.04	4	(3) 2.89	2.32	3
(4) Behaviour/ Reinforce	2.6	2	2	2.57	1.95	2	(4) 2.62	2.04	2.3
(5) Values	3.34	3.13	4	3.22	3.06	4	(5) 3.49	3.18	4
(6) Reinforcing Folklores	3.0	3.5	4	2.97	2.42	4	(6) 3.05	2.58	2.4
(7) Role Models (Consistent)	2.357	2.78	2	2.38	1.69	2	(7) 2.33	1.9	3

The overall sample suggests that the experience of MBA students can be described to some extent by the Pascale model. The means for the responses are all in the middle range of the scale. Higher degrees of recognition were found for steps 1, 2, 5 and 6 (Careful Selection, Humility inducing experiences, Identification with values to reconcile sacrifice and Reinforcing folklore) For two steps; 4 (carefully refined control systems and rewards) and 7 (Role models) students report little experience of the phenomena.

For Step 3 (In the trenches training) a value in the middle of the scale was recorded. The modal values suggest that students experience most commonly Steps 1, 2, 5 but Steps 4, 6 and 7 are less often.

If the two subsets from Cranfield and Otago are compared both conform to the overall sample in broad terms. T tests show that the mean scores are not significantly different.

These results suggest that there is an element of common in MBA student experiences which transcends some cultural difference. The MBA culture and set of values may be prevalent throughout the western developed world - although clearly more studies are required to sustain an assertion of that nature.

The results for the Otago Business School were further tested to compare students from the two entries involved. T tests show no significant differences. The two entries were managed by different Directors with different styles. The Otago results suggest that even with changes leadership the model has resilience in describing the experience of students.

Factor analysis (Table 2) suggests that rather than 7 steps or factors or only one unified factor, there may three:- selection: a composite factor of humility inducing experiences and training in the trenches and a factor linking adherence to values to reinforcing folk lore and to consistent role models.

TABLE 2

**ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX:**

	<u>FACTOR 1</u>	<u>FACTOR 2</u>	<u>FACTOR 3</u>
SELECT	.07165	-.01406	.83813
HUMILITY	.06582	.86941	-.21100
TRAINING	.08553	.57046	.30547
BEHAVE	.06252	.56875	.57775
VALUES	.77266	-.07567	.24577
REINFOLK	.75563	.04162	-.16455
ROLEMOD	.64346	.27843	.12518

**SOCIALISATION AT BUSINESS SCHOOLS - THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE.**

Having established that the model does describe the experience of MBA students an attempt was made to identify from the comments of students in support of their scores, the things that business schools do which produce the Pascale type of socialisation experience.

**Step One: Careful Selection.**

Both Business schools make it clear from the start of their contact with potential students that only the most gifted will be admitted to a very special programme.



The Otago prospectus<sup>6</sup> describes the MBA as *"internationally the major qualification in management and business administration studies at the most sophisticated and demanding level"* The students are described in the same publication as *"bringing a wide range of experience to the programme, the majority having considerable management experience. All are highly motivated and have a distinct contribution to make to the Otago experience as well as something to gain"*. Reference to interviews and the GMAT test increase the impression that to be admitted is an achievement in its self.

The Cranfield prospectus<sup>7</sup> echoes the sentiments:-

*" Make no mistake about it, this is not a programme for the faint hearted. The Cranfield year may well turn out to be the hardest twelve months you ever encounter in terms of the sustained level of work demanded....Potential students, normally between 25 and 35, are ambitious people with good university degrees and/or professional qualification and three or more years of full time work experience."*

References to GMAT and interviews and other tests contribute to the expectation that only the best are good enough. Both universities include examples of their graduates and show highflying success as the result of studying. The brochures themselves are lavishly presented by academic standards.

Other documentation used in the application procedures gives a similar impression. For example the Otago application form lays out the criteria for acceptance and leaves large spaces to use to demonstrate previous experience in every functional level. Resultant blank areas are very off putting to unexperienced managers.

The most common references made by students to careful selection at both business schools were to the use of tests, the initial evaluation of student c.v.s and interviews. Of the 55 examples quoted 24 referred to GMAT and other tests and 20 to the interviews. Some dissenting views were present with students believing the decisions were demand led and not regulated by careful selection at all.

In both cases the admission process is time consuming and expensive for individuals. A belief that the process must be a considered one because of the resources given to it may arise. Letters offering places at the schools also reinforce the view that the individuals has been fortunate to qualify and offer congratulations and further warnings about the special demands of the programmes.

### **Step Two: Humility Inducing Experiences promoting openness**

Students at both schools reported three factors which produced insecurity and humility leading to openness:- The orientation week activities; the workload and the group situation. Overcrowding in the work environment was also mentioned in the case of Cranfield. Previously successful executives, in an unfamiliar environment in which a lot is at stake, are overloaded and provided with colleagues and group working as the only survival route. The group processes requires an openness and an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. Both business schools explicitly address the group process during orientation.

Orientation week is a relatively recent phenomenon at Otago. It was introduced due to difficulties with the process issues in the MBA, leading to dysfunctional relationships between students and between students and staff. Elkin<sup>8</sup> describes its design to pass on the MBA culture and values and the effect it had upon the relationships at the school. In addition to producing humility, it contains elements of in the trenches training

to be a successful MBA student:- Stress Management, Relaxation Training, Use of Time, Study Skills and feedback.

**Step Three: In the Trenches Training leading to the mastery of a core discipline**

This step was identified far less clearly by students. As both courses were producing generalists the issue of a core discipline does not arise unless that discipline is not academic but the learning and working well in a group under pressure to produce high volume and high quality outputs. Study and learning skills and group dynamics figure explicitly in the programmes but mastery of the student skills seems to have gone unnoticed.

**Step Four: Reward and Control Systems are meticulously refined to reinforce behaviour that is deemed pivotal to success in the marketplace.**

Very little was said by students in support of the existence of this activity. Only to the examination system was mentioned. The mean score for the sample of 2.6 suggests that this aspect of socialisation is largely ignored.

**Step Five: Adherence to values enables the reconciliation of personal sacrifices.**

The high score given to this step in the experience of students, and the remarks made by respondents suggests that even where values are not initially shared, they come to be accepted in order to reconcile the sacrifices made by individuals. Students identified very high workloads, time commitment, commitment to the group learning process on loss of income and family and social life as the costs. These are accepted because of the value both of the process of MBA study and the outcome in terms of knowledge and career prospects. The largest single group responded with reference to future personal benefits.

**Step Six: Reinforcing Folklore.**

A mean of 3 for the whole sample and a modal response of 4 and bimodal 2 and 4 for the two schools suggest that folklore is significant. It is clear from the responses that stories abound and that the folklore concerns previous students the staff and the workload. While most of the stories are positively reinforcing to the culture some are discordant. The stories of poor administration counteract the positive features. The message of not practising what is taught is particularly destructive.

Both business schools seem to be making a conscious effort to pass tradition and folklore from year to year and entry to entry. At Otago the entries overlap and joint sessions are arranged and open sessions without staff take place with titles such as *"What its really like"*.

Both schools have conspicuously successful alumni visiting to give classes and case studies-making the point that it is all worthwhile. High profile staff who appear on TV and the other media reinforce their claim to credibility. Graduates are also involved in the selection of students at the schools and in the case of Otago at distant centres where they carry out initial selection.

### Step Seven: Consistent Role Models

Here the issue of the contrast between the teaching content and the behaviour of the staff is at its most prominent. Both groups of students see little evidence of consistent role models at the business school. More references are made to the place of other students as role models than staff. Indeed the responses to staff varied from insulting at one end of the scale to laudatory at the other end.

Staff may not be socialised themselves into behaviour that would serve as a good role model. Academic reward systems do not repay investment of staff time with students. Publishing and consultancy both reap greater rewards in their own ways, discouraging interest in students and the success of the MBA school as a priority. Many teachers have little overall responsibility for the MBA process.

### DISCUSSION

The results show a patchy recognition of the pascale model by students at business schools. Socialisation seems to be taking place. If we believe that the process is worthwhile then a number of areas could be addressed to make its effect greater. Leavitt suggests we need to take action in a number of areas including : Recruitment and selection of students, student orientation, orientation of new faculty, the use of grades and other rewards and punishments and the inclusion of "professional activities" by which he means skills for success, in the curriculum. The areas match well with the model proposed by Pascale of the process.

On the contrary if there is an moral objection to the socialisation process then elements that are prominent could be reduced in practice.

To make the process more effective the desired outcomes need to be clarified. The behaviour and attitudes required need to be clarified. Having clarified the values required alternatives could be explored using the seven steps of the model. It is likely that the reward and control systems and role models will need to be refined and the folklore developed or its transmission encouraged.

As an OB teaching tool it would be interesting to use the results here and others collected at other business schools to explore the socialisation area within OB programmes. Not only would the students understanding to be helped but we may also come to understand the environment we and they are in.

### Notes

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