

## **GENDER, AGE, AND THE MBA: AN ANALYSIS OF EXTRINSIC AND INTRINSIC CAREER BENEFITS**

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*Against the background of an earlier study, this article presents the findings of a Canadian-based survey of career benefits from the MBA. Results indicate first that gender and age interact to influence perceptions of career outcomes and second that both men and women gain intrinsic benefits from the MBA. However, intrinsic benefits vary by gender: Men in the study were more likely to gain confidence from having a fuller skill set, whereas women were more likely to gain confidence from feelings of self-worth. In addition, men emphasized how they had learned to give up control, whereas women argued that they had gained a voice in the organization. The role of the MBA in career self-management and in the acquisition of key skills is examined, as well as the implications for the design of programs in meeting the varied needs of men and women in different age groups.*

**Keywords:** MBA; gender; career benefits; management education

**Women have moved into the labor market in increasing numbers, and this increase is particularly marked in management. In Canada and the United**

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Kingdom, the two countries at the center of this study, the proportion of women in management has risen steadily. Between 1971 and 1997, figures have risen from 16% to 33% in Canada (*Statistics Canada*, 1997) and from 9% to 28% in the United Kingdom (Labour Force Survey, 1996). In both countries, and in most sectors, men outnumber women at higher management levels. For example, at board and director levels, recent figures suggest that in Canada only 6% are women (Catalyst, 2000a) and in the United Kingdom only 5% are women (Institute of Management, 1996).

One strategy men and women adopt to move into the higher levels of management is to equip themselves with an MBA. This has been noted both in Canada (Burke, 1994) and in the United Kingdom (Goffee & Nicholson, 1994; Simpson & Altman, 2000). Women now account for one third of MBA students in Canada and in the United Kingdom (Association of MBAs, 1997; *Business Week*, 1997), and the figure for the United States, the largest MBA market in the world, is similar (Catalyst, 2000b). The MBA is viewed by many as a worthwhile investment, and the increase in the number of MBA programs in North America and Europe is indicative of the perceived benefits of the qualification (*Business Week*, 1997). However, despite the popularity of the MBA, little is known about the nature of these benefits and how they might vary by gender.

This article addresses the above research gap by considering gender differences in career benefits from the MBA. Against the background of a 1996 U.K. survey of MBA graduates, it draws on data from a follow-up study, conducted in 2000, of 225 MBA graduates from a leading business school in Ontario, Canada. Results from the U.K. survey, based on data from eleven business schools and a total of 221 MBA graduates, indicate benefits from the MBA may vary along gender lines. The data suggest that whereas the men may be more likely to gain extrinsic benefits in terms of pay, status, and marketability, women may be more likely to gain intrinsic benefits such as increased confidence, enhanced credibility, and more effective interpersonal skills (Simpson, 1995, 1996, 2000b). The present study in Canada was established to explore the generalizability of this phenomenon by exploring MBA benefits in a different national and academic context.

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## The MBA in Canada

Although the first MBA programs were introduced in the United States, courses were soon established in Europe and Canada. With 9 of its 26 business schools in the 2001 *Financial Times* listing of the top 100 international MBAs, and with 4 in the top 50, Canada now has a well-established MBA provision. The decline in demand experienced in the early 1990s, as students turned to more prestigious U.S. and European universities, has been largely reversed, helped by the growing reputation of Canadian schools and by new initiatives including strategic alliances with the United States (e.g., the new EMBA provided jointly by Schulich Business School in Canada and Kellogg in the United States). As one of the top business schools in Canada (*Business Week*, 2000), the university from which this sample was drawn has a sound reputation and the potential to give its graduates a strong "MBA advantage." Canada's more proactive and interventionist approach to equality initiatives, as evidenced by an emphasis on affirmative action rather than on equality of opportunity common in the United Kingdom (Gunderson, 1994a, 1994b), may mean this advantage could be more equally shared between men and women than was the case in the United Kingdom. The gender gap in pay, for example, tends to be lower in Canada, where women earn on average 85% of men's weekly pay (*Statistics Canada*, 2002), than in the United Kingdom where the comparable figure is 75% (Labour Force Survey, 2002). In addition, Ontario (the location of the study) has been identified as having possibly the most far-reaching equity-initiative laws in North America (Smeenk, 1993). The background of this study consequently provided an opportunity to assess whether gender differences, similar to those that emerged from the U.K. study, might also exist for graduates from a high-ranking business school (*Business Week*, 2000), as well as from a national culture in which more official policies have been initiated and supported to promote women in management.

### EXTRINSIC AND INTRINSIC CAREER BENEFITS

Management theorists have used the concepts of intrinsic benefits (job satisfaction and fulfillment) and extrinsic benefits (pay and status) to evaluate rewards that managers and other workers expect from employment (e.g., Marshall, 1984; Nicholson & West, 1988; Scase & Goffee, 1989; Young, Worchel, & Woehr, 1998). Young, Worchel, and Woehr (1998) used a five-fold measure of intrinsic rewards, including job characteristics (autonomy, feedback, and skill variety), communication (openness of information), leader satisfaction (relationship with supervisors), job satisfaction (enjoy-

ment of job activities), and intrinsic exchange (levels of appreciation for good job performance). In a broader analysis, Scase and Goffee (1989) examined levels of remuneration, opportunities for promotion, security, and personal status of managers as extrinsic rewards, with intrinsic factors including opportunities for decision making, task discretion, autonomy, and self-fulfillment. Marshall (1984) also includes the quality of working relationships with same status and more junior workers. Adopting the above interpretation, Marshall (1984) and Nicholson and West (1988) suggest gender differences in career rewards (discussed below) with men gaining more extrinsic and women gaining more intrinsic career benefits.

As in the U.K. survey, this study adopts a similar dichotomy in analyzing outcomes from the MBA. Extrinsic benefits are therefore taken to include the more objective career advantages such as progression and pay. Intrinsic benefits are taken to include intrinsic rewards from the job (e.g., job satisfaction), as well as more subjective outcomes relating to self-development (confidence, credibility, and enhanced self-worth) and interpersonal skills (leadership or team-working abilities and communication and listening skills). While such skills may not fit easily into a categorization of career benefits, they were incorporated into intrinsic outcomes on the grounds of their likely contribution to many of the stated components above. For example, leadership and team-working abilities, as well as communication and listening skills, may well enhance the quality of working relationships including relationships with supervisors. In fact, using coefficient alpha on the survey data, strong internal consistency reliability emerged on constructed extrinsic and intrinsic scales ( $\alpha = .92$  and  $\alpha = .76$ , respectively), where the latter included confidence, credibility, job satisfaction, team management, and team-working skills. However, because of lack of fit with the extrinsic-intrinsic dichotomy, "hard" skills (i.e., the specific management skills taught within the course, such as data or financial analysis and information technology [IT] skills) are treated as a separate category.

#### THE BENEFITS OF THE MBA

Research from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom indicates important extrinsic benefits from the MBA. A survey conducted by the Association of MBAs (AMBA) in the United Kingdom in 1996 found that, after qualification, the proportion of participants in senior management nearly doubled and that there was a fourfold increase in those involved in senior roles such as corporate strategy and planning (Association of MBAs, 1997). Data from the United States suggest comparable career improvements in terms of seniority of position and business start-ups (Messmer, 1998), with

95% of male and female MBA graduates from the 12 top business schools in the United States expressing satisfaction with their subsequent career progress (Catalyst, 2000b). Data from Canada paint a similar picture, pointing to a strong MBA advantage. *Business Week* (1997), for example, has indicated that graduates from the top Canadian business schools can expect to recoup their investment within two years through promotions and increased pay. Consequently, many men and women perceive the MBA to be a passport to success in terms of increased salary and enhanced career progress and, as Baruch and Peiperl (2000) suggest, increasingly see the qualification as a prerequisite for many senior management posts.

In terms of gender, much of the work on MBAs and career progress comes from the United States, where results suggest that women do not progress as far or receive the same level of remuneration as men. A recent report by Catalyst (2000b) indicates that men have advanced further than women in both line positions and reporting span and that although men and women are equally likely to value the MBA in terms of their careers, men are significantly more likely to be satisfied with their career advancement after completion of their course. Similarly, Cox and Harquil (1991) found that although there was no significant difference between men and women in terms of career satisfaction, women MBAs had significantly fewer management promotions. Moreover, salary growth for women was still significantly smaller than for men, even after controlling for performance, age, experience, starting salary, and career paths—a gap that may well increase over time (Schneer & Reitman, 1990, 1995). Comparable findings on gender disparities in “the MBA effect” emerged from the U.K. study (Simpson, 1995, 1996). Men were more likely to move into senior roles after the MBA, to progress via an internal labor market, and to receive larger salary increases (the salary gap between men and women actually widened after the course). Thus,

*Proposition 1: After completion of the MBA, men gain more than women in terms of extrinsic benefits (number of promotions, increased management status, career change, and higher pay).*

However, although evidence supports the view that, for men at least, the MBA is associated with rapid career advancement, the issue of the nature of other benefits received (e.g., skills, capabilities) remains somewhat sketchy. Kretovics (1999), in a U.S.-based study of the learning outcomes of an MBA program, found that the MBA added value in key areas such as information analysis, sense making, and initiative but not in interpersonal or communication skills. Similarly, Boyatzis and Renio (1989) suggest that attending an MBA program adds value on a number of abilities related to effective mana-

gerial performance but not on interpersonal and leadership abilities. This is despite the increased emphasis on “managerial fitness” (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999; i.e., the maturity, self-awareness, and empathy required to make high-quality decisions) and on communication and leadership skills as critical for success in the workplace. In fact, according to Shipper (1999), the MBA does not provide an advantage in key managerial or leadership skills over those who possess only a bachelor’s or some other master’s degree. Similarly, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) and Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) argue that business education places too much emphasis on the functions of management at the expense of the practice of managing and its associated leadership, interpersonal, and communication skills.

Although the above studies indicate that the MBA may be less effective in the formation of important interpersonal or leadership skills, the issues of how such skills and other benefits might vary by gender are not addressed. Work on conceptualization and career success among male and female managers and professionals indicates that gender is a strong influencing factor: Men are likely to prioritize salary and status, whereas women tend to see career success more as a process of personal development through interesting and challenging work (Burke & McKeen, 1994; Marshall, 1984; Nicholson and West, 1988; Powell & Maniero, 1992, 1993; Russo, Kelly, & Deacon, 1991; Sturges, 1999). This may reflect the presence of career barriers that encourage women to focus on the intrinsic rewards of the task at hand rather than on the uncertainties of pay and status (Marshall, 1984; Nicholson & West, 1988). These differences in career orientation may well influence the nature of perceived career benefits from the MBA—a view supported by results from the U.K. study of MBA graduates. These results indicate that men and women may benefit differently from the MBA along the lines discussed above. Whereas men tend to gain the extrinsic benefits of increased salary and managerial status, women tend to gain the intrinsic benefits of enhanced confidence, credibility, and job satisfaction. During interviews, men and women stressed the credential value of the course by emphasizing enhanced marketability and mobility, whereas women also valued the experience of the MBA in altering their perceptions of themselves, of their organization, and of their work colleagues. Women were more likely to describe the MBA as an eye-opening experience that encouraged self-confidence and self-belief and that gave them greater credibility within the organizational context. A similar finding emerged from Hilgert’s (1998) study of six female graduates from an executive MBA program where the MBA experience was associated with a “new understanding of the world” and a “life-changing” outcome. Within the context of the U.K. study, men were less likely to discuss such changes. Thus,

**Proposition 2:** After completion of the MBA, women gain more than men in terms of intrinsic benefits and skills (confidence, credibility, assertiveness, job satisfaction, and interpersonal and communication skills).

Important connections can be made between these propositions and recent literature on careers. In a survey of such literature, Martin and Butler (2000) found widespread agreement of the rise of "boundaryless" or "protean" careers. These conceptualize a "new deal" whereby people take consensus that the traditional career (where salary, status, and a secure career ladder within a single organization are exchanged for loyalty and commitment) may be giving way to new responsibility for their own career management in a more uncertain environment (Hall & Mirvis, 1996), where career paths go beyond the boundaries of a single organization (Hall, 1996) and where there is an emphasis on portable skills and on meaningful work (Hall & Mirvis, 1996). Such developments in career structures are likely to have important gender implications. As Fondas (1996) and Ensher, Murphy, and Sullivan (2002) suggest, women's experiences and priorities may be more in line with the new career. These experiences, perhaps due to career barriers and/or care-taking responsibilities, involve career interruptions, "outspiralling" moves, and sudden changes in direction that are characteristic of the uncertainties inherent in the new career environment (Burke & McKeen, 1994; Nicholson & West, 1988). According to Fondas, the combination of these experiences with the foregrounding of shared cooperation, empathy, and flexibility, culturally associated with femininity, may make women better suited than are men to boundaryless or protean careers in contemporary organizational contexts where team skills and relationships are emphasized. Accordingly, as Schneer and Reitman (2003) found in a study of MBA graduates, women managers on protean career paths may be more likely than women with more traditional organizational careers to achieve equality with male counterparts, suggesting that protean careers may help facilitate women's progress.

From this new career perspective, the MBA may have a pivotal role for men and women in facilitating career development and as a means of acquiring a range of portable skills that are essential in the new boundaryless career environment. As we have seen, career development for men and women may differ post-MBA, and there may be differences in the range of skills men and women bring to the workplace, including skills acquired from the MBA. This is captured by the two propositions on which this research is based. Given the limited data on skills and benefits from the MBA, particularly in relation to gender differences, it is important to assess the success of the qualification in fulfilling these and other roles.

## Method

Quantitative methods, comprising stage one of the project, were used to establish the personal and work profiles of MBA graduates, career progress of the graduates, and the nature of skills and benefits they received from the MBA process. Data on skills and benefits were also drawn from stage 2 of the project in the form of in-depth interviews. The sample was drawn from a leading business school in Ontario, and nearly all of the graduates (90%) had received their degrees between 1997 and 1999. Six hundred questionnaires were sent to MBA graduates through the alumni association. A total of 225 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 36.8%—within the accepted response rate in management scholarship (Baruch, 1999; Roth & BeVier, 1998). Of these, 63% were male and 37% were female. The sample comprised roughly equal proportions of full-time and part-time or executive students.

The questionnaire covered three key areas. The first section, About You, aimed to gather information on the profile of the MBA graduate in terms of age, qualifications, marital status, children, and the impact of children on careers. The second section, Your Employment and the MBA, sought information concerning career progress (e.g., change in function, role, and pay; number and nature of promotions; career prospects). To reduce the effect of time in the labor market on career progress, a restricted sample, comprising those respondents who gained their MBAs in 1997, 1998, and 1999, was used in career change analysis (i.e., those who received their MBAs prior to 1997 were excluded). The final section, Benefits and Skills from the MBA, explored a range of benefits (e.g., greater marketability, enhanced job prospects, enhanced confidence) and skills (e.g., handling complex data, managing teams, negotiation skills) on 5-point, Likert-type scales.

As the data were predominantly nominal, the chi-square test was used as an appropriate nonparametric statistical technique. The *F* test was used when one of the variables was nominal (e.g., gender) and the other was ordinal (e.g., scales of benefits and skills). To gain a preliminary understanding of the key predictors of MBA outcomes, the chi-square automatic interaction detector (CHAID), as discussed by Kass (1980) and Bigg, De Ville, and Suen (1991), was applied. From this, it became clear that there was an interaction between age and gender for most of the tested outcomes. Consequently, a new variable that broke the respondents into four age/gender groups (females aged younger than 35; males aged younger than 35; females aged 35 and older; males aged 35 and older) was constructed for further analysis of MBA outcomes. The cutoff age of 35 was chosen as the transitional turning point



between career establishment and career ascension, as discussed by Evans (1986) and Altman (1997).

Respondents were asked to provide name and contact details if they were willing to be interviewed. An interview sample (14 women and 11 men) was then drawn up on the basis of accessibility (the location of Ontario) and availability (the researchers were in Canada for only 2 weeks to undertake interviews). Three of the named authors conducted the interviews. To gain an authentic understanding of graduates' perceptions of benefits from the MBA (Silverman, 1993), semistructured interviews were used. Each graduate was interviewed for approximately 1 hour, giving respondents the opportunity to reflect on the outcomes of the MBA. Graduates were asked about their motives for taking the MBA, their career history, and their career progress. In addition, they were asked to reflect on the nature of skills and benefits acquired, the skills and benefits they valued most, and the skills and benefits that had been most useful to them in their postgraduate careers. The latter topics were explored in some depth with the aim of supplementing section 3 of the questionnaire (Benefits and Skills from the MBA). Interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Data were analyzed using content analysis as discussed by Remenyi (1992), Jankowicz (1991), and Holsti (1968). This is defined as "any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1968, p. 608). On this basis, outcomes of the MBA were used as the "criteria of selection" (Bruce & Berg, 2001). These were identified from the analysis of transcripts, and a comprehensive list of skills and benefits was constructed. Twenty-five outcomes were identified in this way, and these were divided into extrinsic and intrinsic benefits as discussed above. A separate category was made to include hard skills (e.g., data analysis, financial skills, IT skills). An initial count was made of respondents who had considered each item to be an outcome of the MBA, and this count was then recorded on a matrix. The matrix, divided by gender, charted the frequency of stated benefits (e.g., increased confidence) and their nature (e.g., confidence through enhanced skills, confidence through self-esteem).

While the frequency of occurrence of concepts was thus taken into consideration, so too were their salience and their relationship to each other. As Ritchie and Spencer (1994) point out, the process of qualitative data analysis is not simply the aggregating of patterns or a reliance on a multiplicity of evidence but also includes the weighing up of the salience and dynamics of issues. According to Bruce and Berg (2001), content analysis can be applied

to “manifest content” (i.e., those elements that are physically present and countable), as well as to “latent content” (i.e., an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data). Accordingly, the researchers interpreted the salience and significance of outcomes, a process referred to as “deciphering” (Heilman, 1976). Such interpretations were made by two of the three researchers involved in the interview process. Data were analyzed separately, and then, corroboration was given to emerging themes by comparing and discussing individual interpretations and by highlighting areas of commonality. Such a technique of independent analysis followed by collaborative scrutiny and discussion was recommended by Heilman (1976) as a means of increasing the reliability of content analysis. Agreement was reached when at least three excerpts were identified from relevant statements that served to document the researchers’ interpretations. This has been offered as a safe rule of thumb for reliability in latent content analysis (Heilman, 1976).

## Results From the Survey Data

### GENERAL PROFILE

Some statistically significant differences emerged in terms of the profile of male and female MBA graduates. Women in the sample tended to be younger ( $\chi^2 = 2.792, p = 0.095$ ) and were less likely to be married ( $\chi^2 = 6.319, p = 0.097$ ) or to have children ( $\chi^2 = 11.626, p = 0.02$ ) than were men. One fifth of women with children and 11% of men with children felt their child-care responsibilities had adversely affected their careers ( $\chi^2 = 9.089, p = 0.059$ ).

The majority of both men and women had a bachelor’s degree as their highest qualification prior to the MBA, with the largest concentrations in business/management (41.3%), followed by science/engineering (34.6%) and arts/humanities (24%). Gender differences in terms of subject of first degree were not significant. Whereas there was an even split in the sample between those who had taken full-time and part-time or executive modes of study, and a fairly even split for men between the two modes, two thirds of women had taken their MBAs on a full-time basis ( $\chi^2 = 11.843, p = 0.001$ ). The full-time mode also attracted younger respondents: 90% of females and 78% of males younger than 35 studied full time, compared with 28% of older women and 10% of older men ( $\chi^2 = 105.345, p = 0.001$ ).

At the time of the survey, 60% of the men and 50% of the women worked in organizations of more than 1,000 employees, and 75% of both men and

TABLE 1  
 Motivations for Taking the MBA by Gender and Age (%).

	Younger Men (under 35)	Younger Women (under 35)	Older Men (35 and over)	Older Women (35 and over)	Total
Improve job opportunities	50.0	28.6	36.9	53.6	41.3
Change career direction	23.4	38.8	16.9	21.4	24.8
Obtain business qualification	12.5	22.4	18.5	17.9	17.5
Intellectual stimulation	14.1	10.2	27.7	7.1	16.5
<i>n</i>	64	49	65	28	206

$\chi^2 = 19.557$

$p = 0.021.$

women were working in the private sector at the time of the survey. The largest concentrations worked in finance (32.8%), consultancy (16.4%), computing (11.4%), and manufacturing (12.4%). Gender differences were not significant. Nearly one half of respondents had been in their present positions for less than one year, and three quarters felt they had remained in their present positions for the time they had anticipated. However, while there were no significant differences by age or by gender in the length of time respondents had remained in their current jobs, younger women were more likely than younger men to feel they had spent too long in their present positions, and older women were more likely than older men (and more likely than any other group) to feel this way ( $\chi^2 = 13.198, p = 0.040$ ).

The most popular reason for taking the MBA was to improve job opportunities (35.8%), followed by the desire for a career change (23.5%), for a business or academic qualification (16.3%), and for intellectual stimulation (15.4%). The least popular choice was the desire to obtain general skills. Very few (2.3%) chose increased salary as a motive for taking the MBA. Age/gender differences were examined for the four most popular choices (improve job opportunities, change career direction, obtain business qualification, and intellectual stimulation). Results are summarized in Table 1. Younger women stand out in wanting a career change (38.8%), whereas younger men and older women were motivated by a desire to improve job opportunities (50% and 53.6%, respectively). Older men were more likely than any other group to be motivated by intellectual stimulation (27.7%).

### CAREER CHANGE AND CAREER PROGRESS

About one half of men and women changed function after the MBA, with higher proportions for younger age groups: two thirds of those younger than 35 changed function, compared with only 43% of those 35 or older ( $\chi^2 = 7.599, p = 0.006$ ). Younger men stand out as the most mobile group: two thirds changed function, compared with 58% of younger and 44% of older women. With only 39% changing function, the least mobile group was older men ( $\chi^2 = 8.286, p = 0.040$ ).

Three quarters of men and women changed roles after the MBA, with the largest move from middle/junior/technical roles into senior management. Gender differences in role before and after the MBA were not significant. Not surprisingly, older respondents were significantly more likely to be in senior roles than were younger respondents. More than one half (58%) of older men and women were in senior roles post-MBA, compared with 33% of younger males and 24% of younger females ( $\chi^2 = 28.487, p = 0.000$ ). Approximately 40% of men and women had achieved one promotion since graduating with their MBAs, and one fifth had achieved two promotions. There were no significant gender, age, or age/gender differences in terms of number of promotions post-MBA.

Looking at the nature of career progress, one fifth had changed career, just less than one third (28%) had progressed within their existing organizations, and one third (28%) had changed organizations to progress. Neither gender nor age was significantly associated with career progress. However, further analysis revealed a significant age/gender effect. Younger men were the most mobile in terms of changing careers (33%), and the least mobile group was older men (7.1%). Younger women stand out in that they were significantly more likely than any other group to have had no change in career since gaining their MBAs (20.8%). None of this latter group had child-care responsibilities. The full report is shown in Table 2.

Some gender and age differences occurred in terms of pay. Before the MBA, age was a critical factor, with older workers receiving higher pay than younger workers ( $\chi^2 = 86.799, p = 0.000$ ). After the MBA, however, age and gender were both significant. Older respondents were more likely than younger respondents to be in the highest pay bracket ( $\chi^2 = 15.291, p = 0.000$ ). Similarly, men were more likely than women to be in the highest pay bracket ( $\chi^2 = 12.532, p = 0.002$ ). Age/gender effects with pay reveals the following.

As Table 3 illustrates, two major sources of disparity emerge. First, younger women are disproportionately represented in the lowest pay category (22.7% of younger women and only 6% of younger men earn less than \$60,000 after the MBA). Second, at the other end of the scale, older women

TABLE 2  
Career Progress of MBA Graduates by Gender and Age (%)

Progress	Younger Men (under 35)	Younger Women (under 35)	Older Men (35 and over)	Older Women (35 and over)	Total
Same function	21.2	25.0	33.9	39.1	28.0
Different function	25.8	18.8	42.9	21.7	28.5
Sideways change	12.1	10.4	5.4	8.7	9.3
Set up own business	4.5	4.2	7.1	8.7	5.7
Change career	33.3	20.8	7.1	17.4	20.7
No change	3.0	20.8	3.6	4.3	7.8
<i>n</i>	66	48	56	23	193

$\chi^2 = 35.881$

$p = 0.002.$

TABLE 3  
Pay After the MBA by Gender and Age (%)

Pay (Canadian dollars)	Younger Men (under 35)	Younger Women (under 35)	Older Men (35 and over)	Older Women (35 and over)
Category 1 (under \$60k)	6.0	22.7	0	4.3
Category 2 (\$60-100k)	58.2	45.5	30.2	60.9
Category 3 (over \$100k)	35.8	31.8	69.8	34.8
<i>n</i>	67	44	53	23

$\chi^2 = 33.577$

$p = 0.000.$

are much less likely than older men to be in the top pay category (34.8% of women and 69.8% of men). In fact, it is older males that stand out in this pay bracket. Interestingly, approximately the same proportion (one third) of younger women and younger men earn more than \$100,000.

Looking at how pay had changed for different groups before and after the MBA, younger men emerged as the most dynamic group. One quarter of younger men and only 16.7% of younger women moved from pay category 1 (less than \$60,000) to pay category 3 (more than \$100,000). At the same time, a larger proportion of younger women (23.8%) remained in pay category 1 after the MBA, compared with only 6% of younger men. Older workers experienced less dynamic pay changes, partly because they were already in higher pay categories. One half of older men (50.9%) and one fifth of older

**TABLE 4**  
**Career Benefits of the MBA (reporting the benefit "to a great extent")**

<i>Main Benefit</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Significant Effect</i>
Greater marketability/mobility	100	45.7	
Enhanced job prospects	82	37.4	
Enhanced salary or status	66	30.1	age, age/gender
Enhanced confidence	56	25.6	age
Enhanced credibility	58	26.4	age/gender
Higher levels of job satisfaction	25	11.4	
Greater interpersonal skills	14	6.4	

women (21.7%) changed from pay category 2 (\$60,000-100,000) to pay category 3 (more than \$100,000) ( $\chi^2 = 126.443, p = 0.000$ )

#### **BENEFITS FROM THE MBA**

In terms of career benefits, the most popular choices were greater marketability, enhanced job prospects, enhanced salary or status, and enhanced credibility and confidence (see Table 4).

There were no significant gender differences. However, some age and age/gender differences emerged with respect to salary or status, confidence, and credibility. Younger men and women were more likely to claim enhanced salary and status as a benefit from the MBA: Of the 14 respondents older than 45, only 1 reported this benefit "to a great extent," compared with 23% of the 35- to 44-year-olds and 38% of the 25- to 34-year-olds ( $\chi^2 = 25.768, p = 0.001$ ). Younger males (younger than 35) were most likely (47%) and older males (35 and older) least likely (16%) to claim this as a benefit ( $\chi^2 = 22.291, p = 0.034$ ). In terms of confidence, older respondents (57% of those older than 45) were more likely than younger respondents (17% of those aged 25-34) to feel they had benefited in this way ( $\chi^2 = 15.283, p = 0.054$ ). Finally, compared with the rest of the sample, younger males (younger than 35) were less likely to claim enhanced credibility from the MBA (19% compared with 30% for the rest of the sample;  $\chi^2 = 9.343, p = 0.053$ ).

Benefits were then grouped together to form extrinsic benefits (including marketability, job prospects, and enhanced salary) and intrinsic benefits (including enhanced confidence, credibility, job satisfaction, and interpersonal skills). For both, a scale was formed by adding the scores of the variables together, with 1 representing *strongly agree* and 5 representing *strongly*

**TABLE 5**  
**Perception of Skills Acquired From the MBA**  
**(reporting the skill "to a great extent")**

<i>Main Skill</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Significant Effect</i>
Handle and analyze complex data	44	20.0	
Improved negotiation skills	27	12.3	
More effective at meetings	26	11.9	
Manage individuals/teams more effectively	25	11.4	
More assertive in my dealings with others	23	10.4	age/gender
Work more effectively with others	22	10.0	
More sensitive to difference and diversity	9	4.1	age

*disagree* (extrinsic benefits: Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.9215$ ; intrinsic benefits: Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.7568$ ).

There were no significant age, gender, or age/gender differences with respect to extrinsic benefits, although some age/gender differences emerged with intrinsic benefits. Older women, compared with all other respondents, emerged as most likely ( $F = 4.903$ ;  $p = 0.028$ ), and younger men, compared with all other respondents, emerged as least likely ( $F = 3.630$ ;  $p = 0.058$ ) to value intrinsic benefits highly. Comparing younger males with older females, the latter were much more likely to have reported gaining intrinsic benefits ( $F = 6.549$ ;  $p = 0.012$ ).

### SKILLS

In terms of skills, the two most popular choices were the ability to handle and analyze complex data and negotiation skills. The least popular choice was sensitivity to difference and diversity (see Table 5).

Gender differences were not significant. However, an age/gender effect emerged in terms of assertiveness. Older women stand out in valuing this as a skill gained from the course: Three quarters of older females, compared with 47% of younger males and females and compared with 39% of older males, claimed they had gained this as a skill "to a large extent" ( $\chi^2 = 15.182$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ).

### Results from Interview Data

In accordance with the survey data, most of the interviewees' motives for doing the MBA were extrinsic (e.g., career advancement, job opportuni-

ties). Almost all of the interviewees believed both that they had progressed in their careers after completing their MBAs (eight women and two men had changed careers completely) and that they had benefited from acquiring a set of hard skills, particularly financial and data analysis skills. However, intrinsic benefits, such as increased confidence and credibility, emerged as highly important for the majority of the research participants. In addition, many of the women interviewed discussed gender as an issue and spoke critically of what they perceived to be the “male ethos” of the course.

### INTRINSIC BENEFITS

Intrinsic benefits identified by interviewees related to greater confidence and enhanced interpersonal skills in both internal and external work relationships.

*Confidence.* The most crucial benefit of the MBA, acknowledged by all interviewees, was an increase in self-confidence. Closely aligned to this was improved credibility through being “hallmarked” by the MBA. Analysis showed that there were two separate groups in terms of how they explained this increase in self-confidence. One group (predominantly male: 9 men and 2 women) believed that their confidence had grown as a direct result of the hard skills they had acquired on the course. This is captured by the following comments:

I’m certainly more confident now. . . . I think doing the course has had an impact on what I perceive my overall skills to be. (Male graduate)

It wasn’t about confidence in general but about confidence in a new area of skills . . . things that weren’t necessarily part of my previous work experience. (Male graduate)

Another group (predominantly female: 10 women and 2 men) attributed their increase in confidence to what might be described as “the MBA experience.” This included feelings of achievement from succeeding in a difficult and demanding program (6 women and 1 man), feelings of self-worth (9 women and 1 man), and empowerment through being able to openly voice opinions (8 women and 2 men). Six women expressed surprise and disbelief at what they had achieved: “It’s opened doors to myself”; “It opened my eyes”; “It was unbelievable for me.” One described her surprise at being in the top 10% of her class:



I never thought of myself as particularly bright. I always had to work hard for everything I got but I finished up on the Dean's List! That increased my confidence, having that official credential from an official body. (Female graduate)

Nine women experienced a greater sense of self-worth: "I feel better about myself"; "I'm more comfortable in my own skin"; "I'm more comfortable with who I am." Enhanced confidence and knowledge gained from the MBA gave women in particular the self-assurance to verbalize ("It helped me speak"), including making their views known, putting their ideas on the table in meetings, and discussing issues with senior staff.

I can put an idea on the table and have it move forward or adjusted or changed—but at least it gives them an idea of where I'm coming from because if I don't speak it they don't know. (Female graduate)

I can hold a conversation [with the CEO] and hold his attention to it. (Female graduate)

I'm more vocal because I have the foundations for it. (Female graduate)

Therefore, whereas all MBAs commented on the enhanced confidence the MBA can bring, gender differences emerged in terms of the source of this confidence. For men, this confidence related more to the acquisition of a set of (largely hard) tools and skills, whereas for women the source of confidence was more intrinsic, relating to feelings of achievement, self-worth, and self-assurance.

*Interpersonal skills.* The majority of the interviewees reported improved team-working skills as a result of doing the MBA. This was acknowledged to be a consequence of the emphasis on group work in the course, an experience that was sometimes painful and difficult (as individual groups did not always work well) but was in general beneficial. Empathy, communication, and listening skills were important for women. Four women discussed how they were "more objective," "less emotional," "more detached," and had "toughened up" as a result of their MBAs. This was seen as useful when difficult decisions had to be made.

Gender differences emerged in terms of the nature of these skills. For men, interpersonal skills were largely discussed in terms of leadership. Nine men and only two women specifically referred to leadership and discussed leadership issues as outcomes in this respect. These related first to a perceived enhancement of leadership capabilities as a result of the MBA experience (6 men and 1 woman). However, this did not always translate into better management skills in terms of managing their own teams at work. Only 4 (all

men) of the 15 interviewees who were staff managers claimed the MBA had helped them in this way. The remaining 11 felt that the MBA had had no effect, either because such skills could only be learned by experience or because they were not addressed by the MBA program. The second leadership issue addressed by interviewees related to the capacity to “let go” and give up control (6 men and 1 woman). This was closely associated with trust and the ability to delegate, as the following quotations illustrate:

It’s a question of letting go sort of thing and not having control and trusting other people. (Male graduate)

I think it’s [the MBA experience] been relatively effective. . . . I think over time if you learn to trust people you can sort of release that grip on the project. (Male graduate)

Before it was inconceivable that I would let someone else do something and put my name on it and trust them to do it as I intended. (Male graduate)

Having to rely on somebody who you had absolutely no control over has been a good experience for me—however difficult. (Male graduate)

Although the MBA emerged as less effective in acquiring skills to manage down (i.e., in terms of managing individuals and teams), one large group (7 women and 5 men) reported that the MBA had equipped them to manage upward and to deal more effectively with their bosses. Sometimes, this was a consequence of increased confidence and assertiveness. For others, it sprang from a new awareness of the necessity to manage upward and from the acquisition of political skills enabling them to do so.

*Gender and the MBA.* Not surprisingly, gender was an important issue for women. Although none of the men referred to gender (unless specifically asked about male or female experiences on the course), 10 women raised gender as an issue early in the interviews and without prompting. Difficulties of being female either in the context of the MBA course or at work were discussed, as were detrimental male attitudes and the problems associated with the integration of family and work. Overall, women were more critical of the program, and this related mainly to what was perceived to be the “macho” and competitive culture of the course. Women commented on both the arrogant attitude and the “bravado” of male students and on the male students’ competitive behavior—referring to the typical MBA graduate (described by one female student as “Mighty Big Attitude”) as, in their words, “aggressive,” “competitive,” “arrogant,” and “overconfident.” None of the men interviewed commented on the gendered nature of the MBA experience.

## Discussion

*Proposition 1:* After completion of the MBA, men gain more than women in terms of extrinsic benefits (number of promotions, increased management status, career change, and higher pay).

Results from the survey data conform with previous research (e.g., Association of MBAs, 1997; Catalyst, 2000b; Messmer, 1998), which suggests a strong MBA advantage in terms of career progress and pay. However, unlike the mainly U.S. research on gender and the MBA (Catalyst, 2000b; Cox & Harquil, 1991; Roman, 1990), and in particular contrast to the U.K. study (Simpson, 1995; 1996; 2000a; 2000b), it was gender with age rather than gender alone that was associated with significant differences in career progress. The survey data therefore only partially support the above proposition.

Younger men gain more in terms of extrinsic benefits than any other group (they are the most mobile in terms of changing function and career, and they achieve the greatest pay increase). Younger women are equally career focused: They also want career improvement and, in particular, career change—in conformance with career models that indicate high career investment for younger age groups (Clark, Oswald, & Warr, 1996; O'Connor & Wolfe, 1987). Some younger women achieve their goals—moving on in terms of function, career change, and pay—but a substantial number remain in the lowest pay scales and, despite their desire for a change, with no change in their careers. Although child-care responsibilities may be seen as a common career constraint, this is not the case for this childless group. This may suggest other barriers located within culture and practices of the organization along the lines discussed by Marshall (1984), Ibarra (1993), and Maddock and Parkin (1994).

Of the four age/gender groups, older men stand out in wanting intellectual stimulation in addition to career improvement, and like older women, they value the enhanced confidence from the MBA. Older women also have broader values—placing importance on intrinsic benefits (credibility, job satisfaction, and interpersonal skills) in addition to career progress. This conforms with research that suggests that the importance of material success may lessen over time, whereas the desire for a less tangible, more personal kind of success increases (e.g., Lynn, Cao, & Horn, 1996; Marshall, 1995; Nicholson & West, 1988).

Older men are the least mobile in terms of career and function change, and already on high pay scales, they are least likely to value salary and status as benefits from the MBA. Compared with the younger age groups, they gain modest increases in pay. As O'Connor and Wolfe (1987) suggest, men often

reduce the investment in their careers as they get older and move from the establishment or advancement stages to the maintenance stage of their careers (Hall, 1976; Lynn et al., 1996; Schein, 1978). This change may not be shared by older women, however, who often increase investment as they struggle to gain a career foothold after a period of family prioritization or as a result of earlier career barriers (O'Connor & Wolfe, 1987; Roberts & Morgan, 1987). Accordingly, older women emerge from this study as more mobile than older men (although they benefit less in terms of pay). They are more likely than any other group to feel that they had spent too long in their present positions—possible evidence of a desire to effect a change (they form the majority of those women believing child-care responsibilities had adversely affected their careers). There is little evidence—as in the case of younger women—of a “nonmobile” or static group or of a career plateau that may characterize the careers of older men. This conforms with Powell and Maniero’s (1992) “river of time” model. This model conceptualizes career development as currents of a river, with career success on one river bank and success in relationships on the other. Women seek a balance but may move toward the “emphasis on relationships” bank after starting their families; although at a later stage, when children are older, women may return to the “emphasis on career” bank. In the context of this study, some older women may be at a stage of focusing on their careers—just at the time when older men are putting their priorities elsewhere.

Therefore, although men may be conforming to the traditional career model of early-career building and midcareer maintenance (Hall, 1976; Schein, 1978), for women, the position is less clear-cut. Younger women share with younger men an emphasis on extrinsic career benefits, but a substantial group experiences little movement in terms of pay or career change. Some diversity also exists within the group of older women—in terms of both values and career outcomes—reflecting possible differences in career stages and priorities. This is resonant with Hakim’s preference theory (Hakim, 2000), which suggests that women are more heterogeneous than men in their values and aspirations as they address in different ways the tensions between “production and reproduction” as a central life activity.

Overall, the survey results suggest a greater gender convergence in career progress than was the case in the United Kingdom where large differences between men and women emerged. This may reflect the greater concentration of women in Ontario working in the private sector (in a city dominated by financial and other private-sector institutions) where career paths are likely to be more dynamic. At the same time, the interventionist approach in Canada toward employment equity, as discussed by Gunderson (1994a, 1994b), where the emphasis is more proactively on equality of outcomes than

on equality of opportunity, as is the case in the United Kingdom, together with Ontario's particularly progressive approach in this respect (Smeenk, 1993), may well have reaped rewards in terms of assisting women's careers.

*Proposition 2: After completion of the MBA, women gain more than men in terms of intrinsic benefits and skills (confidence, credibility, assertiveness, job satisfaction, and interpersonal and communication skills).*

The possibility that men prioritize extrinsic career benefits, whereas women focus more on intrinsic career benefits, has been raised by previous work (e.g., Marshall, 1984; Nicholson & West, 1988; Powell & Maneiro, 1992, 1993; Russo et al., 1991; Sturges, 1999). Similar gender differences in extrinsic and intrinsic skills and benefits from the MBA were suggested by the U.K. study, which found that men placed greater value on enhanced job marketability and mobility than on job satisfaction, enhanced credibility, and the development of interpersonal skills, which were prioritized by women (Simpson, 1995, 1996, 2000a).

Two important outcomes have emerged from this study in relation to the above proposition. First, the survey data suggest that it is age with gender, rather than gender alone, that is associated with differences in the extent to which graduates benefit intrinsically from the MBA. Older MBAs are more likely to focus on intrinsic career factors than are younger MBAs. At the same time, young men are least likely, and older women most likely, to claim intrinsic career benefits from the course. This conforms with research suggesting that women have greater orientations toward intrinsic career rewards (e.g., Powell & Maneiro, 1993; Russo et al., 1991; Sturges, 1999) and that, for both sexes, these orientations become more important with age (Clark et al., 1996; O'Connor & Wolfe, 1987).

Second, as the interview data suggest, both men and women gain intrinsic benefits from the MBA, but they do so in different ways. Exceptions include enhanced confidence (discussed below) and the ability to deal confidently with bosses—seen as equally important by men and women. Such “managing up” capabilities are important if, as Weick, Mintzberg, and Senge (1999) suggest, managers need to be able to “speak up to power” and send information fast in an upward direction.

In terms of gender differences in intrinsic benefits, interview data indicate that for men, the focus is largely on issues of leadership. This relates to a perceived improvement in leadership skills, as well as to a newfound ability to give up control through the development of trust in other team members. As Cianni and Wnuk (1997) indicate, team working frequently involves a tension between individual needs and team development, and this can be

resolved only if individuals “give and take” in the allocation of tasks, including leadership roles, and in the facilitation of learning. Integral to this process is the development of trust—a factor that has wider implications in terms of effective interfirm and intrafirm collaboration (Weick, Mintzberg, & Senge, 1999). These results are important if it means that as a result of the MBA, men experience a shift in what is often seen as a typically “masculine” individualistic and directive approach (Collinson & Hearn, 2000; Fondas, 1996; Hearn, 1994; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993, 1998) to a more cooperative and supportive style.

Interview data suggest that both men and women claim an increased confidence from the MBA. However, gender differences emerged in the antecedents of such confidence. For men, perceptions of enhanced confidence were tied up with the acquisition of identifiable hard skills, whereas for women, confidence was seen to lead to several personal changes relating to a feeling of achievement, a feeling of greater self-worth, and a sense of empowerment. In relation to achievement, as Ohlott, Ruderman, and McCauley (1994) suggest, overcoming obstacles can be a powerful developmental and affirming experience for women. Conquering lack of self-confidence and coping with pressures from the course itself—as well as from possible family responsibilities—may therefore intensify feelings of triumph and personal success. Confidence also leads to a strong sense of self-worth, and there is evidence to suggest that this encourages a “redrawing of mental boundaries” (Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000, p. 29) as women expand the range of options thought to be possible or achievable. Finally, confidence from the MBA experience was seen by many women to give them a voice and a sense of empowerment. The concept of voice was first used by Hirschman (1970) to describe how, in a political or a market context, citizens and consumers articulate their critical opinions. More recently, the term has been used in a gendered context (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Jansen & Davis, 1998) to refer to how women—seen to lack voice—are excluded and silenced from the private and public realms. For Gilligan (1982), women often lose voice and freedom of expression as the needs to preserve relationships and protect others become paramount, whereas for Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997), acquiring a voice is intricately entwined with women’s development of mind and of self in ways that have strong associations with the progress of female MBAs discussed above.

Although the survey data indicate that young men may be least likely to benefit from intrinsic career factors (in partial support of the above proposition), what seems likely is that men and women bring different attitudes and levels of intrinsic skills to the MBA. They may therefore benefit differently in

terms of this particular skill set. As Marshall (1984) suggests, women may be more "tuned into" interpersonal skills (it is women who identify the empathy and listening skills required of an experienced and successful team worker and who are critical of the more individualistic and competitive attitudes of men), but they often lack confidence in their own abilities and self-esteem. Changes in self-perception as a result of the MBA experience may therefore have a critical impact on the opportunities they see open to them and on how they see their effectiveness at work. Men may also experience a shift, from a more individualistic, controlling style of working to one based on trust and cooperation, and this could be equally cathartic in terms of self-evaluation and of creating the conditions for enhanced managerial performance.

### Implications for Management Education

These findings raise important issues for management education. First, although some people have argued that there are trends toward a "feminization" of both careers (e.g., Burke & McKeen, 1994; Fondas, 1996) and management (e.g., Fondas, 1993; Kanter, 1989; Lee, 1994), there is little sign that these trends have been reflected in the course content or design of the MBA. In terms of careers, as Fondas (1993) and Burke and McKeen (1994) point out, insecurity and frequent career shifts (previously characteristic of women's experiences) may be increasingly part of the new career reality for men, as they are less able to rely on steady increases in pay or predictable progression within a single organization. Similarly, the classical, masculine notion of managerial work as consisting of "planning, ordering, directing and controlling" (Fondas, 1996, p. 288; also see Alvesson, 1998; Collinson & Hearn, 2000; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993, 1998) is giving way to a need for cooperation, the building of relationships, and responsiveness to others—culturally associated with femininity rather than masculinity (Alvesson, 1998; Kanter, 1989; Lee, 1994). Despite these possible trends toward feminization, however, MBA course culture and design (as many of our female interviewees pointed out) remain largely masculine. This view is supported by Sinclair (1995), who suggests that many MBA programs are based on values of "competition, individualism, instrumentalism and exclusiveness" (Sinclair, 1995, p. 296). Other research also points to the masculine nature of many programs (e.g., Mavin & Bryars, 1999; Simpson, 2000a; Smith, 1997), which as we have seen, may be largely out of touch with the demands of modern management. This, we argue, may suggest a need to feminize the MBA through more cooperative work and through the encouragement of self-reflection, sharing, and exchange so as to deepen emotional learning and



mutual support and to create a culture that is comfortable and developmental for both men and women.

In terms of course design, this may involve the need to foreground intrinsic benefits and skills beyond the informal context, where these intrinsic elements are largely located, and to adopt a less ad hoc methodology so that MBA providers take more responsibility for this area of learning. Formalizing such processes, for example, by giving time and space to critical reflection of individual and team practices, could drive even more powerfully the acquisition of valuable personal and interpersonal skills in a work environment that demands “knowledge for application” or “Mode 2 learning” (Fulmer & Bernard Keys, 1998, p. 35). In this context, listening, trust-building skills, and adaptability have been identified both as critical to the successful manager and as a crucial, although hitherto neglected, component of management education (Martin & Butler, 2000; Thomson, Maybe, Storey, Gray, & Iles, 2000; Weick, Mintzberg, & Senge 1999). This may involve a personal development program that explores underlying attitudes and beliefs that inform a manager’s interpersonal ability in relation to colleagues, superiors, and clients. In other words, MBA programs need to provide opportunities for developing emotional intelligence and for building better team-working, communication, and leadership skills, as well as opportunities to learn how to “let go” of unhelpful attitudes and behaviors.

A second and related issue concerns the need to recognize the diversity that exists within MBA programs. Although MBA students remain overwhelmingly young and male (Association of MBAs, 1997), supporting the stereotype of the MBA student as a “grab it all” young man intent on advancing his career (Dix, 1991), program developers must avoid any tendency to model their provision on this group alone. This is particularly important if it is young men who fail to fully capitalize on the “broadening” of the individual and life-changing development that Johnson, McLaughlin, Saari, and Simmerle (1988) argue are critically important outcomes. As this research has highlighted, the motivations, aspirations, and developmental outcomes from the MBA vary with gender and age so that valuable learning opportunities can be lost for all if the course methodology favors one albeit dominant group. Older women, for example, may not make effective managers if they lack confidence and assertiveness, and they may benefit from opportunities to develop these skills and capabilities. Both younger and older men may need help in enhancing skills and attitudes associated with reciprocity and trust. Furthermore, if (as seems to be the case for many students) the MBA is a program of repositioning in the world of work and given differences in career orientation by gender and age, then it may be appropriate to include career theory and career development in course content and design. In this



way, students can be provided with a framework for the analysis of their own motivations and experiences and can be encouraged to reflect on and perhaps redraw boundaries in terms of what they see as desirable or possible in their future careers. Overall, program directors need to be aware of how age and gender can influence career orientation as well as attitudes toward and specific requirement from the course.

Finally, business schools need to ensure that they market themselves on intrinsic benefits and interpersonal skills as well as the overt extrinsic benefits and hard skills from the program (Sturges, Simpson, & Altman, 2003). As we have seen, these intrinsic outcomes are of increasing importance in the new career environment where managing team relationships and personal skills is key to success (Hall & Mirvis, 1996). In what has been described as a "saturated" market (*Business Week*, 2000), MBA providers can gain competitive advantage by marketing and promoting such benefits as key outcomes of the MBA experience and as critical to the professional and managerial career. Overlooking these benefits in promotional and marketing material not only fails to capitalize on an important outcome from the MBA, but it may also send wrong messages to its students in terms of the priorities of the program.

## Conclusion

This article set out to explore the nature of extrinsic and intrinsic benefits from the MBA and how these might vary by gender. Whereas there has been considerable research on the MBA and career outcomes, there has been little research to date on the gendered nature of such outcomes or on the role of the MBA in the acquisition of skills relevant for what has been seen as a new career environment. This study has demonstrated the significance of both gender and age for understanding the benefits of the MBA and for critically evaluating the relevance of MBA programs. On this basis, findings can be useful in helping to design programs that meet the needs and wants of men and women in different age groups, as well as in forming the foundation for future research.

## Limitations

Several limitations are evident from this study. First, quantitative analysis relied on self-report data collected post-MBA requiring some reflection on the pre-MBA experience. Such data may be distorted by self-justification and personal bias (Baruch & Peiperl, 2000), as well as by a lack of immediacy to

the experience under question. Although this may be less problematic in eliciting objective data on career change (e.g., pay or position before and after the MBA), there may be some tendency to overstate the acquisition of more subjective outcomes such as interpersonal skills, leadership capabilities, and team working. Second, although the data analysis on career change was based on a restricted sample that had graduated between 1997 and 1999 (excluding those who had graduated prior to that time), this does not eliminate the influence of time on career progress. On one hand, there are likely to be considerable time-related variations in career progress within that period. On the other hand, the one-year gap between the survey and the completion of the MBA for those who graduated in 1999 may be insufficient for major career changes to be charted. A longitudinal study of MBAs would overcome these time-related problems. Finally, unlike the U.K. study, which drew its data from 11 business schools, this Canadian survey has relied on one, albeit large, MBA provider. The sample size is, therefore, relatively small and is drawn from a narrow base. Such a sample may well limit the generalizability of the findings beyond this specific research context. The small sample size has also placed constraints on the application of multivariate analysis that might otherwise have further disentangled some of the relationships uncovered. However, as Ibarra (1995) points out, small sample research can provide a foundation for and inform future work. On this basis, this study can be seen to have provided a useful starting point for further inquiry into the relationship between age and gender in orientation toward and outcomes from the MBA. Future studies, particularly with larger samples, can build on and fine-tune these findings.

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