Career Goals and Personal Research Focus

An Essay for the WF ED Doctoral Candidacy Exam

Workforce Education and Development

The Pennsylvania State University

by

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Introduction

To realize my passions for both organization development and education, workforce education (WF ED) continuing study at the Pennsylvania State University (PSU) is the obvious choice since the programs allows pursuing both interests simultaneously. In 2005, Steven Jobs in Stanford University commencement speech discussed, “connecting the dots.” This essay illustrates my career goals and personal fit and how I expect to connect all the dots by studying in the PSU WF ED doctoral program.

Career Role

Short Term Career Role

My short-term career role, after receiving my doctorate is to pursue a professional consultant as an expert in workplace learning and performance (WLP), with particular interest in multinational organization development. Therefore, my current research areas focus on culture’s and social networks’ impact on Taiwanese owned multinational organizations and the development of their succession planning and the impact on acculturation of foreign-born workers (FBWs) to improve performance and commitment to a foreign workplace. Given my research interest, it is crucial for me to have both scholarly and practical knowledge.

The importance of a dual practical and scholarly approach to my research is linked to the fact that culture has a strong impact on succession planning and management (SP&M). In 1949, Henri Fayol, an innovative researcher, proposed that planning is one of the five primary functions of management (cited in Rothwell, 2005). In 1991, Hofstede’s “dimensions of culture of multinational study” attracted attention to the culture’s impact on management. These two studies confirmed the significance of the relationship between business succession and culture as
well as the different influences of various cultures in succession planning. Succession planning is important because research indicates trends for retirement. Britt (2003) noted, the baby boomer generation, which occurred after the World War II, is nearing retirement and the number of workers age 55 and older will increase to 47% in 2010. Since 1998, the number of workers aged 45 or older have increased from 33% to 40%, but the number of workers age 25 to 44 have shrunk from 51% to 44% (Delong, 2004). RHR International also suggested that by 2010, half of surveyed companies will lose even more than 50% of their higher management (as cited in Barnett & Davis, 2008). Also in relation to retirement, Tianxia Magazine (2009) indicated that among the 30 largest corporations in Taiwan, which represent a market value of $13 trillion (USD), over 40 percent have not arranged for a clear corporate succession planning. Of the 30 largest companies in Taiwan, the top executives of nine are over the age of 60; two of them are older than 70, and one is 83 years old.

Regarding cultural influence on business management and its relevance to succession planning and management (SP&M) in Taiwanese organizations, Chinese business firms are often almost totally governed by one or more top-level patriarchs (Leung, 1995). In Hofstede’s multinational culture study, he found that countries with deep Chinese influences are usually collectivist-oriented societies (1991). In fact, Chinese inheritable culture influences many companies in Taiwan that tend to foster relatives who might assume a business’ leadership. In Chinese culture, “business is considered family property” (Yan and Sorenson, 2006, p. 9). Of course, some large companies may hire a professional manager to assist in operations; however, most power remains chiefly with the family. Human Resource Development (HRD) and WLP content from America can continue to bring new concepts of succession planning to Taiwan. For instance, the principle of hiring an inside manager, trained within the organization, provides a
more positive influence than recruiting from outside (Chara, 2007; Chen, 2007). The comparison of the history of 5,000 years of Chinese society and western professional management shows obvious differences, and adjustment, understanding, and adoption are necessary.

Therefore, my desire is to identify and compare the influences of culture and social networks of multinational companies and cross-Strait (Taiwan and China) companies. Furthermore, I seek develop modules and solutions to assist organizations’ succession planning and management.

My interest in the effect of culture and social networks on FBWs arises from first-hand experience with job seekers from diverse backgrounds as well as with companies of various fields. This experience fuels my desire to become a functioning professional in factors of FBWs’ performance and commitment to a foreign workplace. As a foreign-born worker in America, I had access to a diverse work environment in New York City through work in job development and career counseling. Most people serviced were new graduates, new immigrants, and foreign born workers. The greatest challenge for new immigrants and FBWs was their struggle with acculturation, language, work status, and creating social networks. In particular, because of the economic crisis, many corporations for which I worked received federal Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) Funds to help them to overcome financial difficulties. Even though these companies were recruiting some talented FBWs, a great deal of time accrued in providing evidence that no American workers were available. While waiting through the longer hiring process, FBWs struggled, anxious and unsure about the situation. These FBWs, especially those from Asia, lost their confidence and sought other opportunities in their own countries or other
countries. Hence, companies lost access to those talents and incurred extra expense to fulfill their employee ranks.

However, American companies are facing a more diverse consumer base than 20 years ago. Immigrants play a crucial role in the labor and housing markets. In 2000, New York City (NYC) had 2.9 million foreign-born residents compared to 2 million in 1990; and in 2000 the 36% of foreign-born NYC residents represented the largest proportion in the city’s history. Of foreign-born residents, 2.9 million or 23% were Asian. Overall the US population of foreign-born residents was 11%, of which 26% were Asian (“The Newest New Yorker”, 2000). Since “26.5% of FBWs are in management, professional, and related occupations, showing that this segment of the workforce is growing in size, strength, and influence” (USBoL, 2005; cited in Lope, 2006), the FBWs cannot be ignored in user markets or organization development. A need exists for research in cross-cultural career development that focuses on FBWs and immigrants (Lopes, 2006) which prompts my interest in academic study and industry experience, both of which will help me to establish useful systems to respond to the problem.

Long Term Career Goal

My favorite two popular Chinese proverbs are: “Give is better that receive,” and “The latter (pupil) excels the former (teacher).”

In order to satisfy desire to teach, at some point of the future, I seek to become a professor at a university in Taiwan or China. More than ten years experience as a consultant in WLP around the world has already established a strong foundation for clearly distinguishing problems, solutions, resources, and potential. My plans include publishing research, writing books, giving speeches, and fostering the next generation of professionals in WLP. I am devoted
to education as a vehicle to use experience and knowledge to influence the world’s cultural understanding of the workplace. Furthermore, I seek to become involved with volunteering in the world education projects with United Nations as my grand uncle Dr. Chester Tsai did in thirty years ago.

Meanwhile, in order to support the International Rotary Foundation which provided me great opportunities for developing leadership, cultural exchange, world understanding, and study abroad, I wish to create and organize an “International Young Scholar Academic Diversity Program” with Rotary International. The program will provide grants for two projects: One is for international graduate students’ research internships in foreign countries. The second provides undergraduate students’ first and second years’ college experience to learn of different occupations in different countries to assist choosing college majors and careers.

Knowledge/Skills Required

As my long term goals indicate, successful completion of the short term goal provides a necessary foundation. In order to succeed in my short-term career goal, enhancing knowledge in the foundational areas of human resource development (HRD): psychology, economics, and systems thinking (Swanson, 2001) is critical. In addition, according to my research direction, culture studies, global organization management, and social networks are necessary focuses of study. Simultaneously, improvement in academic writing, research, analysis, and presentation skills will allow high quality, academic contributions.

Action Plan
The Pennsylvania State University offers various cross-departmental courses and research resources that allow creating a foundation of advanced knowledge. My research focuses on the influence of culture and social networks in succession planning and FBWs, so the core courses designed for the WF ED program and research courses are priorities. I expect include related courses in counseling education, adult education, and MBA courses in psychology, economics, international business, and social networks. Since a summer internship and campus interns are encouraged in WF ED, I expect to participate in an on-campus internship at PSU’s career services and plan to seek another intern opportunity with Management Development Programs and Services, along with industrial summer internships with multinational organizations or international consulting firms in the US or Taiwan. A co-op at the United Nations is a consideration as my research progresses. Two high level functions of language are expressing personal opinions/ideas and persuasion (“Connecticut World Language Curriculum Framework”, 2005); therefore to enhance exposure of my research, publishing papers in journals and conference proceedings is essential during my doctoral study.

The PSU WF ED program also provides many practical opportunities such as the ICF International’s (ICFI) Executive Leadership Development Program in which I am participating through assisting with surveys and interviews. In addition, the WF ED program provides a positive learning environment that allows students to implement theory into practice. I am taking part in an action learning team to practice collaborative learning, and to develop leadership, creativity, and systematic thinking. In addition, in order to evaluate the actions of learning group, some journal articles will be produced collaboratively.

Some additional strategies during the doctoral program at PSU will enhance personal ability to achieve career goals: IT training, HR certification, and networking. PSU provides
students many technological workshops and web space which I can utilize to professionally present research around the world. Certifications I expect to obtain are Professional in Human Resources (PHR), Global Professional in Human Resources (GPHR), and Certified Professional in Learning & Performance (CLPL). The HR management for Industrial Trainers course in the WF ED program will prepare me for the PHR exam in 2010. Regarding networking, I can benefit from the faculty’s advisement and learn the techniques of establishing a professional networks in WLP/HRD field.

Personal Fit

In 1999, I assisted Providence University’s (PU) preparation for certification for ISO 9001:2000 and organized career fairs with PU’s career service office. Those were my first experiences in organization development (OD) and career development (CD). I realized that I have a facility for communicating with individuals and creating learning projects. Those experiences led me in a different direction from my original accounting major. I designed and developed student leadership and honors programs in the high school where I served as a guidance counselor. They were implemented in two different grades as pilot programs. After evaluation, those two programs became continuous disciplines in the school. I learned that from students’ improvement of their behavior and attitude change, the school’s atmosphere also changed. The learning environment was more motivated and relations between pupils and teachers became more positive. From this point I began to apply counseling, education, and project development to industry.

Skills that I transferred from previous professional experience brought me to a communication and coordination role between departments in Hermes-Epitek, a semiconductor
supplier business. I became involved in innovating and organizing a reward system with the welfare committee and included aspects of collecting and analyzing secondary data, articles to compose a new plan, convincing the president-chief operating officer that the plan would improve employees’ performance, and implementing the plan. I also participated in creating a manual, Key Performance Indications (KPI), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), and Customer Relationship System (CRM) with the HRD team. Through coordinating seven semiconductor venders from US, Sweden, Israel and Japan, I realized that cultural background and social networking play critical roles for foreign managers and engineers when working in Taiwan. The recognition of the importance of culture and social network in workplace learning and performance was reinforced when I served in assisting career services in NYC. I saw many cases of acculturation which affect working attitudes, performances and commitments. Hofstede asserted cultural difference effects in management (1991). In addition, Mehra, Kiduff, and Brass (2001) insist that the social networks are significant for employees’ performance. Hence, the hypothesis of culture and social networks as being factors in FBWs performance is valuable for guiding research that is supported in part from experience.

Much research stated that succession planning involves a very important system that allows organizations to develop future, talented managers to achieve organizational goals (Huang, 1999; Garman & Glawe, 2004; Barnett & Davis, 2008). I was an intended successor for my family’s construction business, and from a very young age, my parents planned to have me study abroad after graduating from elementary school. They tried but failed because of homesickness and resistance. After the abroad plan, I was forced to join the young Pan Shi Club, funded by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the greater Taichuang area to create a social networking environment for children who are potential successors. In 1999, Hogg and
Mullin noted that the influence of similar social networking groups increased individuals’ decision-making abilities (as cited by McDonald and Westphl, 2003). Also networking with biological family members and distant relatives, as well as with friends and other people in the same community, play important roles for building trust in traditional Chinese culture (Huang, 1999), and consequently, culture and social networks play important roles in succession planning. I think my background in Chinese culture and as a successor will be invaluable for accessing succession planning research in Taiwan and China.

Conclusion

Dr. Farmer’s visiting Scholarly Inquiry class shared the valuable leadership role of PhDs, and Dr. Passmore also said, PhDs are not only titles but also represent the expectation of creating values in the world. The value I want to create is the understanding of culture and social networks, to break barriers and to implement research into organization’s workplaces for learning and performance.

I have explained my desired short term and long term goals which define a desire become a multinational OD consultant as an outcome of a doctoral degree in WF ED. After consultant’s career, I seek to bring experience and knowledge into education through a professorship that fosters a new generation of WLP researchers.

The potential influence of my research will not be impermanent but a long-range influence. I believe that I can grow in theoretical and practical knowledge in WLP with the Pennsylvania State University’s WF ED doctoral program and related courses. This program helps me to connect all dots and to achieve my short term and long term career goals.
References


Britt, J. (2003, October 1). It’s time to get serious about succession planning, *HR Magazine, 48*, 12


