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## 企業管理碩士學程

### 碩士論文

跨領域人脈經營與 MBA 教育之探索性研究

**Boundary-spanner development  
in MBA education: an exploratory study**

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# National Chiao Tung University

College of Management

Global MBA

**Thesis**

The logo of National Chiao Tung University is a circular emblem with a gear-like outer border. Inside the circle, there are stylized representations of a book, a microscope, and a graduation cap. The letters 'E', 'S', and 'A' are prominently displayed in the center. At the bottom of the emblem, the year '1896' is written in a white box.

**Boundary-spanner development  
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Advisor: Prof. Francis Woomin Wu

**June, 2010**

# **Boundary-spanner development in MBA education: an exploratory study**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Global MBA Department

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Global Master of Business Administration



# Boundary-spanner development in MBA education: an exploratory study

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## ABSTRACT

Globalization and economic realities in the aftermath of a recent global recession provide some incentive for more individuals to enroll in an MBA program to improve their future job outlook. Critics contend that MBA education is often too canonical and authoritarian at a time when our world and organizations are becoming networks of eclectic knowledge. Rapidly advancing technologies and ever expanding market opportunities indicate that a different kind of leader, manager, entrepreneur is needed, and so too, perhaps an added emphasis in leadership education.

This paper argues that more highly skilled and capable *boundary-spanners* are needed that can identify and resolve complex issues being faced by managers, entrepreneurs and leaders across professions, organizations, and countries. Business school MBA programs have provided a channel for leadership development and therefore can have a significant impact in facing this growing need. It is suggested that *boundary-spanner* education should involve a more critical focus on communication skills, networking and culture-brokering – concerns unintentionally being left to chance in many business schools today.

Based on a study that included International MBA and Global MBA program students at five top university graduate business schools in Taiwan, recommendations are offered to help enhance boundary-spanner education. In their rather unique cross-cultural context, students enrolled in these I/GMBA programs offer constructive insight into how we may equip future managers, entrepreneurs and leaders with the boundary-spanner skills and abilities required in a complex global environment.

**Key words:** Boundary-spanner; Leadership education; Global MBA; International MBA

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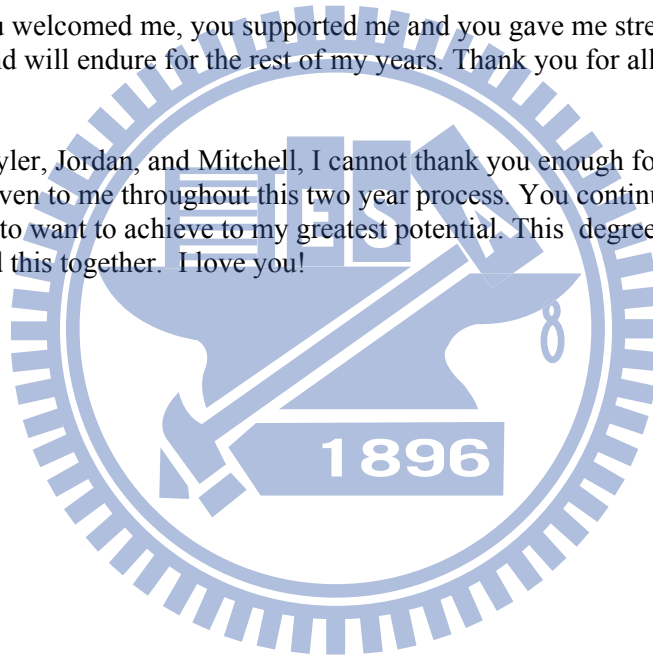
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## Chapter I. INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Problem

Graduate business school MBA enrollments have increased following a global economic recession. One university president in California attributes the increased interest in his university's MBA program to laid off workers and recent graduates who are willing to carry extra debt to gain the additional skills that will make them more attractive to potential employers in a tight labor market. (The Biz Press, April, 2010). So as many students scurry to find answers to their economic woes and prepare for better times ahead, it seems a good time for some pause to reflect on the anticipated outcomes and needs associated with an MBA-leadership education today. It's true that a number of researchers already have pointed out that there is a lack of reliable evidence to suggest that MBA studies actually contribute to improving managerial and leadership practice (Watson et al, 2001; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). For some, business school education available to future managers has become too canonical and authoritarian in spite of the fact that global organizations today have become networks of eclectic knowledge (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2006).

Garcia (2009) has suggested that organizations are in need of a new breed of ethical and creative decision-maker who develops a kind of socially-responsible leadership to reduce existing tensions between corporate, individual and public interests. In this paper, it is proposed that current MBA education may be too focused on knowledge delivery, rather than developing the skills, behavior, network, and culture needed for people to become effective boundary spanners. A central aim of MBA education today ought to include, therefore, a strengthened commitment, even beyond the classroom, to nurturing and developing essential skills and competencies for effective *boundary spanning*. In general, a *boundary-spanner* education should involve a critical focus on self-awareness, inter-cultural communication skills, and networking abilities. Based on a study which included students at five top university graduate business school programs in Taiwan, recommendations are offered to help enhance

the amount of boundary-spanner education that may occur outside the academic classroom to further assist graduates in learning to identify and resolve complex issues facing people, organizations and communities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

More business schools in Asia are taking steps to position their MBA program to be competitive in the market of global leadership development. Current and prospective future business managers and leaders are surrounded by a growing number of Global MBA and International MBA degree program options. Taiwan is no exception, as the number of top universities competing to attract domestic and international students in an English-instructed management development experience is increasing. To ensure a rich and valuable education environment, department leaders aim to enroll as diverse a mix of students as possible. Efforts are made to reach out to individuals from a broad range of backgrounds and work experiences. And, as is true in MBA programs generally, it is expected that the rich diversity achieved in the student enrolled population will help to provide meaningful benefits in the process of nurturing and developing future managers.

Might these new programs actually be helping to move leadership education away from the tried-and-failed canonical prescription of functional area content and authoritarian instructional practices that have left not a few begging the question, are MBA's worthwhile? It's been suggested that traditional MBA's present a rather rapid, fast-paced journey designed to expose students to the essential courses and subject matter of various business functions in order to inform and expand their ability for managerial decision-making in Finance...Accounting... Economics...Marketing...Organizational Behavior...Supply Chain Management...Information Management...etc. In this study, we ask whether student experiences in these IMBA/GMBA's can offer insights that confirm or reinforce expectations for best practices in order to meet the needs of boundary-spanner development, beyond the classroom.



A guiding question for this exploratory study is: *What supports can be constructive to assist aspiring global business leaders in developing effective boundary-spanner skills and abilities?* This study proposes that organizations and businesses operating in and across the global marketplace are in need of highly skilled and capable *boundary-spanning* managers, entrepreneurs and leaders capable of interfacing and operating across professions, between departments, and across organizations. As such, business schools that will focus attention and efforts accordingly can more fully develop the kind of skills needed by effective boundary-spanners. While it may be widely recognized that communication skills, networking and an integration of content and cross-cultural experience are useful components of a leadership education, as has been stated previously, studies continue to indicate that such concerns are regularly left to chance in many traditional business school programs. Perhaps this notion also contributes to the conclusion of some researchers who suggest that there simply is not sufficient evidence to suggest that MBA studies actually improve management and leadership practice (Watson et al., 2001; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002, Garcia, 2009). Kirby (2007) has pointed out that business schools seem uncertain about how to address existing shortcomings.

Further, while it is suggested that self-awareness, inter-cultural communication skills, and networking abilities together with time for critical-reflection all pose meaningful significance for students from western and non-western countries alike, this study indicates that such matters may actually be particularly noteworthy in Taiwan, for example. As a foreign guest who has resided in Taiwan and worked in the education field for some years, the author has observed the uniquely competitive educational environment inside Taiwan that includes an inherent emphasis on test-taking and testing achievements as students navigate the educational system. One might suggest that precious little time seems to be devoted to critical problem-solving, student self-reflection and self-awareness. Even interpersonal communication skill development is arguably absent from the education experience for a large number of students in Taiwan. More than a few close friends and professional colleagues from

Taiwan have provided personal narrative to how this backdrop can play out as students enter either a western-style academy for higher education or work in a global business environment. Critical occasions demanding cross-cultural interaction and success can be met with shyness, anxious inactivity and, not infrequently, real disappointment.

Linking such observations with recent studies of boundary spanners and leadership, the case is made that MBA programs simply cannot afford to leave critical and desired outcomes to chance. A dedicated commitment to creating a supportive environment for boundary-spanner skill development, even outside the academic classroom, simply ought to become a clear and desired objective of any successful business school MBA education.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study explores beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and opinions of students, enrolled in International or Global MBA programs in Taiwan, pertaining to various issues that extend beyond the focus of the academic classroom and can have a significant impact on the development of boundary-spanner skills and knowledge. *IMBA* (International Masters of Business Administration) and *GMBA* (Global Masters of Business Administration) are increasingly common titles for MBA programs presented in English, with a concentration on developing managers and leaders who will deal with the complex and dynamic issues of an increasingly global marketplace.

It is suggested in this paper that dedicated efforts to shape and nurture a supportive environment that fosters significant amounts of student interaction, self-awareness, networking, leadership and inter-culture communication can provide the essential ingredients required to effectively educate boundary-spanners. *Boundary-spanner's* are those individuals who because of their unique set of acquired skills, competencies and behaviors are capable of playing important key roles to help improve or resolve complex challenges and situations faced within and between people, organizations and communities.

## **Research Question**

By drawing from the early student experience of I/GMBA cohorts in Taiwan this study explores possibilities for support systems beyond the academic classroom to further facilitate a boundary spanner education that is critically needed in the world today. A central question for this exploratory research study then is: *What supports can be constructive to assist aspiring global business leaders in developing effective boundary-spanner skills and abilities?*

## **Significance of the Study**

Current MBA education may be too focused on knowledge delivery, rather than developing the skills, behavior, network, and culture needed for people to become effective boundary spanners. In this study, it should be useful to learn how Taiwan's young I/GMBA programs may be an example that helps to further planning and implementation of practices that impact the potential for MBA graduates to become boundary-spanners in their future organizations and communities. It is suggested that a dedicated focus on boundary-spanner skill development at business schools, inside and outside the classroom, will result in increasing abilities of graduates to lead and relate effectively with others, both within organizations and across professions. This study, therefore, aims to identify helpful learning experiences and important learning supports and objectives, beyond the classroom, that may be critical for development of student leaders and boundary spanners. Recommendations are offered to assist business school leaders in designing or strengthening support initiatives that result in more graduates ready to embrace their boundary-spanning potential.

## Chapter II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Boundary-spanner

The concept of boundary-spanner has existed in organizational literature for many years across multiple disciplines. *Friend et al.* (1974) have emphasized the importance of a number of skills commonly associated with “networking” today, such as: cultivating inter-personal relationships, communication, political skills and an appreciation of the interdependencies around the structure of problems and potential solutions. *Hosking and Morley* (1991) suggest that it is networking skills which enable the boundary spanner to understand the social constructions of other actors, and how they define the issue in relation to their own values and interests, knows what outcomes and processes each would value, knows who needs to be involved, knows who could mobilize, influence, and so on – the basis for successful negotiation.

*Trevillion* (1991) views boundary-spanners as “cultural brokers” motivated to understand people and organizations outside their own circle and empathize with and respect different values and perspectives. Still others emphasize different characteristics in describing the effective boundary-spanner: innovative, entrepreneurial and highly flexible (*Challis, 1988*); lateral-thinking rule breakers and visionary thinkers (*Leadbeater and Goss, 1998*); gives value to mutual understanding and the building of mutual trust (*Hornby, 1993; Webb, 1991, Bachmann, 2001*); facilitative and catalytic leader (*Luke, 1998*); integrator, diplomat, cross fertilizer and deep-thinker (*Kanter, 1995*).

On the matter of training and development in boundary-spanner work, one author has argued that while traditional management training focused on hierarchical situations, an emphasis should now move to developing key partnership skills such as brokerage, facilitation, negotiation and coordination and project management (*Jupp, 2000*). *Tushman and Scanlon* (1981) suggest that functional boundaries can be spanned effectively only by boundary-spanners who understand and are attuned to the varied contextual influences that exist in different relationships, between departments or across organizations.

Finally, from his focus on the individual actor in the field of inter-organizational relations, *Williams (2002)* offers this profile of the effective boundary-spanner: as network manager; the importance of building effective personal relationships with a wide range of other actors; the ability to manage in non-hierarchical decision environments through negotiation and brokering; and performing the role of policy entrepreneur to connect problems to solutions, and mobilize resources and effort in the search for successful outcomes. An organization without boundary spanners tends to have reduced innovation by limiting the awareness of opportunity, alternative approaches, and the perspectives of others (*Hsu, Wang & Tzeng, 2007*).

### **Leadership and education**

Senge (1990) depicts paradigm shift as a healthy transition that leaders, managers and entrepreneurs in an organization learn to make as they become skilled at using the creative tensions that exist and can adopt adaptive learning behaviors. Robinson (2008) considered the skills needed by global managers facing chaos and change in organizations today. He proposed that leadership development is a journey, and the ultimate station of development involves inter-dependency and requires the ability to integrate and forge synergies.

Continued expansion in the centrality of technology across our changing global business economy has increased pressures on organizations to consider the way leaders are trained and educated. And in 1994, the Green Report was issued by the American Society of Engineering Education. Not surprisingly, accelerated reforms called for in this report and by companies interested in maintaining a competitive edge are extremely consistent with the requisite skills and abilities necessary for effective boundary-spanning: Team skills, including collaborative, active learning; Communication skills; Leadership; A systems perspective; An understanding and appreciation of the diversity of students, faculty, and staff; An appreciation of different cultures and business practices that are now global; Integration of knowledge throughout the curriculum; and A multi-disciplinary perspective.

### **Chapter III. METHODOLOGY**

#### **Subjects**

The subject population for this study includes: GMBA students from National Chiao Tung University and National Taiwan University; and IMBA students from National Tsing Hua University, National Cheng Kung University and National Cheng Chi University. Each of the five universities is located in Taiwan. Participants are either domestic Taiwan residents or international students representing multiple nationalities and are either a first or second year MBA student in the Spring of 2010.

#### **Instruments**

A survey of currently enrolled MBA students is expected to provide insight to practitioners interested in the planning and implementation of program supports that yield effective leadership education and boundary-spanner development. The author has identified three critical components of a boundary-spanner education: self-awareness, inter-cultural communication skills and networking abilities for emphasis in this study. As such, items included in the survey questionnaire focus on gathering student feedback related to the following few guiding questions.

First, *Is increasing self-awareness and personal growth important to developing global business leaders?* Four survey items, in particular, are included in the survey to help identify the level of priority I/GMBA student's associate with matters of self-awareness and self-improvement for their management development. An additional item is also included to help gauge students' perceived need for additional support in this area of personal development. Second, *Is improving inter-cultural communication skills important to developing global business leaders?* Three items are included in the survey to help identify the level of priority student's associate with matters of inter-cultural communication skill development in their management education. An additional item is also included to help gauge students' perceived need for additional support in this area of inter-cultural communication skill development. And third, *Is improving networking abilities important to developing global business leaders?* Five items are included

in the survey to assess the actual level of student engagement in activities associated with networking skill development in their management education. An additional item is also included to help gauge students' perceived need for additional support in this area of networking abilities development.

Thus, the study is designed to explore student perceptions related to their management education and certain key components of a boundary-spanner developmental experience: self-awareness, inter-cultural communication skill and networking abilities. Careful consideration of student responses is expected to reveal positive trends and opportunities that help to strengthen and expand a focus on finding effective strategies for boundary-spanner development in MBA programs.

The survey will consist of five likert-scale questions that each include multiple items of particular concern to issues of management education and boundary-spanner development. Response options to the 5-point likert-scale questions include: "Very Important...Not Important," "Highly Engaged...Not Engaged," "Highly Satisfied...Not Satisfied," and "Highly Confident...Not Confident." Two other questions require simple yes-no responses pertaining to: the presence of requirements for a student internship and existence of observed cultural barriers in the program experience.

### **Administration**

Preliminary steps were taken to collect email contact data from students enrolled in I/GMBA programs at the five participating universities. As a result, a research survey will be distributed to students via both Internet and paper survey. Arrangements for a five-school I/GMBA student-faculty retreat to Penghu, Taiwan is expected to afford convenience and opportunity to facilitate a paper survey among participants in attendance. Approximately 15 minutes is needed for participants to complete the survey.

## Chapter IV. FINDINGS

### Review of the Problem

The central assertion put forth in this paper is that organizations and businesses operating in and across the global marketplace are in need of highly skilled and capable *boundary-spanning* managers, entrepreneurs, and leaders. While it is proposed that self-awareness, inter-cultural communication skills, and networking abilities are critical components of a leadership education, research indicates that for too many business schools these concerns are largely being left to chance.

This research acknowledged an increased presence of Taiwan universities offering all-English MBA programs intended to target the unique challenges of leadership education and the needs of global management professionals. Business school leaders at these universities aim to enroll a diverse mix of students from a broad range of cultural backgrounds and work experiences. The study asked whether these young International and Global MBA programs might actually help to inform and achieve movement away from the tried-and-failed canonical prescription of functional area content and authoritarian instructional practices common elsewhere.

For this exploratory study, the following summary is offered to describe an effective boundary-spanner as a combination *Networker / Cultural-broker*:

#### ***Networker:***

- Able to cultivate inter-personal relations.
- Able to communicate thoughts and ideas effectively.
- Able to understand own values and beliefs.
- Able to understand values and beliefs of others.
- Able to read and understand situations.
- Able to mobilize and influence people and resources in order to get results.



***Cultural-broker:***

- Respects different values and perspectives.
- Values mutual understanding and trust-building.
- Able to achieve win-win solutions to problems by influencing, bargaining, negotiating and mediating.

Importantly, in addition to these critical communication skills and networking abilities, it is also proposed that for a boundary-spanner to be truly effective in sustaining relationships and managing issues of a diverse nature, self-awareness must remain a constant interest to the effective boundary-spanner. So, it has been suggested that an emphasis on *boundary-spanner* education in the business school will involve commitments to improving and developing communication skills and networking abilities with opportunities for interaction and reflective integration of new learning associated with both subject area content and personal lived experiences. The specific concern in this study involves the experiences and objectives of an MBA agenda in support of boundary-spanner education away from or outside the formal classroom.

**Discussion of Findings**

This research focused on understanding student perceptions and behavior related to their management education and certain key components of a boundary-spanner developmental experience: self-awareness, inter-cultural communication skill and networking abilities. The survey was sent out to 262 students representing five Taiwan national universities. Questionnaires were initially sent via email distribution on the internet. Some respondents (42%) replied by email. A vast majority of responses (58%) were gathered via a paper survey easily coordinated during a five school MBA networking retreat to Penghu, Taiwan in April. A total of 43 surveys were returned for a response rate of 16%.

A majority (63%) of participants were international students representing 16 different countries while 37% were from Taiwan. The sample consisted of 53% females and 47% males. 47% of participants were 1st year MBA students and 53% were 2<sup>nd</sup> year students in the Spring of 2010. The age of participants ranged from 72% between 20-30 years old, 19% between the ages of 31-40, and 9% were over 40 years old.

Data collected from this study indicate that *understanding their strengths and limitations* as well as *understanding their own values and beliefs* are important to aspiring global leaders; with Mean scores of 4.44 and 4.37, respectively on a five-point scale. Additionally, a mean score of 4.60 resulted when students were asked how important personal transformation and self-improvement are to their management education. (See Table 1).

Table 1: Self-awareness & Self-improvement as priority for boundary-spanner education

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Understand my strengths and limitations	4.44	0.66
Understand own values and beliefs	4.37	0.82
Personal transformation & self-improvement	4.60	0.62

How important are the following items to your management education?

5=Very Important 1=Not Important

Survey results also indicate that 95% of students in the study regard their ability to interact with and build relations with people from different countries (m=4.67), professions (m=4.51) and organizations (m=4.60), respectively, as important or very important components of their management education. (See Table 2).

Table 2. Inter-cultural Communication as a priority for boundary spanner education

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Ability to interact & build relations with people from other countries	4.67	0.57
Ability to interact & build relations with people from different professions	4.51	0.59
Ability to interact & build relations with people in different organizations	4.60	0.58

How important are the following items to your management education?

5=Very Important 1=Not Important

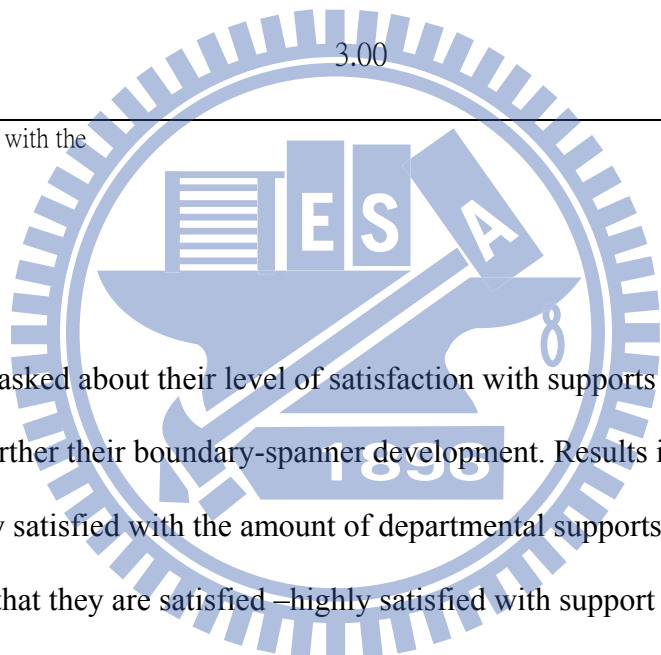
When students were asked about their level of engagement in various actions associated with networking abilities away from the classroom, responses here are somewhat less supportive regarding hypothesis 3. 71% students in the study do indicate that they are highly engaged in spending time *forming and maintaining relationships with people from different countries* ( $m=3.93$ ). However, the numbers of respondents actually engaged or highly engaged in activity to cultivate a broad network of interaction and support outside their own student group is limited: *EMBA enrollees* (36%;  $m=2.30$ ); *professional in nearby corporations* (28%;  $m=2.46$ ); *students at other universities* (29%;  $m=2.28$ ); *their own professors* (40%;  $m=3.00$ ). These results suggest that there is need to find other means of facilitating development of student networking abilities and involvement in these boundary-spanning behaviors. (See Table 3).

Table 3: Networking abilities as a priority for boundary-spanner education

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Time forming & maintaining friendships with people from different countries	3.93	0.91
Networking with EMBA students	2.30	1.66
Cultivating relationships with working professionals	2.46	1.58
Communicating with students at other universities	2.28	1.68
Cultivating relations with professors	3.00	1.20

What is your level of engagement with the following activities?

5=Highly Engaged 1=Not Engaged



Students were also asked about their level of satisfaction with supports currently being provided outside the classroom to further their boundary-spanner development. Results indicate that half of all respondents are moderately satisfied with the amount of departmental supports being provided currently. 48% of students indicated that they are satisfied –highly satisfied with support efforts. In particular, just 33% of respondents feel satisfied-highly satisfied with support efforts to help connect students to people in other schools or organizations (m=3.07). And just 27% are satisfied-highly satisfied with supports to connect students with working professionals (m=2.86). Somewhat greater satisfaction was reported regarding faculty advisement (m=3.51) and assistance with cross-culture relationship abilities (m=3.53) (See Table 4)

**Table 4. SUPPORTS to facilitate boundary spanner skill development beyond classroom.**

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Satisfaction with amount of faculty advisement.	3.51	0.86
Satisfaction with assistance with cross-culture relationship abilities.	3.53	0.96
Satisfaction with help connecting to working professionals.	2.86	1.19
Satisfaction with help connecting with people and resources at other schools and organizations.	3.07	1.08

How satisfied are you with your departments' efforts to support you?

5=Highly Satisfied 1=Not satisfied

Another survey question asked students to identify their level of confidence that they in fact possess critical skills and abilities related to the fulfillment of an effective boundary-spanner role. Students in the study are confident that they know their own values and beliefs (88%; m=4.28), respect the values and beliefs of others (81%; m=4.05) and are trustworthy (83%; m=3.98). Further, 76% of survey respondents rate themselves as confident critical thinkers and problem-solvers (m=3.70) and also convey confidence for reading people and understanding motivation and behavior (m=3.84). When it comes to effective networking (m=3.91) and finding win-win solutions to problems (m=3.70), 71% and 72% of students claim to be confident or highly confident, respectively. A majority of respondents (73%) express confidence in their ability to not allow conflict and criticism to harm their relationships (m=3.86).

Survey results further suggest a moderate level of student confidence associated with organizing other students to solve problems (58%; m=3.44) or coordinating people and resources to achieve a goal (60%;m=3.40). Just 57% of students feel confident- highly confident in their ability to express themselves with clarity (m=3.62) while 58% say they are willing to be influenced by the views of other people (m=3.48). Such moderate performance associated with these key boundary-spanner criteria suggest two possibilities. First, some business school leaders might infer that greater attention to a students' past proven leadership experience can be a constructive measure in finding students for admission and

enrollment. Additionally, more attention to fashioning a support environment that is capable of promoting and encouraging leadership attributes for boundary-spanning success will be useful.

**Table 5. Selected SELF-REPORT LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE in relation to possession of key boundary-spanner criteria**

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
I have mobilized people and resources to achieve successful outcomes.	3.77	0.78
I have effectively organized students in my department to find solutions to problems.	3.44	1.01
I have effectively coordinated people and resources outside my dept. to achieve a goal.	3.40	1.18
I normally express myself and my position with clarity.	3.63	0.76

Describe your current level of confidence related to the following statements.

5=Highly Confident 1=Not Confident

Two additional exploratory questions were included in the survey questionnaire. One question simply asked students to indicate whether an internship experience was required for them to meet program graduation requirements at their institution. In this instance, only respondents from one university, National Chiao Tung University, are currently expected to complete an internship during the Summer between year one and year two of study. It is suggested that participants of a practical overseas internship experience often are advantaged by their exposure to real-world work experience that frequently require critical-problem-solving, interaction with people from different countries, cultures and professions, and expanding opportunities for networking and strengthening of communication skills – important components of a boundary-spanner education.

A final question asked students if they have noticed barriers between individuals or groups in their program experience. Results from this question show that 81% of respondents have noticed cultural

barriers within their peer group; a clear indication that ample opportunity exists to further target occasions for broad exposure to cross-cultural understanding and skill development.

In addition to completed survey questionnaires, many students involved in the study also volunteered other personal insights that help to illuminate the experience of students currently enrolled in an I/GMBA programs. Following, is an overview of the variety of additional comments and insights offered by students in this study:

- *“ One really worthwhile experience included a social mixer held in Taipei. It was entirely organized by students from four different universities and it gave us a chance to build our support network and begin getting to know one another.”*
- *“My department helps us organize a winter tour to a place in Taiwan. We refer to this activity as “Knowing Taiwan.” It gives us a break from the hectic pace of studying and allows us to spend time getting to know each other better while we learn more about the local culture.”*
- *“My department experimented with offering separate workshop experiences for both first year and second year students. Most people thought it was very successful! We talked about our unique potential as a peer group and got to discuss our group dynamic and some personal issues a bit. We also worked on helping each other organize important action steps for our future career success. That was great but, I wish we could have started that discussion in our first year.”*
- *“I pretend that I know things that I really don’t know to hide my weaknesses. I think a lot of us do that.”*
- *“I think people’s biases and stereotypes get in the way a lot and create obstacles to keep us from connecting as we might like.”*

- *“Our school doesn’t help us with internships. I wish they did!”*
- *“We had students go to Africa, the USA, Europe, South America, and other countries here in Asia for their Summer internship. Some international students stayed here in Taiwan. It was very cool to hear about their experiences. Some even got job offers.”*
- *“I haven’t talked to any student who is getting much help with their career planning and coordination efforts. I could really use a counselor to help me explore my options.”*
- *“ A bunch of us talked about how nice it would be to be assigned an Advisor in our first year instead of only at thesis time.”*
- *“Somebody did suggest that organizing us into advisory teams that meet regularly to focus on either personal development issues or discussion to help integrate our course experience, you know “the big picture,” would be a good idea. I liked the sound of that!”*
- *“Cliques are definitely a problem. And I’ve noticed that domestic students can be a bit superficial and dialogue with them stays rather trivial with almost no chance for a deeper, more penetrating discussion. I understand that language is an obstacle for us at times.”*
- *“I participated in a retreat weekend with peers and professors from five different universities. We went to Penghu with two objectives 1) pure social networking so we could know each other and 2) some practical problem-solving as we got a chance to offer solutions to local leaders concerned with increasing tourism to the island. What an awesome experience! And already, we’ve had one reunion meeting, are planning a return leadership camp together this Summer, and I’m sure we’ll gather one more time before graduation!”*



- *“I did wish that we could have had more chances to meet professionals in the EMBA program. We’re surrounded by great corporations but it’s so hard for foreign students to get to meet people!”*
- *“Some people are actually taking 7 or 8 courses at a time. At that pace, it’s hard to get people to actually listen to one another. We’re too busy I think.”*



## Chapter V. CONCLUSIONS

Responses from students enrolled in the participating IMBA and GMBA programs suggest that Taiwan university business school programs and their multinational cohort structure are in a unique position to be an example for others as they plan and adopt practices that are sure to impact the effectiveness of graduates interested in becoming boundary-spanners in their future organizations and communities. It would seem, based on results of this exploratory study, that while these universities are not leaving critical components of essential leadership and boundary-spanner education to chance, multiple recommendations are highlighted for the continued improvement of a boundary-spanner support system.

International and Global MBA programs in Taiwan are strongly encouraged to continue incorporating opportunities for greater student interaction, reflection, networking and communication skill development in their programs to prepare more capable global boundary-spanners for the future. Of course, faculty practically everywhere experience struggles for time and meaningful student involvement to get to know students well. For this reason, an alternative strategy is recommended that emphasizes student leadership development to help achieve the objectives of a boundary-spanner education. Specifically, peer support and/or discovery groups can be useful. Student discovery groups may be established to meet periodically in order to foster dialogue related to pressing issues, either personal or academic. In this way, students learn to identify and solve important problems while also strengthening the bonds of their own peer network. Possibly a department coordinator or student support services representative can lend support to help guide and direct this student activity. Faculty advisors may help to guide efforts or merely participate from time to time to build rapport and gain knowledge of student needs and interests. Naturally, wherever practical, it will be quite productive for faculty advisors to support and participate in the implementation and facilitation of regular advisory discussion forums.

It is a good sign that so many students acknowledge a high priority for self-awareness and self-improvement. Relationships and business partnerships succeed and endure when individuals are able to fully appreciate the influence that their unique personality and set of beliefs and values bring to the interaction with another, and are willing to adapt and grow accordingly. MBA program planners therefore must not leave such an important development to chance. Efforts to increase the amount of time and opportunity available for students to reflect critically upon their experience and their new learning should be explored. Again, small group advisory settings may be useful for broad discussion and feedback amongst peers, and faculty whenever possible. Additionally, some occasion for one-on-one counseling and guidance with an advisor can be constructive to further student growth as well as the potential for faculty support in personal internship and career planning stages.

Equally encouraging is the fact that students so strongly affirm inter-cultural communication skills as a priority in their management education. Supportive steps recommended for MBA planners here include scheduling various student trips or retreats to promote understanding of local and farther away cultures while possibly including a practical component that invites some critical reflection and business problem-solving. Students in the study also shared a keen sense of value for coordination of social-mixers that can help to effectively initiate new relationships and exposure to different cultures. And efforts to infuse the MBA experience with occasions requiring students to negotiate and mediate issues can as well be invaluable in developing skills for inter-cultural communication successes.

Possible suggestions to help strengthen student networking abilities among MBA student groups might involve the coordination of social –mixers or special events that include students from other universities, professionals from local corporations, or faculty and students from other departments on campus. Advisory groups, mentioned earlier, may prove useful in furthering networking abilities and potential outcomes. And it has been suggested that efforts to coordinate job fairs and other means to connect students with working professionals can be useful in developing abilities for effective networking.

A brief summary of promising examples and/or suggestions provided by this exploratory study to benefit boundary-spanner development include:

- Coordinate occasional inter-school and corporate collaborative events and social mixers to build professional networks.
- Schedule group culture tours and leadership retreats that include culture learning and business problem-solving.
- Allow early program assignment of faculty advisor to support adjustment, new learning and relationship building.
- Establish a means for facilitating group and/or individual assistance to reduce cross-culture barriers, minimize misunderstandings, and raise levels of trust and mutual respect and understanding within peer group.
- Actively support student efforts associated with finding meaningful internship assignments abroad.
- Provide a means for career counseling and advisement.
- Coordinate meaningful peer discovery groups or interactive workshops that meet regularly to support individual growth, peer interaction, academic integration, even career and internship planning where honest sharing and peer support may be maximized to further develop boundary-spanner skill/ability set.
- Facilitate interaction with EMBA groups and school alum to build professional network and enrich practical education experience.
- Foster interactions and environments where occasions for critical-reflection and sharing can allow students to frequently find new ways of defining themselves and their world.

By engaging invaluable expressions of student voice and experience, this study has identified important learning supports and objectives that are critical for development of boundary spanners and are perhaps still largely outside the scope of many MBA programs today. Gary Hamel, Founder of Management Innovation Exchange (MIX) and a popular innovation architect, has suggested that a revolution is needed in management to reinvent management. He argues that “organizations of every size and type today are confronted by new challenges outside boundaries of management as usual and that we

need managers to be more adaptable, innovative, inspiring and responsible than they have been in the past.

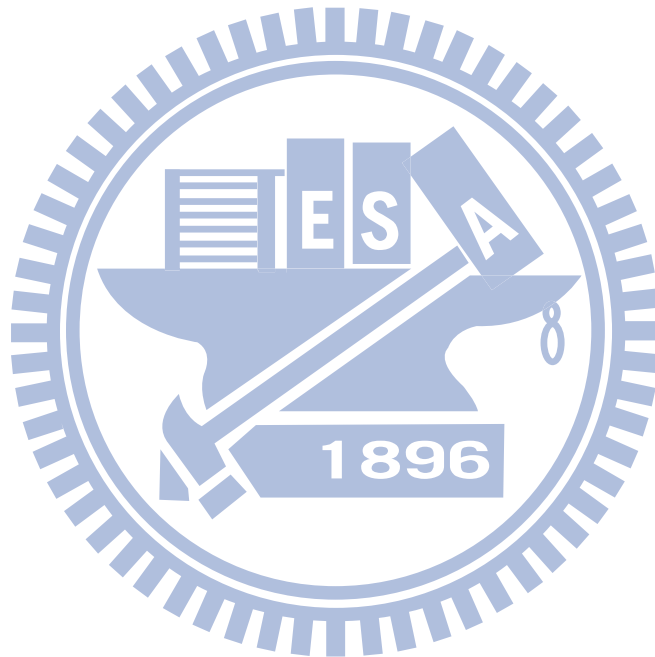
Without more dedicated support to directly and proactively nurture and facilitate the kinds of boundary-spanning skills and competencies discussed in this paper, students' skills and understanding (education) of important issues that impact their ability to lead and relate effectively with others, both within organizations and across cultures, will be limited. Boundary-spanning skills and abilities are the tools that permit leaders to navigate the chaos and change environment to identify and resolve issues and bridge important relationships in various settings across organizations and in the global marketplace. Future similar research studies should aim to expand the sample of student responses to afford opportunity for comparison. Such comparison was not possible in this instance since a vast majority (77%) of responses were provided by students at one university and two universities were represented with just one respondent each.

While the study revealed insights, observations, and behaviors associated with student personal experiences, results provided can be relevant and valuable to business school MBA programs anywhere. And so, while this is quite possibly the first study to focus specifically on boundary-spanner education at business schools in Asia, future research may look to study the experience of students in programs offered in other regions of the world. For instance, in light of the apparent recent shifting in the world economic order, perhaps business schools in the western hemisphere also will begin to re-evaluate their curricular and extra-curricular agenda for MBA participants in order to maintain a competitive foothold in the area of global leadership development education.

Naturally, faculty-administrator responses may be considered in future exploratory studies of the challenges and opportunities associated with MBA boundary-spanner education. As well, future researchers are advised to look to the marketplace for insight regarding needs for boundary-spanner education. In other words, inputs from entrepreneurs, corporate managers, and community leaders can

significantly inform the boundary-spanner education agenda. And while this study focused on boundary-spanner education that can occur beyond or outside the academic classroom, considerable benefit exists for future studies to investigate formal classroom efforts to further boundary-spanner skill development – i.e. possible emphasis on criticality and transformative learning.

Finally, recommendations have been offered to assist business school leaders in identifying helpful learning experiences and important learning supports and objectives that can be useful to the development of student leaders and boundary spanners.



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**Dear Fellow I/GMBA Student:**

As someone currently enrolled in an I/GMBA program in Taiwan your input will be an integral part of an accurate and useful research report regarding MBA and leadership education. Thank you in advance for completing this survey. Your responses are confidential and specific individuals will not be identifiable.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:**

Please indicate which university you attend?

- NTHU     NCCU     NCKU     NTU     NCTU

What is your current level of enrollment?

- First Year     Second Year

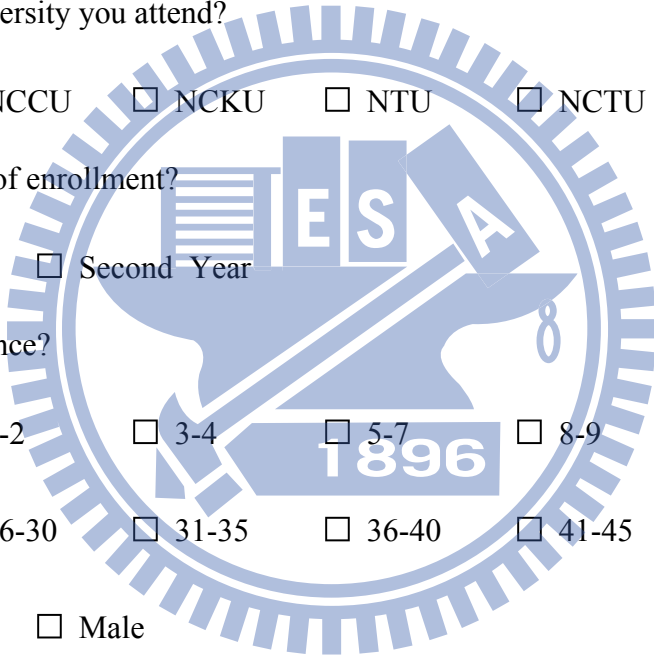
# of years working experience?

- 0     1-2     3-4     5-7     8-9     10+

Age:  20-25     26-30     31-35     36-40     41-45     45+

Gender:     Female     Male

Country of origin: \_\_\_\_\_



*Any questions, contact:*

**Ken Willis, NCTU Global MBA Program, College of Management**

**Email: [willis.his@gmail.com](mailto:willis.his@gmail.com)**

**Cell Phone: 0934442854**

**STUDENT SURVEY**



1. How important are the following items to your management education, using 5 as very important, and 1 as not important, and 0 if you are not sure? Circle (or color code) your answers.

	Very Important				Not Important	Not Sure
a. Peer interaction.	5	4	3	2	1	0
b. Constructive criticism from caring peers.	5	4	3	2	1	0
c. Reflection time to process my learning.	5	4	3	2	1	0
d. Understanding of my strengths and limitations.	5	4	3	2	1	0
e. Understanding of my own values and beliefs.	5	4	3	2	1	0
f. Understanding of values and beliefs of others.	5	4	3	2	1	0
g. Personal transformation and self-improvement.	5	4	3	2	1	0
h. Deeper self-awareness.	5	4	3	2	1	0
i. Personal guidance and faculty advisement.	5	4	3	2	1	0

2. How important are the following abilities for your career, using 5 as very important, and 1 as not important, and 0 if you are not sure? Circle (or color code) your answers.

	Very Important				Not Important	Not Sure
a. Ability to interact and build relationship with people from other countries.	5	4	3	2	1	0
b. Ability to interact and build relationship with people in different professions.	5	4	3	2	1	0
c. Ability to interact and build relationship with people in different organizations.	5	4	3	2	1	0

3. What is your level of engagement with the following activities, using 5 as highly engaged and 0 as not engaged? Circle (or color code) your answers.

	Highly Engaged				Not Engaged	
	i.e. Daily... Weekly... Monthly... Seldom... Never					
a. Spending time to form & maintain friendships with people from different countries.	5	4	3	2	1	0
b. Networking with experienced professionals enrolled in an EMBA program.	5	4	3	2	1	0
c. Cultivating relations with working professionals from corporations nearby.	5	4	3	2	1	0
d. Communicating with students enrolled at other universities.	5	4	3	2	1	0
e. Cultivating relationships with my professors.	5	4	3	2	1	0
f. Seeking constructive feedback from others to understand how my attitudes and behaviors are being interpreted.	5	4	3	2	1	0

4. How satisfied are you with your departments' efforts to support you, using 5 as highly satisfied, and 1 as not satisfied, and 0 if you are not sure? Circle (or color code) your answers.

		Highly Satisfied			Not Satisfied		Sure
a. Amount of personal guidance and advisement from faculty.		5	4	3	2	1	0
b. Assistance in developing your abilities for cross-culture relations.	5	4	3	2	1	0	
c. Help connecting you with working professionals.		5	4	3	2	1	0
d. Help connecting you with people and resources at other schools or organizations.	5	4	3	2	1	0	

**5. Describe your current level of confidence related to the following statements, using 5 as highly confident, and 1 as not confident, and 0 if you are not sure. Circle (or color code) your answers.**

		Highly Confident			Not Confident		Not Sure
a. I understand my own values and beliefs.		5	4	3	2	1	0
b. I understand and respect the values and beliefs of others.		5	4	3	2	1	0
c. I am a good critical-thinker and problem-solver.		5	4	3	2	1	0
d. I have mobilized people and resources to achieve successful outcomes.		5	4	3	2	1	0
e. I have effectively organized students in my department to find solutions to problems?		5	4	3	2	1	0
f. I have effectively coordinated people and resources outside my dept. to achieve a goal.		5	4	3	2	1	0
g. I normally express myself and my position with clarity.		5	4	3	2	1	0
h. I can be influenced by the views of other people.		5	4	3	2	1	0
i. I do not let conflict and criticism harm my relationships.		5	4	3	2	1	0
j. I think it is easy for people to trust me.		5	4	3	2	1	0
k. Finding win-win solutions to problems is my strength.		5	4	3	2	1	0
l. I am an effective networker and can get things done.		5	4	3	2	1	0
m. I am pretty good at reading people and understanding their motivation and behavior.		5	4	3	2	1	0

**6. An internship is required for my graduation?**      \_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_ No

**7. I notice cultural barriers between individuals or groups in my program.**      \_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_ No