

Factors Affecting Career Progress of MBA Students

Vivien T. Supangco

Abstract

This paper explored the factors that affect career progress of students in the MBA program of the University of the Philippines.

To understand career progression, four measures of career progress were used in this study, namely: number of promotions, number of years in between promotions, total cash compensation, and number of administrative levels from the company president. On the other hand, the factors used to explain career progress included human capital, organizational, interpersonal and demographic variables.

The results showed that the different measures of career progress had distinct determinants implying different dynamics. It appeared that measures of career progress that are sensitive to the value employers attach to the individual (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991) such as total compensation, total number of promotion and years per promotion were related with human capital factors such as work experience and number of companies worked for. On the other hand, measures that relate to centrality of the position, in which market forces have less impact, were associated with organizational variables such as organization size and the demographic variable gender.

While gender did not explain variation in total compensation, number of promotions and number of years between promotions, these null results are important for two reasons. First, it implies that the female MBA students were at par with their male counterparts as far as these measures of career progress are concerned. Second, it challenges the generalizability of the finding of gender segregation at the organizational level—where men receive significantly higher wages than women—which is a common finding among studies done in the United States. The results using the MBA students as sample show that income and promotion parity may indeed be achievable and this brings hope to women in general.

However, the statistical significance of gender in explaining career progress as centrality of position does not augur well for women. This result implies that despite the fact that the women in the sample were intelligent (that is, they passed the stringent MBA screening), motivated and obviously were able to manage their time well—being able to balance work, school and in some cases, family responsibilities—they were still far removed from the top. These women still faced some hostile environment that prevented them from fully contributing to making decisions that matter.

Keywords: career progression, career development, career management, career strategies, determinants of career success, career of female MBA students

Introduction

Career progress has become a significant expectation from working to many individuals who spend at least 30 percent of their time at work. Career development efforts are ideally a joint responsibility of the individual and the organization. However, business activities such as downsizing, reengineering and restructuring which result in fewer workers render career development more challenging. This scenario of diminished growth and opportunities presents an impetus for the individual to take a more proactive role in his career development (Feldman, 1996).

This study focuses on career progress of MBA students at the University of the Philippines. Being in the MBA program at the University of the Philippines signifies that the person has an above average intellectual endowment as well as a strong desire and commitment to invest in human capital enhancing activities such as the MBA. For these reasons, it becomes all the more interesting to learn some lessons in career progress from this group of individuals. To make informed decisions about one's career, it is important to understand what factors contribute to career success and why.

Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

1. To describe the career progression of students in the MBA program;
2. To establish some patterns of their career progress; and
3. To determine the factors that contribute to their career progress.

Meanings of career progress

Career progression is associated with work role changes resulting in positive psychological or work related outcomes (London & Stumpf, 1982). It includes not only upward movement along the organizational hierarchy or increasing pay, but also changes resulting in “greater job, career and life satisfaction; feelings of psychological success and self worth; feelings of competence, mastery and achievement; and attainment of organizational rewards such as money, power, prestige and status” (London & Stumpf, 1982).

In most studies, career progress is measured in terms of work related outcomes such as number of promotions (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993), total compensation (Pfeffer & Blake, 1987; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993), current pay grade (Daley, 1996), size of most recent merit increase (Lobel & St. Clair, 1992), as well as career and general work satisfaction (Whitely & Coetsier, 1993). These previous researches on career progress focused on the effect of specific variables such as gender (Pfeffer & Blake, 1987; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; and Daley, 1996), mentoring (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993), and family structure (Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; and Shenav, 1992), among others, on one or two measures of career progress. In this paper, however, the focus is on understanding the factors of career progress using four measures: total cash compensation, number of promotions since graduation, average number of years per promotion and number of rank levels from the company president.

Looking at career progress from its different meanings is important in understanding this phenomenon. This should give us insights into the different dynamics of career progression because from the point of view of the individual, career development involves among others, career planning. The process of career planning involves assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses, and the environment affecting work in general, and making informed decisions about what goals to pursue and how to pursue them. In other words, the individual decides the career goals, the strategies with which to arrive at these goals and the measures by which career progress is evaluated. It has been shown that individuals define career success differently depending on how they assess their career prospects (Ebadan & Winstanley, 1997).

Influences of career progress

Career progress is influenced by several factors including ability, achievement and contributions to an employing organization (Howard & Bray, 1988; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991). It is also recognized that informal interpersonal processes, such as mentoring, influence career progress (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993). In addition, career progress is correlated with such factors as gender (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992; Shenav, 1992; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993; and Daley, 1996), proportion of women in the organization (Pfeffer & Blake, 1987), tenure (Medoff & Abraham, 1980; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992) and average number of hours worked, education, work experience, and continuous work history (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993).

The above factors can be categorized into: human capital, organizational, motivational, demographic, and interpersonal processes (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; and Whitely & Coetsier, 1993).

Human capital factors include experience, education, continuous work history and tenure. Accordingly, investments in human capital result in higher wages to the extent that workers increase productivity as a result of training, learning new skills or perfecting old ones (Becker, 1975). Education is positively related to career progress (Daley, 1996). Moreover, factors such as having an MBA, longer work experience and a continuous work history positively influence compensation (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993). Work experience (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993) and continuous history also positively influence promotion rate (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991).

Organizational factors like organization size and the proportion of women in the organization affect career outcomes. Whitely and Coetsier (1993) reported that organization size positively influences number of promotions but negatively affects career satisfaction. It is thought that larger organizations have greater ability to pay and offer more promotion opportunities (Whitely & Coetsier, 1993). On the other hand, the proportion of women in the organization is negatively associated with compensation (Pfeffer & Blake, 1987). Several perspectives may explain this phenomenon. Economic competition or crowding argument says that when demand for labor is held constant, factors that decrease labor supply increase wages and conversely, factors that increase labor supply decrease wages. Professional licensing, for

example, artificially increases wages as the supply of labor able to practice certain profession or occupation is restricted (Stigler, 1971; Pfeffer, 1974; Pfeffer & Blake, 1987). In the same vein, organizational practices that disallow women from participating in certain jobs in organizations artificially increase wages of men in these positions but decrease wages in jobs where women are allowed to participate and thus were crowded into (Pfeffer & Blake, 1987). Another perspective explaining this phenomenon is institutionalization. Salaries are sometimes based on institutionalized norms and practices. Such practices may be prevalent when there is lack of competition, difficulty in assessing marginal revenue product or where these positions do not exist in the general labor market (Pfeffer & Blake, 1987). When any of these scenarios is coupled with the institutionalized concept that women's work is less valuable, it follows that women are paid less than men are. The greater proportion of women in an organization signals that the work is women's work hence is viewed as "less valuable, critical or economically important," thus resulting in lower wages (Pfeffer & Blake, 1987).

Moreover, motivational factors such as number of hours worked per week positively influence career outcomes (Whitely & Coetsier, 1993; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Daley, 1996). Number of hours worked may indicate work involvement and the drive to excel and it increases the visibility of the worker leading to a more positive assessment by supervisors (Whitely & Coetsier, 1993).

Demographic factors include gender, marital status and age. Gender has been found to affect career progress. Specifically, male employees receive higher compensation and other work related outcomes indicating gender segregation at the organizational level (Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993; Daley, 1996; Glass, 1990; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992). However, when the effects of career identity salience and family responsibility were controlled, the gender differential in merit increases was not significant (Lobel & St. Clair, 1992). However, a study using longitudinal research design (Shenav, 1992) yielded a more promising scenario for women. The study showed that white women's opportunities were better compared to those of white men in the private sector. When the same data set was used in cross sectional analyses, the results showed that in comparison with male and white samples, women and blacks had lower chances to be promoted to managerial positions (Shenav, 1992), which result was more congruent with results supporting gender segregation. The inconsistency in the results was attributed to differences in research design. This is perhaps one area that will have to be looked into.

Another factor found to influence career progress is mentoring. Mentoring is an interpersonal process that encompasses a set of roles and activities such as coaching, support and sponsorship (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991). These roles and activities provide the protégés with the needed technical and interpersonal skills and visibility opportunities that facilitate career progress in the organization. Several studies have documented the positive influence of having a mentor on career progress (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993; and Daley, 1996). In addition, managers from high socioeconomic status benefit more from mentoring than managers from low socioeconomic status (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991). However, a female mentor negatively influences the protege's career progress (Daley, 1996).

In the Philippines, some studies on career progress have focused on factors affecting career success of women (Hoffarth, 1990; Supangco, 1985) and factors contributing to becoming a president of a company (Supangco, 1988). These studies used the managers' attributions of success rather than statistically determining the factors influencing career progress. Factors affecting career success of executive women in selected companies in the Philippines (Supangco, 1985) included skills; work experience; support from boss, husband and parents; hard work; dedication and determination to succeed. In a related study of managerial women in Asia, the study showed that factors contributing to success of these women included hard work, talent, and competence; supportive husband, networking and having a mentor (Hoffarth, 1990). On the other hand, selected company presidents attributed their success to education and training, capacity to motivate and hard work (Supangco, 1988). These studies pointed to human capital and motivational factors as critical to career progress.

Variables

Some indicators to measure the variables in this study were adapted from earlier works in order to provide continuity and comparability of results.

Career progress was measured by the following indicators: number of promotions since graduation, number of years per promotion, total cash compensation, and centrality of position indicated by the number of levels away from the company president. In addition, to determine the factors that influence career progress, the following variables were used: organizational variables including number of employees in the organization, number of

employees in the department, proportion of women in the organization, and proportion of women in the department. For human capital measures, the following were used: tenure in organization, years of work experience, years since graduation, and number of changes in employment. Moreover, motivational variables included hours of work per day and hours of work per week. Interpersonal processes variables included mentoring experience and gender of mentor, while demographic variables included gender, civil status, and age.

The study also looked into career planning practices and strategies used by respondents through open-ended questions.

Methodology

Data was collected in October to November of 1997 using a structured questionnaire. Data for this study was obtained from a convenient sample of 87 MBA students from the University of the Philippines. It was deemed important to test for possible non-response bias. A test of proportions was done in order to ascertain that the convenient sample was similar in structure with the rest of the students who did not respond to the questionnaire. The test revealed that the proportion of female students in the sample was not significantly different from that of the non-respondents ($p<0.197$).

In order to determine the patterns of career progress, the data was analyzed using frequency distributions, means and other appropriate measures of central tendency. To determine the factors that contribute to career progress, several steps were undertaken. The first step was to determine which among the independent variables (those with at least an interval measure were introduced in the equation first) significantly contributed to explaining the dependent variable. For this step, a stepwise regression analysis was used. Once the significant variables were selected, variables with categorical measures were introduced into the model using multiple regression analysis. Only significant independent variables were retained in the final model. Residual plots and other diagnostic tests are not presented in this paper. Only the final models are reported.

Profile of respondents

The sample consisted of 87 MBA students from the University of the Philippines. The average age of the respondents was 28.9 years; 48.3 percent

were female, and 66.7 percent were single. A majority of the respondents, 65.5 percent, graduated from the University of the Philippines. The average number of years since graduation as well as years of work experience was about seven years, implying that work history was generally not interrupted. The respondents occupied positions which, on the average, were about five levels away from the top officers of their organizations. They worked an average of 43.7 hours per week and earned an average annual income of PhP 329,921.

Career progression: Early career experience

Some 68.2 percent of the respondents had career plans at the start of their work history. On a scale of 1 to 5, the median degree to which this plan was specific was 3. The more common career goals included “to gain work experience in relevant fields” (33.3 percent) and “to be in middle management” (24.1 percent). However, about 6.9 percent mentioned that they did not have any career goal.

It appears that the more realistic an individual’s goals were, the more chances he/she had in attaining them. All five respondents with goals, in the early part of their careers, of becoming supervisors achieved them and about sixty-five percent of those who wanted to gain experience in relevant fields did so. However, only 52.4 percent of those who wanted to be in middle management achieved this goal. Still almost a quarter (24.7 percent) of the respondents who set goals at the start of their career did not achieve any of these goals.

Based on the responses of the 57 respondents who answered the questions on career strategy, the more common strategies used to achieve their goals were along the lines of investments in human capital (56.1 percent) either through pursuing an MBA or attending seminars, as well as strategies which were motivational in nature (33.3 percent), such as hard work and the right work attitude. However, some 10.5 percent of the 57 respondents said they did not have any career strategy.

On the average, the respondents worked in about three companies. While the average tenure increased from 2.5 years in the first organization worked for to 2.8 years in the second, the average number of promotions remained about the same (1.7). About 48.2 percent of the respondents reported that they had a mentor and these mentors were usually male (65.8 percent).

Career progression: Current career experience

At the time of the study, which was about seven years after the respondents finished college, more of them reported having career plans—93.1 percent (compared to 68.2 percent at the start of their careers)—and that these plans were more specific. However, the ratio of respondents reporting to having mentors decreased to only 28.2 percent. While the mentors were still predominantly male, the percentage has slightly decreased to 56.5 percent. The respondents worked in their current organization longer compared to their first jobs. On the average, the respondents have worked in their current organizations for the past 4.11 years and expect to stay for another five years. In addition, they also expected to receive a salary increase of about 20 percent in the year following the survey, and another 30 percent two years from the time of this study.

The two more common career goals at the time of the survey were to be in middle management and to own a business. Pursuing an MBA and other human capital enhancing strategies still constitute the more commonly mentioned strategies (81.1 percent). Motivational variables such as hard work have gone down in popularity (7.78 percent), while interpersonal process variable such as networking was being used as a strategy for career success (11.11 percent).

Patterns of career progression

A comparison of the current and early career experiences of the respondents showed an increase in the percentage of respondents having career plans as well as an increase in the degree of specificity of these plans. There was also the tendency for the respondents to stay longer in their current organization compared to when they were only starting to work. However, there was a decrease in the percentage of respondents reporting having mentors as well as in the percentage of male mentors. While the composition of specific goals may have been different, the means to attain these goals remained constant: increasing job knowledge through education and training.

Factors contributing to career progress

In this study, four variables were used to measure career progress. These included number of promotions since graduation, number of years per

promotion, total cash compensation, and number of rank levels away from the company president. The results showed that indeed the different measures of career success have distinct determinants.

Career progress as total number of promotions

The natural logarithm of total number of promotions was used in the final model instead of total number of promotions because the plot of the standardized residual versus standardized predicted values showed (not presented, please consult author) a violation of the homoscedasticity assumption. The resulting final model revealed that number of promotions was positively associated with years of work experience which was significant at $p<0.000$ (almost zero) and negatively related to number of organizations worked for at $p<0.021$; the regression model explained 18.5 percent of variation of the number of promotions (Table 1).

Table 1. Multiple regression and goodness of fit test: Total number of promotions

Variables	Coefficient	VIF	T Value	p Value
Work Experience	0.06	1.22	4.33	0.000
Number of Organizations	-0.10	1.22	-2.36	0.021
Constant	0.70		5.42	0.000
Value				
R Square		18.50		
F		9.54		
F Significance		0.00		
K-S Z		1.17		
2-Tailed p		0.13		

The result showed that work experience was associated with number of promotions and is consistent with the findings of Whately, Dougherty, and Dreher (1991), and of Whately and Coetsier (1993). This result is consistent with the human capital position. To the extent that work experience increases worker productivity through new skills learned on the job as well as the perfecting of old ones (Becker, 1975), number of promotions should increase with work experience. On the other hand, the negative relationship between number of promotions and the number of organizations worked for may also be explained by the fact that individuals who move from one organization to another must learn firm specific skills and perhaps how things are done in the

organization. From the human capital perspective, constant organizational transfer therefore affected upward movement negatively. On the other hand, from the point of view of interpersonal processes, these individuals must invest some time to be visible to top management who must be able to assess their contribution to the organization. This process may have to start anew every time an individual joined an organization.

Career progress as number of years per promotion

Number of years per promotion was positively related with the number of organizations worked for. This relationship was significant at $p<0.004$ and 47.0 percent of the variation in number of years per promotion was accounted for by the regression model.

The human capital perspective may explain the positive relationship between number of years per promotion and number of organizations worked for. Some firm specific skills may have to be learned every time a move is made. Also, from the point of view of interpersonal processes, it would take some time for the individual to be visible to the supervisor who assesses his contribution to the organization and the processes must start every time a move to a new organization was made. Because regression only shows the linear association between variables but not necessarily causation, it could also be that individuals whose upward movement in terms of promotion was slow felt dissatisfied with their organization and hence tended to leave (Table 2).

Table 2. Multiple regression and goodness of fit test: Years per promotion

Variables	Coefficient	VIF	T Value	p Value
Number of Organizations	0.32	1.02	2.94	0.004
Dummy for outliers	-6.99	1.02	-7.58	0.000
Constant	9.23		9.23	0.000
Value				
R Square		47.00		
F		37.22		
F Significance		0.00		
K-S Z		0.92		
2-Tailed p		0.37		

Career progress as total cash compensation

Career progress measured in terms of total cash compensation was positively related with years of work experience. The relationship was significant at $p<0.002$ and 53.60 percent of the variation in total cash compensation was accounted for by the regression model.

The result is consistent with the findings of Pfeffer and Blake (1987), of Whately, Dougherty, and Dreher (1991), and of Whately and Coetsier (1993) which showed that work experience was positively related with total cash compensation. Again this result is consistent with the human capital position. To the extent that experience increases worker productivity through new skills learned on the job as well as the perfecting of old ones (Becker, 1975), total compensation should increase with experience (Table 3).

Table 3. Multiple regression and goodness of fit test: Total cash compensation

Variables	Coefficient	VIF	T Value	p Value
Work experience	11,484.53	1.02	3.19	0.002
Dummy for outliers	-624,602.00	1.02	-8.73	0.000
Constant	851,821.30	-	10.88	0.000

Career progress as number of levels away from the company president

Career progress measured in terms of the number of administrative levels away from the company president as a measure was positively related with organization size, which was significant at $p<0.000$ (almost zero). In addition it was also related with gender, women being farther from the top than men. This relationship was significant at $p<0.013$, and 46.6 percent of the variation in the number of levels from the company president was accounted for by the regression model.

Larger organizations have greater vertical differentiation (Child, 1974). Given that the sample was almost homogeneous in terms of age and educational attainment (all being MBA students), those who worked for larger organizations

tended to occupy more levels away (less central positions) from the company president. While large organizations may offer more promotion opportunities, there may also be more steps to climb before reaching the top of the organization (Whitely & Coetsier, 1993). On the other hand, the finding that women were far removed from top-level positions in organizations supports the concept of the glass ceiling where many women are stuck at the middle management level (Daley, 1996). This may be explained by the institutionalization perspective where organizations limit the participation of women in certain jobs (Pfeffer & Blake, 1987). There is a typecasting of women in certain jobs and occupations based on the assumption that women are weak, passive, people-oriented and dependent (Fenn, 1978). Such a mindset necessarily limits women to lower management positions (Table 4).

Table 4. Multiple regression and goodness of fit test: Number of levels from company president

Variables	Coefficient	VIF	T Value	p Value
Organization size	0.000208	1.00	4.09	0.000
Gender (Female=1)	0.988	1.00	2.55	0.013
Dummy for outliers	-9.170	1.00	-7.08	0.000
Constant	12.780	-	9.87	0.000
Value				
R Square		53.60		
F		48.53		
F Significance		0.00		
K-S Z		1.03		
2-Tailed p		0.24		

Summary and conclusions

The results showed that the different measures of career success had distinct determinants implying different dynamics. As an exploratory work, this study started with several variables to determine which among them explain career success. The study looked into organizational, human capital, motivational, interpersonal and demographic factors. Organizational variables included number of employees in the organization, number of employees in the department, proportion of women in the organization and proportion of women in the department. Human capital variables used were tenure in organization, years of work experience, years since graduation and number of changes in employment. Motivational variables included hours of work per day and hours of work per week. Interpersonal processes included mentoring experience and gender of mentor; and demographic variables included gender,

civil status, and age. While this study started with the above variables, only the following turned out to be significant in explaining the various measures of career progress: the organizational variable size of organization, human capital variables, work experience and number of organizations worked for, and the demographic variable gender.

Total number of promotions was positively related with work experience but negatively related with the number of organizations worked for. Likewise, the number of years in between promotions was positively related with the number of organizations worked for. On the other hand, total compensation was positively related with work experience.

Meanwhile, the number of levels away from the company president was positively associated with the organizational variable size. This measure of career progression was also related with gender, women being farther away from the top.

It appears that measures of career progress that were sensitive to the value employers attach to the individual and are likewise sensitive to market forces (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991) such as total compensation, total number of promotion, and years per promotion were related with human capital factors such as work experience and number of companies worked for. On the other hand, career progress measured in terms of centrality of position, in which market forces have less impact but which is a source of organizational power, was associated with organizational variables such as organization size and the demographic variable gender.

Implications

This study has several implications both at the individual as well as the societal levels. In deriving the implications of the study, one has to look beyond what factors were significant.

Individual

The implications of the results on individual career strategies are straightforward. Strategies may be derived directly from the variables that turned out to be significant in explaining career progression. Career strategies clearly depend on how one wants to evaluate it. This is an important qualification

because career progression includes not only upward movement along the organizational hierarchy or increasing pay, but also changes resulting in “greater job, career and life satisfaction; feelings of psychological success and self worth; feelings of competence, mastery and achievement; and attainment of organizational rewards such as money, power, prestige and status” (London & Stumpf, 1982). Moreover, it is the individual that defines career targets depending on how one sees one’s prospects. Thus when career progress is defined in terms of number of promotions, what seems to be critical are work experience and fewer organizational transfers. What really seems to matter is the firm specific work experience. When career progress is defined to be the speed with which one is promoted, one actually benefits from working for fewer organizations. This implies that one should choose the organization to work for to avoid any costly career mistakes. This calls for the individual to thoroughly assess the different organizations giving job offers and not just grab the first offer that comes along. When career progress is defined in terms of compensation, work experience appears to be the determining factor. However, when the definition of career progress one chooses is the number of levels away from the company president, larger organizations entail more steps to climb and hence more time to get to the top. Gender also affects chances of getting to the top. Because women were found to be far removed from the top post, women therefore should look at the culture of the organization and join those that are not encumbered by traditions or conventions, those that have demonstrated the capacity to believe in women’s worth and in giving them room to grow.

Societal

The societal implications of this study need further elaboration. Although this study focused on the factors affecting career progress of U.P. MBA students, several interesting and significant insights may be derived from it. While the above exposition concentrated on the variables that were significant in explaining career progress, the societal implications seem to be derived from the ones that were not significant; especially those that relate to gender issues such as gender and family responsibility indicated by civil status. It seems that vast insights can be gathered from the variables that did not come out significant. Statistically, it implies that these variables do not explain the differences in the dependent variables as in this study, measures of career success such as total compensation, total number of promotion and years per promotion as well as number of levels away from the company president.

While gender did not explain variation in total compensation, number of promotions and number of years between promotions, this null result is important for two reasons. First, it implies that the women MBA students were at par with their male counterparts as far as total compensation, number of promotions and number of years in between promotions are concerned. The same can also be said about civil status where being married may not necessarily hamper career growth no matter how one defines it. Second, it challenges the generalizability of the finding of gender segregation at the organizational level common among studies done in the United States (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Whitely & Coetsier, 1993; Daley, 1996; Glass, 1990; Lobel & St. Clair, 1992) where men receive significantly higher wages than women. The results using the MBA students as sample show that income and promotion parity may indeed be achievable, and this brings hope to women in general. This study shows that, among others, work experience explains differences in total compensation as well as number of promotions, implying that as long as there is no interruption in one's work history, career success of women in terms of these two measures is no different from those of men's. It is actually possible for some women in the Philippines—those who can afford to have “yayas” or those who have relatives who can take care of child rearing, house-keeping and taking care of the elderly—to have an uninterrupted work history. Thus the above support system seems to enable women in the sample to carve a niche for themselves in the world of work.

However, the statistical significance of the gender variable in explaining centrality of position, as measured by the number of levels away from the company president, does not augur well for women. This result implies that despite the fact that the women in the sample were intelligent (that is, they passed the stringent MBA screening), motivated and obviously were able to manage their time well—to balance work, school and in some cases, family responsibilities—they were still far removed from the top. These women still faced some hostile environment that prevented them from fully contributing to making decisions that matter. This result can only give us a preview of what to expect about the situation of the vast majority of women who may not have the opportunity or capacity to empower themselves through gaining an MBA.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study used a convenient sample of MBA students due to resource constraints; however, it was shown that the sample did not significantly differ from the non-respondents. This gives us the confidence to generalize the results

to the U.P. MBA students. Despite this limitation, some findings are consistent with studies using different populations, particularly in the role of human capital variables such as work experience and number of organizations worked for in explaining career progression. However, this study differs from the others in that it gives a null result for the variable gender and even family responsibility as measured by civil status.

Moreover, the sample, all being MBA students and, therefore, homogeneous in terms of educational attainment, did not allow testing the variable education which some studies (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; and Whitely & Coetsier, 1993) consistently found to be a factor of career progress. Meanwhile, the cross sectional nature of the data limits us from really gaining a true measure of causation. Again limited resources constrain the use of a longitudinal study. This study may thus be replicated using a broader sample and also using a longitudinal research design in order to address the issue of generalizability.

This study also reveals interesting insights regarding the effect of gender on career progress. Career success measured in terms of salary and promotion may have impact only on the individual. However, career success in terms of centrality of position would have impact beyond the individual because then, having a position that is more central to the organization enables one to contribute to important decisions. Especially when decisions affect the quality of working lives of other women, the issue of improving one's chance of obtaining a more central position becomes an important societal concern. Future studies along this line should be worth looking into.

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Vivien T. Supangco is Associate Professor at the College of Business Administration, University of the Philippines Diliman.