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Author(s): Naveda Kitchlew, Sami Bajwa, Khuram Shahzad, Haris Aslam

Affiliation: University of Management and Technology Lahore, Pakistan

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Department of Economics and Statistics, Dr. Hasan Murad School of
Management, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

Evaluation of Executive Education Programs to Enhance Mid-Career Employees' Role-based Performance: An Organizational Perspective

Naveda Kitchlew, Sami Bajwa, Khuram Shahzad* and Haris Aslam

University of Management and Technology Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Executive MBA (EMBA) program from an employers' perspective in Pakistan. The study adopts a role-based performance lens to evaluate the extent to which an EMBA program has met the sponsoring organizations' expectations in terms of enhancing the role-based performance of their mid-career employees. Data was collected, through a structured self-administered questionnaire, from 140 EMBA graduates linked to 99 sponsoring organizations in Pakistan. The findings indicate that employers consider job-related tasks the most important aspect of employee performance, followed by teamwork, career development, innovation, and extra role behaviours such as citizenship. Overall, employers are satisfied with the post-EMBA role-based performance of their graduate employees. However, there exists a negative gap between what employers expect from the EMBA program and what these programs deliver in terms of enhancing role-based performance of mid-career employees.

Keywords: mid-career employees, pakistan, effectiveness, evaluation, executive mba.

Introduction

Executive education serves as an important tool, for organizations, to enhance the capabilities of their mid-career managers' (Conger & Xin, 2000; Long, 2004). Many professional institutions and universities are offering executive education programs to address the organizations' managerial capability gap (de Vries, et al., 2020). These programs are usually designed for mid-career, experienced managers who seek to enhance their skills in order to become more effective in their roles, at their

*Corresponding Author: khuram.shahzad@umt.edu.pk

organizations (Dubas, et al., [1998](#)). More specifically the program aims to develop creative and critical thinking among individuals by improving their leadership skills, management competencies, and professional behaviour (Kirby, [2004](#)). In this vein, university-based Executive Masters of Business Administration (EMBA) programs are considered an important tool for enhancing the overall managerial competencies and performance of mid-career employees' at the workplace (Dubas et al., [1998](#)) which resultantly provides a human capital based competitive advantage to firms (Longenecker & Ariss, [2002](#)).

Although, EMBA programs have generally been found to be positively associated with knowledge and skill development, concerns still remain regarding its efficacy in effectively fulfilling the expectations of employers and employees (Han & [Liang, 2015](#); de Vries, et al., [2020](#)). Concerns have been raised by both scholars and practitioners regarding the practicality and importance of the program's delivered outcomes for professionals and organizations; and the evaluation of the opportunity cost of money and time which organizations and individuals spend (Long, [2004](#); Fisher, et al., [2007](#)). These concerns seem logical as organizations and individuals seek to juxtapose the expense and time, which they incur on tuition fee and traveling, with its effectiveness in helping to transfer and enhance their learning and performance at the workplace (Conger & Xin, [2000](#); Crotty & Soule, [1997](#); Long, [2004](#); Myrsiades, [2001](#)). Most importantly, in the prevailing situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the order of the whole world in general and corporate sector in particular has changed and this has led to a breakdown or a breakthrough for organizations. This may be a time where organizations expect the most from their EMBA graduate employees. Especially, how they utilize their instincts and insights; developed through the EMBA program; to lead and respond in this crisis. Aiming to ensure that their organization and its members are supported (Dirani, et al., [2020](#)). Taken together, these scenarios therefore call for a robust and outcome-based evidence pertaining to the effectiveness of EMBA programs in understanding and fulfilling the challenging requirements of key stakeholders (Hsu, et al., [2009](#)).

Many previous studies have highlighted the interrelatedness of executive education with the employee and eventually the organizations

performance and growth (Harrison, et al., [2007](#); Mento, et al., [1999](#); Tushman & O'Reilly, [2007](#)). The question, however, as raised by Harrison et al. ([2007](#)), relates to the role that universities play, by providing executive education, in capability enhancement of practitioners and its consequent impact on a graduates' workplace performance. This remains an understudied and under-researched area. Universities are largely criticized due to their overwhelming focus on theoretical concepts and a lack of attention on real-time organizational issues and needs. This lag between academic research and management practices is not going to go away easily as practitioners and scholars both are haunted by this theory-practice dilemma (Voronov & Yorks, [2005](#)). To this end, literature on Executive MBA programs highlights a need for investigating the Executive MBA programs' effectiveness in terms of relevance and in responding to the true needs and expectations of its participants and the organization (Fine, [2007](#)).

In view of the above, the question whether Executive MBA programs fulfil the requirements, from the viewpoint of the business world, is important and deserves attention (Haskins, et al., [2020](#); Ray & Jeon, [2008](#)). Literature indicates that, amidst rapid technological advancements, rising customer demands and resultant competition employers expect their employees to take on more multifaceted tasks and roles (Fogaça, et al., [2018](#)). These expectations range from performing typical job-related tasks to extra roles (i.e. teamwork and citizenship behaviour) that directly contribute to the organization's strategic objectives such as innovation, performance and competitive advantage (Welbourne, et al., [1998](#)). Although the literature during the last many decades has been overwhelmed with job-related aspects of employee performance, contemporary scholars have started paying attention to the roles that also constitute employee performance and the organization's overall effectiveness (Bateman & Organ, [1983](#); Welbourne, et al., [1998](#)). The use of multiple roles, as indicators of managerial performance in this study is consistent with (Kirkpatrick, [2009](#)) four-level evaluation model and (Welbourne, et al., [1998](#)) role-based performance framework. Feedback and satisfaction of sponsoring organizations in this regard is very significant, as they are the ones who bear the cost of education and suffer in terms of time and productivity loss when their employee is completing the degree.

This is particularly important in case of developing countries like Pakistan, which lack dedicated executive development platforms and therefore, the industry relies heavily upon universities to fulfil its requirement of skilled man power, especially at middle management level (Kitchlew, [2020](#)). Industry officials in Pakistan frequently criticize MBA and EMBA programs due to a lack of its applicability and practical approach. Thus providing the scope of this research work which explores the extent to which the Executive MBA program enhances the performance of graduate managers at the workplace. Furthermore, this research work aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Executive MBA programs from the industry's perspective and identify any gaps between the industry's expectations and academic institutions' offerings. Very little research is available that encompasses the impact of Executive MBA on managers' real-time role-based performance at the workplace in the case of Pakistan in particular.

Therefore, the main research question of this study is as follows “Do Executive MBA programs in Pakistan meet or exceed the organization's expectations in terms of enhancing mid-career managers' post-degree role-based performance at the workplace?”

This study draws upon the Adult Learning Theory and Role Theory to develop role-based performance criteria to provide a uniquely multifaceted approach of examining the effectiveness of Executive MBA programs. Drawing on this model, the current study aims to measure which roles of middle tier employees are considered more important by the organization, and what is their perceived satisfaction with EMBA graduates in performing those roles. The current research work is significant as it is extending the applicability of the executive education effectiveness framework to user-centered role-based performance expectations.

Literature Review

Employee Development in Organizations

The ever-changing and challenging business world has made organizations realize that they can be competitively advantageous through value creating resources (Clulow, et al., [2003](#)). Researchers have concluded that among all the resources that a firm has; knowledge and

competencies possessed by their human resource directly impacts its competitive advantage (Manroop, [2015](#)). The role of education and training appears to be very significant in creating new knowledge and improving the organization's processes and functions in order to counter internal and external change that demands current knowledge and further keeping it updated over the course of time (Gil, et al., [2015](#)). Organizations build their respective knowledge and skill repositories by focusing upon the continuous development of their managers, especially the middle tier.

Literature suggests that middle tier managers are the most significant layer in any organization and that their role is multifaceted in the organization's success (Ou, et al., [2017](#)). Middle tier managers contribute strategically to the competitiveness of an organization through their respective roles and by readily adapting to strategic changes (Braaf et al., [2011](#)). They further accelerate the process of cultural transformation within an organization and bring holistic changes in its overall structure and processes (Braaf et al., [2011](#); Rouleau & Balogun, [2011](#)). The mental models of managers and their attitude towards change is very important as it ensures their involvement and support for change, utilizing their confidence (Valle & Teresa, [2006](#)). Organizations, in this regard, are cautioned to pay extra attention to their middle management because this level influences organizational performance unlike any other tier of management (Al-Hakim & Hassan, [2011](#)). Concluding the above discussion regarding the multi-dimensional role of middle managers in an organization, it seems that their role is less physical and more mental. Therefore, their cognitive development, mental richness, professional knowledge, behavioural modifications and communicative competence are key faculties that enable them to perform their job better.

The Role of Executive Education in Employee Development

Executive education is built on the theory of adult learning. Adult learning stems from the theory of Andragogy, which was developed by Malcolm Knowles in 1980. This theory is considered among the most well-known theories in adult teaching (Glickman, et al., [2013](#)). It postulates that adults are intrinsically motivated and self-directed individuals who apply knowledge during the course of their learning to readily solve problems related to developmental tasks evolving at their workplace (Blondy, [2007](#)).

Studies have found that different learning models help executive participants apply what they have learnt in their work environment. Whereas experiential team based learning models seemed helpful in entrepreneurial setting and boost learning cycles (Blackwood, et al., [2014](#)). There is a large consensus among scholars and practitioners that executive education is purely a targeted education. Hence, a blend of participant and instructor centred approach would be more helpful as opposed to a conventional teaching approach; as interactive sessions appear to be more pragmatic and provide work place acquainted teaching. It is further predisposed towards targeted knowledge and skill development among executive participants (Dover, et al., [2018](#); de Vries, et al., [2020](#)).

Executive MBA programs provide individuals with the required competencies that expedite career progression. One of the significant objectives of the Executive MBA program is to equip middle or senior-level managers with professional and leadership skills. Since these skills have become very critical for organizational success, a significant amount of resources are invested by organizations and individuals in executive education to minimize the knowledge gap between management theory and leadership practices (Wright & Koltz, [2017](#)). There is a greater demand for professionals who can multitask and take effective, profitable decisions. Therefore, an increasing number of employees are taking the opportunity to avail continuing education programs being offered by their organizations as fringe benefits. Hall and Ko ([2014](#)) derived a list of specific learning goals, which are opted by sponsoring organizations and linked with many EMBA programs, such as “strategic perspectives, decision making, leadership, change management, innovation and globalization”. Organizations are keen to equip their senior managers with these skills so that they perform at the desired level.

Expectations from Executive MBA Programs

The Executive MBA program fundamentally aims to satisfy the organization’s needs by transforming individuals into competent managers, endowed with leadership skills, through customized and distinct curricula (Siegert, [2008](#); Edwards, Elliott, Iszatt-White, & Schedlitzki, 2013). However, meeting the diverse expectations of its stakeholders i.e. organizations and participants has always been an arduous task for such

programs. On the one hand the program has to meet the participant's objective of development and rewards and on the other hand the organizations demand for effective and ethical managers/leaders. To achieve this executive education institutes are continuously learning and innovating.

Executive education provides countless benefits to managers in terms of improved individual and team performance, superior networking at higher levels, development of new perspectives, assimilation of the latest and advanced material taught by a highly qualified faculty having both corporate and academic experience. According to Noe, et al. (2014) EMBA participants acquire important knowledge, new ways of thinking and looking at the problems with enhanced confidence. The future of every organization depends upon such managers who can efficiently and effectively cope with a complex and dynamic business environment. Hence, managers are trained to think in a broader context, understand more comprehensively and act in a more sophisticated manner. Overall, the Executive MBA is expected to provide participants with advanced applicable knowledge and skills that should satisfy participants' aspirations as well as the companies' needs.

Dizik (2008) has noticed that executive participants enjoy meeting and networking with their class-fellows and professors. Participants also view their Executive MBA to reduce tension and stress, brought about by greater demands at their workplace. Besides is Executive MBA is usually undertaken for financial gain and motivational reasons. Compensation is also a significant motivational factor for executive graduate participants, as upon the completion of their Executive MBA degree, they expect substantial salary increments along with promotions.

A typical pool of participants consists of early to mid-career executives who are looking to fulfil both needs. This is perhaps a reason why Executive MBA programs are offered as a retention mechanism, sponsored by large organizations. Apart from this, executive education also enables the participants to realize their self-esteem needs as highlighted by Maslow's hierarchical 'pyramid' of motivational needs, the fulfilment of which leads to self-actualization.

Summing up the above discussion, EMBA students utilize the program to become effective leaders and managers by developing their knowledge, intuitive judgment, learning, critical thinking, and networking skills.

Professional Development and Executive Education in Pakistan

Pakistan remains focused on maintaining macroeconomic stability, growth, mobilizing domestic resources and increasing exports, balanced regional development and providing safety nets to vulnerable groups. Industries and companies across the country need managerial staff, especially at the middle management tier, through which they can succeed in the face of rapid business disruptions. Organizations develop these managers either by directly hiring from recognized institutions across Pakistan or by providing the required qualification to their junior managers through sponsored executive education. Since, the labour market in Pakistan lacks skilled and trained middle-level managers, the role of educational institutions become crucial in providing industry-specific knowledge and skill. A main concern, however, is the ability of the educational institute to translate and transform the needs and wants of the industrial sector into action. Educational institutions are expected to provide the industry with skilled human capital but unfortunately, their role comes into question when the the end product (the students) enter the market unaligned with the needs and demands of industry (Abbasi, et al., [2011](#)). Specific research in this area is not readily available in Pakistan. However, educational institutes are criticized for their lack of research orientation. The provision of curriculum and teaching methods also seem highly disconnected from the market (Memon, [2007](#)).

The requirements of the industry need to be addressed by the institution in a joint effort. Universities produce graduates and the industry accommodates them, measuring their quality, as they are the ones paying the price (Karatepe, et al., [2005](#)). Employers closely focus on a desired set of skills including intellectual, personal, social and professional (Raza, et al., [2010](#)). EMBA programs being offered in Pakistan claim to provide working managers the opportunity to upgrade their skill and qualification despite working in a modestly progressive business environment (HEC Annual Report [2009-10](#)). In 2002 The Higher Education Commission (HEC) was established. Its purpose was to meet the challenges of the 21st

Century, regarding the development of intellectual human capital, through restructuring the higher education sector of Pakistan. The Commission established a Medium Term Development Framework for Higher Education (MTDF-HE) outlining the intellectual development preference from 2005 till 2010. The duration of the EMBA program in Pakistan ranges from 24 to 36 months with classes being held in the evening. Thereby allowing in-service managers to undertake this academic up-skilling with ease. EMBA programs in Pakistan are intended to deliver in-service managers with complete exposure to management theory and applied skills so that they can become better professionals, active front-runners, accomplished and more industrious organizational workers. Though, there is a need to deeply examine the inconsistency between what is claimed by universities and the quality of graduates it produces.

Theoretical Framework

This research intends to evaluate the impact of Executive MBA programs on mid-career managers' role-based performance. The major assumption behind this study is that executive education can develop certain skills and capabilities that enable participants to effectively perform critical roles within the organization. The theoretical rationale behind the proposed link between education and role-based performance is derived from Adult Learning Theory and Role Theory. Adult learning stems from the theory of Andragogy, which was developed by (Knowles, [1980](#)). This theory is well-known in adult teaching (Glickman et al., [2001](#)). Based on the principles of Adult Learning Theory, adult education programs are designed to change the values and attitudes of an individual, ultimately instilling productive behaviour (Rivera, [1973](#)). Adult learning programs are envisaged as tools that contribute towards organizational performance. Hence, both researchers and professionals, are in search of frameworks that could explain the process through which individual learning transforms into managerial roles and performance. The use of multiple roles as indicators of managerial performance in this study is consistent with (Kirkpatrick, [2009](#)) the Four-level Evaluation Model and (Welbourne et al., [1998](#)) the Role-Based Performance Framework. The Role-Based Framework developed by Welbourne et al. ([1998](#)) explains why roles should be used as a multidimensional performance measure and which dimensions to include

a work performance model. According to this employee performance should be measured, in a business perspective, by using a theory-led multidimensional approach. This approach includes five different roles such as job, career, teamwork, innovation, and citizenship.

Methodology

Survey Procedure

A list of around 800 HR professionals, containing contact details, i.e. emails, cell numbers, addresses, was obtained from a company which had been conducting monthly HR forums (workshops/seminars) since the last 10 years across different cities in Pakistan. HR professionals were targeted because the study wanted to obtain performance feedback of EMBA graduates from a third-party. Therefore, HR managers were expected to have both the objective and subjective information regarding the performance of their EMBA graduate employees. Selection of HR managers was important to avoid possibility of social desirability, commonly referred to as common method bias, which in the case of employees could be high (Podsakoff, et al., 2003). This study included only those behavioural roles that were part of an organization's formal system. On the basis of which decisions of increment and promotions, of EMBA graduate employees, were made within the organization. To ensure that the response came from the correct sample population, it was explicitly mentioned in the 'participant information sheet' that this questionnaire will be completed only by HR managers, as they formally appraise EMBA graduate's performance.

An email, with reference to the forum's organizers, stating the objective of the survey was sent to HR managers of the EMBA graduate organizations requesting their support in data collection. Around 30% of the emails bounced back due to the inability of the server to identify the valid recipient, around 200 emails expired and were thus deleted from the reminders list. Over the period of two months, 185 responses were received out of which 140 met the study's criteria. 45 questionnaires were dropped due to high number of missing or vague responses.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire for this study was developed by following a rigorous process suggested by Rea and Parker (2014). It consisted of the following steps: 1) the selection of items from the literature, 2) interview with respondents, 3) consulting an experts panel and 4) pilot testing.

The study implemented a role-based performance scale, as proposed by Welbourne et al. (1998), which originally contained 20 items against five performance dimensions namely job, career, innovation, teamwork, and citizenship. The original instrument was developed and tested in a western context, to ensure its relevance in this study's context, which is primarily eastern, the content and questions of this instrument were discussed with academics and organizations. During this procedure, five new performance indicators were identified and included in the original instrument with minor changes in the language. In consultation with experts and the related literature, one item was included in an existing dimension i.e. teamwork and the other four items incorporated in a new factor termed as managerial behaviours. The final instrument carried 25 field questions related to role-based performance indicators to be rated by respondent organizations against the importance of those indicators in their formal appraisal system, and current performance of their Executive MBA graduate/s on those indicators. The final questionnaire, after careful examination, was sent to five Pakistani and one overseas professor. After adding their feedback, the questionnaire was then sent to working HR professionals for further feedback and validation. After adding their feedback, the questionnaire was pilot tested on a sample of 30 respondents using convenience sampling. For instance, HR managers from 10 organizations, that were selected from the list provided by one university, were asked to rate their middle managers' performance against the given set of questions. However, representation of different business organizations was ensured to avoid any possible bias. Consequently, organizations of medium to large size, private and public, manufacturing and services and local and international were included in the pilot test.

This study used a self-administered structured questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three parts. The first part included general information related to the participating organization

and the executive MBA graduates. The second part included information related to the importance of Role-based Performance dimensions by the respondent organizations. The third part included the perception of the organization about the performance of executive MBA graduate managers against given the given role-based performance dimensions.

Role-based performance-Importance Dimension: The importance of role-based performance indicators was measured against performance dimensions, as proposed by Welbourne et al. (1998), on a rating scale of 1 to 5 where 1 denoted “not at all important”, and 5 denoted “indispensable”. The main heading was “please indicate the extent to which the given indicators are considered important by your company’s formal performance appraisal system. Sample questions included “quantity of work and quality of work”.

Role-based performance-Effectiveness Dimension: The performance of executive MBA graduates was measured against the same performance dimensions (Welbourne et al., 1998), on a semantic rating scale of 1 to 5 where 1 denoted “needs much improvement”, and 5 denoted “excellent”. The main heading was “please rate the performance of your executive MBA degree holder employee against the same given indicators”. Sample dimensions of performance included “quantity of work and “quality of work”.

Respondents

The demographic profile of this study encompassed information about the respondent organizations and the Executive MBA graduates whose performance feedback was obtained from their respective employers. In total, 93 organizations from almost all the leading industries i.e. banking, telecommunication, pharmaceuticals and education participated in this study’s survey. The sample contained a balanced representation of manufacturing and services, national and multinational and private and public organizations. 74 percent (N-69) of the respondent organizations formally sponsor/encourage their employees to receive executive education. 54 percent (N-50) respondents were relatively large-scale firms employing over a 1000 people, whereas only 11 percent (N-10) belonged to small scale organizations. Regarding Executive MBA graduates’ gender, most of the

graduates were male i.e. 71 percent. 43 percent graduates had a CGPA above 3.5 out of 4.00, and 78 percent graduates had served more than five but less than ten years in the same organization, at the time of data collection.

Factor Analysis

Maximum Likelihood with Varimax rotation method and Eigenvalues greater than one were applied to 25 items related to the importance of performance indicators. Analysis revealed a five-factor structure with 24 items explaining 67 percent of the variance. One item could not meet any criteria and thus was omitted from the analysis. The highest variance of 45 percentage, with maximum items loadings, was explained by the first factor. The Kaiser and Bartlett test values were also within acceptable range. Table-1 depicts the factor structure in descending order of respective items loadings. The internal reliability scores for each of the five subscales and full-length instrument were greater than 0.80.

One item that was originally related to organizational citizenship behaviour loaded on the team related performance dimension. According to Hofstede, in individualistic cultures, individuals tend to be more focused on their self-interest and are less concerned with social cohesion especially if it is at the expense of personal loss. Collectivist cultures, on the other hand, highly regard social binding and prefer to be identified with groups in exchange for loyalty and personal favours (Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2007). This logic can be applied in this OCB's item loading on teamwork. Welbourne et al. (1998) developed and tested this instrument in a Western context, which according to Hofstede's study carries individualistic orientation. Observed from the standpoint of western culture, it is quite logical to categorize any helpful behaviour beyond the scope of the job like citizenship. However, in this study's eastern context, which according to Hofstede contains a collectivist orientation; where social harmony and group identity are more important; it is quite reasonable to expect and consider 'helping behaviour' as part of team work instead of citizenship. (Davidson, et al., 1976) asserted that in a collectivist culture the focus of an individual would be to develop close ties with their social group and to promote the group's interest instead of their own. The logical explanation of the loading of three new items on the job related performance

i.e. 1) adhering to rules and disciplinary requirements, 2) demonstrating ethical behaviours, and 3) making informed and calculated decisions, can be derived from the theory as the issue of decision making, control, and ethics in managerial roles has long been the concern of organizations (Mintzberg, [1979](#); Perrow & Perrow, [1970](#); Simon, [1957](#)). Decision making is considered a key skill in every managerial position. The success, growth, and failure of an organization hinges on a managers' decision making skills (Daft, [2009](#)).

The process of making a choice greatly depends on the ethical values and interests of the manager. Especially when evaluating between alternatives. There is risk, uncertainty and conflict in decision making accompanied with the bounded rationality phenomenon. Hence, organizations apply checks or controls on a manager's behaviour to avoid any unpleasant consequences (Daft, [2009](#)). Control is a systematic process that helps organizational members watch their behaviour in light of planned targets and set performance standards (Otley, [1999](#)). Although, such targets or performance standards are set by the managers, adherence to these established standards becomes a crucial part of a managers' job (Alvesson & Willmott, [2002](#)). In view of the arguments given above three dimensions under the job-related performance indicators have been included in the analysis.

Table 1

Factor Analysis with Respective Items Loadings

Role-based Performance Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
1. Job Performance (α .870)					
1- Quality of Work	.654				
2- Customer service provided (internal and external)	.601				
3- Quantity of Work	.595				
4- Adhering to rules and disciplinary requirements	.594				
5- Demonstrating ethical behaviours	.548				
6- Accuracy of work	.532				

Role-based Performance Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
7- Making informed and calculated decisions	.503				
2. Team Performance (α .882)					
8- Making sure his/her work group succeeds	.709				
9- Responding to the needs of others in his/her work group	.708				
10- Sharing knowledge/experiences with others	.626				
11- Seeking information from others in his/her work group	.609				
12- Working as part of a team or work group	.575				
13- Doing things that help others when it's not part of job	.532				
3. Career Performance (α .834)					
14- Making progress in his/her career	.701				
15- Seeking out career opportunities	.657				
16- Developing skills needed for his/her future career	.641				
17- Obtaining personal career goals	.573				
4. Innovation Performance (α .879)					
18- Working to implement new ideas	.734				
19- Finding improved ways to do things	.694				
20- Coming up with new ideas	.567				
21- Creating better processes and routines	.466				
5. OCB Performance (α .835)					
22- Doing things to promote the company	.807				
23- Helping so that the company is a good place to be	.708				
24- Working for the overall good of the company	.537				

Findings

This research aimed to identify the extent to which Executive MBA programs had been responding effectively to the needs and demands of the industry. Specifically in terms of developing knowledge, skill and attitude of the participants which would increase their role-based performance at the workplace after the completion of their degree program. For this purpose 24 indicators were used that measured 5 different role-based performance dimensions which consist of the following: Job (7 items), Career (4 items), Innovation (4 items), Teamwork (6 items), and Citizenship (3 items). To measure the level of satisfaction of the employing organization with the EMBA program; this study adopted a relatively unique approach developed by (Abduh, et al., [2007](#)) and later used and endorsed by (Lilai, [2010](#); Shahzad, et al., [2012](#)). This approach is indirectly consistent with the gap five of the SERVQUAL model as proposed by Parasuraman, et al. ([2004](#)) which measures the organizations' performance expectations (importance of performance dimensions/indicators) against the actual level of performance received (actual performance delivered by graduates at workplace) by Executive MBA graduates. This is measured in terms of the level of importance the organization gives to different role-based indicators in managerial performance and the organization's perception concerning the effectiveness of the EMBA program in developing the participant's capabilities in those specific indicators. An organization will be considered satisfied when the score of actual rated performance of EMBA degree holder employee against any given performance indicator will be greater than the score of perceived importance of the same performance indicator. Similarly an organization will be considered dissatisfied when the score of the perceived importance of any specific performance indicators will be greater than the score of actual performance of any EMBA degree holder employee against the same performance indicator. This technique will be helpful in categorizing a set of performance indicators with regard to organizations' level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the marked difference between expected and received performance (Abduh et al., [2007](#)).

The findings reveal that overall organizations were highly satisfaction with the Executive MBA program used to enhance mid-career managers'

post-degree role-based work place performance. Table-2 depicts that organizations rated their executive MBA graduates' performance "good" as the average score in all five performance dimensions. Meaning that all were assigned a rating of 4 on the scale. Organizations' satisfaction with managers' job-related performance was highest (Mean; 3.58), followed by OCB (Mean: 3.51), Career (Mean: 3.49), Teamwork (Mean: 3.49), and Innovation (Mean: 3.48).

A Paired-Samples T-test was applied to compare the perceptions of the organization regarding the importance of the five role-based performance dimensions and the Executive MBA degree holder managers' performance in those dimensions. The aim was to identify any significant differences in the importance-satisfaction domain. Paired-Sample T-test is a statistical tool that can be used to compare the means of the same group with two related dimensions. In this study, this test was used to compare the difference of perception of organizations about two different matters i.e. importance of performance indicators, and actual performance of EMBA graduate managers in those indicators. The use of paired sample t-test for mean comparison is very common in interdisciplinary researches (Bradley, et al., [1999](#); Hendrickson, et al., [1993](#); Mee & Chua, [1991](#)).

The mean difference between the importance and effectiveness was calculated by subtracting the importance score from the actually rated performance score and by setting the suggested confidence level. A positive mean difference would be interpreted as the program exceeds expectations, and vice versa. For instance, numerically speaking, if an organization rates innovation as a 4 on a scale of 5 then it implies that innovation is an important indicator of its managerial performance, and if it rates the actual performance of an employee as 5 against the same performance indicator. Then this may be considered as a proxy that that employee exceeds the organization's expectations in terms of performance against that specific indicator (i.e. actual performance minus perceived importance of performance; means $5 - 4 = +1$), and vice versa.

Table-2 shows a significant negative difference for all performance dimensions in the organization regarding the perceived importance of the given five indicators for managers' performance and the actual rated performance of the Executive MBA graduate managers in these

performance dimensions. In absolute terms, this difference is not huge, but in relative terms, it is highest in the case of job-related performance (Mean: -0.37) and lowest in the case of OCB (Mean: -0.13). Teamwork (Mean: -0.27), innovation (Mean: -0.24), and career (Mean: -0.21) have also received negative feedback.

Table 2

Paired-Samples t-test: Difference between importance and satisfaction dimensions

Performance Indicators	Perceived Importance	Perceived Effectiveness	Mean Difference (E-I)	Significance
Job	3.95	3.58	-0.37	.001
Career	3.70	3.49	-0.21	.003
Innovation	3.68	3.44	-0.24	.002
Team Work	3.75	3.48	-0.27	.001
OCB	3.64	3.51	-0.13	.046

Note. Negative (-) sign means EMBA does not meet role based performance expectation.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate if Executive MBA programs in Pakistan meet/exceed the organizations' expectations by enhancing graduate managers' role-based performance at the workplace. The results illustrate that despite being satisfied with the effectiveness of EMBA programs, as per the role-based model, organizations perceive a considerable gap between the desired and actual level of performance of these programs. The results show that organizations considered task and team related roles the most important dimension of employee performance. However, as per the findings of this study, the satisfaction level of organizations with both these dimensions did not exceed their expectations. In other words, the measurement of effectiveness of EMBA through role-based performance indicators, besides showing an overall satisfaction of the organizations with EMBA graduates, have substantiated the concern that there is a significant gap between what is being offered and what is expected. This explains the decline in the organization's interest with

regards to investing in their employees' development and executive education programs (Ray & Jeon, [2008](#)). It is also pertinent to note that in the current study the gap in perceived importance and performance against roles has been found in all five roles studied. This overall underscoring of perceived effectiveness compared with desired level reiterates the theory-practice dilemma; that the requirements for a practical orientation, which essentially is embedded in home-grown differences of organization, cannot be easily extracted and explicated in 'theory'; and therefore gap between theory and practice widens (Mintzberg, [2004](#); Yorks, [2005](#)). Nevertheless, re-designing the graduate curriculum and adopting new strategies in graduate business schools is important and carries considerable weight (Hsu, et al., [2009](#); Conine Jr. & Peratoner, [2019](#)). Diversification, globalization, future interfaces, and demographics are core features that must be incorporated in graduate education. A similar argument has been presented by Peter Lorange that most business schools are teaching theoretical concepts rather than problem solving and decision making skills (Lorange, [2013](#)).

Nonetheless, these findings have rather far reaching implications for universities, students and organizations. It is important to consider that within organizations, as propagated by the quality management approach of performance management, there are always system factors which play a decisive role in enabling and constraining employee perform (de Vries, et al., [2020](#)). These factors must be incorporated when measuring performance. This is particularly true for the innovation dimension, given the fact that both the quality approach of performance management as well as the system and learning organizational theory argue that innovation requires a synergetic combination of various organization/system factors and therefore demands innovation from employees (Caputo, et al., [2019](#)).

Another reason for this persistent gap could be the objective and motives of the individuals pursuing the EMBA program. The Executive MBA is usually undertaken for financial gain as well as motivational reasons. The literature has identified compensation as a significant motivational factor for executive graduates. Participants expect that the Executive MBA program will help them develop analytical thinking, self-esteem, and confidence. Dizik ([2008](#)) has noticed that executive participants enjoy

meeting with their class-fellows and professors, and networking with them. Participants also see their Executive MBA as a source to reduce the tension and stress which they are exposed to at their workplace because of escalating demands (Jacobs, [1999](#)). For the sake of job improvement EMBA students objectively plan to learn new skills during the program. This could be an important variable in relation with EMBA and effectiveness on the job and other related roles (Haskins, et al., [2020](#)).

Universities have been criticized for accepting admissions, into the executive MBA program, without setting any standards. Thereby using the program as a pure money-making venture (Byrne, [1991](#)). Similarly, many HRD specialists and practitioners have shown serious concerns apropos the high cost of executive education and whether such costs are justified and help managers reduce their management knowledge gaps. This is evident from the fact that in the past couple of years, corporate sponsorships for EMBA programs in the United States of America has dramatically declined resulting in students having to paying out of pocket (Speizer, [2007](#)).

To summarize, Executive MBA programs fundamentally aims to satisfy the organizations' needs by developing competent managers with leadership skills through customized education. EMBA programs target middle to senior level executives lacking formal business education or an MBA degree. The rapidly growing needs of an organization for quality managers can only be met through training, research initiatives and executive education. Training and research are more objective, task focused and limited time activities. Whereas, executive education (EMBA) is by far the most comprehensive, compact and multi-dimensional approach that develops mentally robust managers, fully equipped to play a pivotal role in the rapidly changing environment (Dover, et al., [2018](#)).

Implications

The findings have implications for organizations, universities, mid-career professional as well as for researchers. Insofar as organizations are concerned EMBA programs are valid and robust Andragogical tools for augmenting knowledge, skills and developing the behaviour of middle tier professionals. Enabling them to cater to the emerging challenges within the organizations (Hsu, et al., [2009](#)). The observed gap between the perceived

important roles and the efficacy of EMBA graduates against these roles, demonstrates that organizations need to give due consideration to system factors and the environment in which employees perform at their expected levels (Kitchlew, [2020](#)). Furthermore, organizations need to work towards building a close collaboration with universities and be more open to sharing their problems and demands with them enabling universities to design demand-driven curriculum and need-based teaching methods for EMBA graduates.

Executive MBA graduates must understand that the chances of financial gains and career progression increase only when they learn to apply this acquired knowledge and skill to the workplace and bring improvements in their roles (Haskins, et al., [2020](#)). While the EMBA program provides them with knowledge, motivation, critical thinking and analytical ability it only matters if it translates into improved performance.

Universities had been criticized for accepting admission to the Executive MBA without setting any standard and making it a source of making money (Byrne, [1991](#)). Similarly, many human resource development (HRD) specialists and practitioners have shown serious concerns regarding the high cost involved in executive education and whether such costs have been justified and whether they have helped managers to reduce their management knowledge gaps (Foreman, et al., [1996](#)). Universities, therefore, need to collaborate more closely with industry to understand their real issues and design EMBA programs accordingly (Haskins, et al., [2020](#)).

Researchers can deploy multidimensional and client-centred frameworks to evaluate effectiveness of professional development programs. It is evident that organizations expect their employees to perform within multiple dimensions. Thus relevant theoretical frameworks should be developed to provide organizations with practical, outcome-based scalable paths for employee development.

Limitations and Future Research

A comprehensive model of evaluating adult education by (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, [2007](#)) proposed a four level framework: Level one focuses on the evaluation of customer satisfaction (content of materials, instruction

methods, facilities etc.), level two deals with gaining new knowledge, skills and attitude, level three tackles the issue of how well the learned knowledge and skills were applied at the workplace, and lastly level four deals with the impact of learning on the effectiveness of the organization. Measuring the effectiveness of the EMBA through the perception of organizations is the biggest limitation of this research. The perspective of the clients (students of the EMBA) as well as universities would give a more comprehensive view of this phenomenon. Similarly, this research has been undertaken with a limited sample size within Pakistan. Increasing the sample size and including respondents from various other countries could provide a more accurate measurement of the effectiveness of the EMBA.

Since executive MBA programs are traditionally compared to traditional MBA professional programs, a comparative study of the perceived effectiveness of MBA graduates versus EMBA graduates could also be an interesting avenue for future research. The same study with a larger sample and including respondents from different countries is also another avenue for future research. Moreover, the development of a more comprehensive evaluation framework, including the relationship between curriculum, skill development and individual performance also calls for further research.

Conclusion

With an increasingly complex and dynamic business environment, it is imperative that organizations augment the capacity of their intellectual capital and human resource. Executive education in this context has become increasingly popular in the last couple of decades. The findings of this study substantiated the robustness of the role-based measure, showing that though by and large organizations seem satisfied, there exists a gap between each of the required roles. The gap between work and team related roles was found significant and given that these two roles have been rated as most important by organizations. The need to improve curriculum and teaching methods in this area have been reiterated by the findings. In conclusion, while the EMBA is effective in enabling its graduates to perform the perceived important roles within the organization, there is a need to reinvigorate the current EMBA offerings, in accordance with the changing needs of the organizations.

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