Dominant drivers of business students

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Abstract. *Taibi Kahler wrote in 1974 a theory about five main drivers that could explain people's motivation and a series of positive and negative behavior patterns: Be Strong, Be Perfect, Hurry Up, Try Hard and Please People. Of course, we consider there is no absolute positive or negative behavior, since (1) everything needs to be analyzed by taking into account the context and (2) any behavior pattern can mean a series of advantages as long as people understand their own values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. It would be interesting to link Kahler's drivers to the educational process, in order to be able to adapt our courses and our teaching styles to students' requirements and also to the requirements in the labor market. Our paper is built on literature review and a questionnaire applied to a sample of 607 students in Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. Information was processed with Microsoft Excel 2013, in order to look at the main working styles our students have, at the main explanations for the differences between them and in order to test a series of hypotheses. We were interested to look at the main traits of the current generation of students in our university: dominant drivers, roles of managers and specialists, the attractiveness of the entrepreneurial career path, etc. and at a series of patterns (i.e. gender-related differences). We consider results of this study are useful both for teaching and research purposes. In terms of teaching, we plan to adapt our educational methods in order to improve the educational process.*

Keywords: drivers, business higher education, motivation, human resource management

Introduction

Many researchers have recently focused their work on what Kahler (1974) described as "drivers". These working styles reflect particular preferences for doing things. There has also been an increasing interest in educational topics related to students' motivation. In this paper we would like to bridge the gap between these concepts, in order to try to better motivate business students by taking into account their main working styles.

Students' motivation depend on many factors. We tried to explore some of them, which are well-connected to their present perspective on future career and entrepreneurship, by looking at the main drivers they have. The paper is based on literature review and on a questionnaire applied to students studying Business in Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania.

Literature review

The five drivers (working styles)

Kahler (1974; 1975) described five main drivers reflecting people's internal processes that explain the ways they prefer doing things (with speed, perfection, etc.). These drivers (*Be Strong, Be Perfect, Hurry Up, Try Hard* and *Please People*) could explain people's motivation and a series of positive and negative behavior patterns. Hay (1992) referred to these drivers as "working styles", by adapting them to the organizational field. These drivers are briefly described in Table 1.

Table 1. *The five drivers – beliefs, advantages and disadvantages*

Driver	Main Belief	Advantage	Disadvantage
Be Strong	Need for being strong and independent	Rational decisions can be made without too much emotional attachment.	Human relations are poor; there is not enough time for the others.
Be Perfect	Need for perfection, for always doing the right thing	Tasks are well-planned and completed in a competent way.	Very detailed plans can make projects a lot longer than necessary.
Hurry Up	Need for efficiency and moving fast	Work is completed very fast, which is excellent for jobs that do not require detailed analysis.	Details are often missed, which might lead to poor quality and/or additional work after.
Try Hard	Need for trying harder and being patient and persistent	There is a lot of persistence, even in situations in which other people would give up.	Decisions are taken slowly (without any shortcuts) and risks are sometimes avoided completely.
Please People	Need for pleasing others	There is harmony.	Sometimes own work is undervalued in favor of others.

Source: Adapted from Kahler (1974).

We consider there is no absolute positive or negative behavior, since (1) everything is contextual and needs to be analyzed by taking into account the context as it is and (2) any behavior pattern can be rather positive as long as people understand their own values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

Tudor (2008) talked about a sixth driver (*Take It*), one that might partly explain the development of narcissism, by looking to aggressively take and own objects.

Career and entrepreneurship

Career preferences seem to be highly influenced by the social and family context and they continuously adapt to people's work and life conditions (Rodrigues et al., 2013).

Stoeber et al. (2016) found that perfectionism may explain individual differences in students' attitudes related to career planning. The authors showed that high standards of performance - for oneself or for others - have positive relationships with a series of positive career planning attitudes, such as flexibility and adaptability, while evaluative concerns have negative relationships with these positive attitudes.

Many people need a balance between a successful career and a good family and social life (Schein, 1996). It is still debatable if lifestyle is more typical to women or there is not any clear relationship between gender and lifestyle. Some authors still support the idea that women are more lifestyle oriented than men (Williams et al., 2014), while other studies did not validate this hypothesis (Radu et al., 2016).

Miller (1983) described entrepreneurial orientation as being pro-active, risk-taking and innovative. Entrepreneurship has increased as a subject in secondary and tertiary education systems, in order to enhance the entrepreneurship potential of students. Women entrepreneurship has also become a subject of interest both for researchers and policy makers in last decades (Holienka et al., 2016).

In this paper we would like to explore these issues related to career and entrepreneurship and try to link them to the five drivers (working styles).

Motivation of business students

Motivation in education refers to all the factors that stimulate and energize people's learning process. (Hrbackova and Suchankova, 2016; Ryan and Deci, 2000). It is very important to understand the different types of extrinsic motivation, since intrinsic motivation is basically not enough and thus there is a need for intrinsic motivation to be stimulated by a series of external factors that depend on the teacher's approach (Radu, 2016).

Radu (2016) found that business students are primarily motivated by particular teaching methods, some particular teacher's attitudes and by carefully looking at the assessment process. We consider these attitudes and even teachers' methods could (and even should) also adapt by looking at the main drivers (working styles) that students have. Good teaching is not necessarily perceived in the same way by students and teachers (Nasser-Abu Alhija, 2016; Goldstein & Benassi, 2006) and the interaction between the teaching style and the learning styles is very important (Radu, 2016). Kim and MacCann (2016) noticed that students prefer some particular personality traits of teachers, depending on their own personality.

King (2016) showed that students' perceptions of peer attitudes with respect to learning could also be an important predictor of gender differences in terms of motivation, engagement, and achievement, since students are part of social networks.

Case study: students' perspectives on drivers, career and entrepreneurship

Method

A questionnaire was applied in May-June 2016 to students studying Business in Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, by using the online platform Google Docs. There were 607 respondents. The sample was representative in terms of gender and faculty and specialization they are studying.

The questionnaire contained the test on drivers (working styles) and 15 additional questions, out of which some referred to their technical-functional career preference at the moment (being a manager or highly specializing and becoming an expert in the field) and their desire and readiness to start a business. From the very beginning we wanted to explore three main hypotheses:

- *H1. There are gender differences in terms of working styles of our students.* In particular, we consider that *Be Strong* and *Hurry Up* are more likely attributed to men, while *Be Perfect*, *Try Hard* and *Please People* are more likely attributed to women. We had this hypothesis both because of some

characteristics generally attributed to a particular gender and as a result of our observations of class activities.

- *H2. Male students aim more for a managerial career than female students.* While we think that this difference should be lower compared to previous generations, we believe this difference still exists due to some “traditional” factors. Thus, women would more likely prefer to be experts in their fields than to occupy managerial positions.
- *H3. Male students aim more for having their own business compared to their female colleagues.* While the entrepreneurship “potential” could probably be the same, men generally risk more than women.

For the second and third hypothesis, we would also like to explore if there are some interesting particularities related to students’ preferred working styles.

Discussion of research findings

We calculated the score for each of the five working styles and then selected only the most important driver (the one with the highest score) for each of the 607 respondents. There were 21 respondents for whom there were two drivers with a maximum score instead of only one.

The structure of the main drivers is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Students’ main drivers and gender

Source: Authors’ own research.

More than a half of our respondents (for both female and male respondents) have *Be Perfect* as a main driver. At the first sight, it might seem unexpected, if we take into account their age (average: 22) and the fact that young people get bored faster, especially as a result of technological developments. We believe having a majority of people at this age with *Be Perfect* driver is normal because we are talking about a particular educational environment, but the situation would be different when analyzing this age group in general.

The main difference in terms of gender refers to *Be Strong* driver. As we could observe, this working style is more typical to men (15.00% of the men, compared to only 6.13% of the women). There is also a difference with respect to *Please People*. This driver appears more often in the case of women (17.16%, compared to only 11.82% in the case of men). These two results confirm our initial thoughts. However, the first hypothesis does not seem to be totally validated, since we could not observe big differences between men and women for the other three drivers: *Be Perfect*, *Try Hard* and *Hurry Up*.

When asked if they prefer, for their future career, to manage people or to be highly specialized, some differences can be observed, as presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Students' preference regarding specialization (a gender perspective)

Source: Authors' own research.

At least by looking at the structure, we can see a small difference between men and women that slightly confirm our second hypothesis. Thus, male students have a stronger preference for a future managerial career (53.55% compared to 44.44% of their female colleagues). We consider the responses only "slightly" confirm our second hypothesis, because, while there is a gender difference that is mainly what we considered initially, we can notice that in the case of female students the structure was quite balanced and there are still a little more respondents that would like to become managers in the future.

The students' preference regarding specialization should be also analyzed by looking at their main working styles. It was interesting to notice that most of the male students preferred a future managerial career and this happened in the case of all the five drivers. In the case of women, most of them preferred a little bit more to be highly specialized, for all the drivers except for *Be Strong* and *Try Hard*, as presented in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Gender and specialization - "Be strong" driver

Source: Authors' own research.

Thus, 3.28% of the female respondents have both *Be Strong* driver and the desire to become a manager.

In the case of men, there was always a higher preference towards management, but the situation was quite balanced, with the exception of *Try Hard*, with 4.27% of the male

respondents having this main working style and the desire to become a manager, compared to only 1.42% having this main driver and preferring to be highly specialized in their field.

Figure 4. Gender and specialization – “Try hard” driver

Source: Authors' own research.

As explained in the previous sub-section, we were also interested to explore some gender differences in terms of risk-taking and thus in terms of students' readiness to have their own business (the third hypothesis). Results are presented in Figure 5.

We could notice that, as expected, male students were more open to the idea of having their own business (6.16% of them already have such a business, 30.33% are interested to start one in the next 3 years and 33.65% at a later time). Almost half of the female respondents (42.42%) admitted that were not thinking about having any business in future, while there were only 2.27% already having a business and 17.68% who are thinking about a start-up in the next 3 years.

Figure 5. Students' readiness to entrepreneurship (a gender perspective)

Source: Authors' own research.

By looking at each main driver separately, we could observe the same trend of having more men than women entrepreneurs. The most special result refers to *Be Perfect*, as presented in Figure 6.

Figure 4. Gender and entrepreneurship – “Be perfect” driver

Source: Authors' own research.

In the case of *Be Perfect* driver, most of the respondents did not seem very interested in having their own business and in this particular case the proportion of women is higher:

- out of a total of 61.27% of women having this driver as a main one, slightly more than 10% already have a business or plan for one in the next 3 years;
- out of a total of 58.18% of men having this main working style, almost one quarter also have a business or plan this for the following next 3 years).

Conclusions

Our study showed some interesting and useful information regarding our students, which should be used in order to improve the educational process. Thus, it is important to take into account they are different in terms of working styles, but many of them have a preference for *Be perfect* driver.

There are not significant differences in terms of gender, except for *Be strong*, which is more typical to male students, and *Please people*, which is more typical to female students.

Men seem more inclined to managerial careers and to entrepreneurship than women. However, we should also take into account the fact that our students' responses reflect their views at the moment and most of them do not have any relevant previous experience. Thus, their perspectives might significantly change in the future. It was interesting to notice there were two “different” situations for female students: *Be strong* driver made them more prone to a future managerial position and *Be perfect* working style seemed to work better for women when thinking about entrepreneurship (or, more precisely, this driver did not discourage them, as in the case of men; however, there are fewer women aiming for entrepreneurship). While we are aware of the fact drivers are people's characteristics and it is hard to change them, we believe we should increase the number of educational activities that might stimulate these two drivers.

Strictly from the methodological point of view, we think our study has a limitation, referring to the way we considered a driver as the main one (the one with the highest score). We did not pay attention to all the scores. Some small differences between two

drivers might indicate the fact that a person has more “main” working styles. The totals are also problematic as there were a few students with two main drivers instead of one, because of the maximum score. We will take these into account and try to see whether some of our conclusions might slightly change.

We will also continue our research by looking at the labor market and then we will try to analyze the match between supply and demand from the working styles point of view, in order to adapt our educational activities.

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