

The Psychology of the MBA



Have you ever decided to run a full marathon?

If you have then you know... it is not an easy decision. You need to think and prepare for it. Engaging in training doing many miles becomes a preparation to the 'big event'!

Going through the MBA programme often feels that you are going through a marathon. At times, it feels that is never ending. You become frustrated with having to find new stamina. When the deadlines are approaching you feel that you are running up onto a 'hill'. Once you reach the top you feel relaxed. Then you are reminded that there is another hill coming!

The psychology of a student, whilst studying for the MBA, remains one of the most neglected and yet serious topics for consideration. Universities do very little in order to prepare students. At the same time, students come with all sorts of backgrounds and expectations. Some of the students' perceived career-goals are not sufficiently scrutinised. Hence, MBA students feel that they will achieve

their ideal job failing to realise that this is not going to happen on basis of the MBA alone. If this was not enough, students expect from tutors to provide them with instant gratification. However, they are confronted with more questions. Tutors want to challenge the students' understanding and often make painful remarks about their 'lack of engagement'.

Emotions Matter

The MBA operates as a self-reflective mechanism. Concerns are kicking in from when you studied at school or university. This can lead to all sorts of questions.

The sense of frustration is an uncomfortable feeling.



We are programmed to survive. We are looking for concrete resolutions. However, the process of managing one's frustration remains a complex psychological synthesis of 'thoughts' and 'emotions' that operate unnoticed. Hence, when anxiety and panic kick in, it is often because you have spent little time identifying with 'how' you are going to meet this challenge.

Lack of expectations – Lack of motivation = PANIC

As we have highlighted in many articles, an experience of learning remains a highly subjective process! Identifying with an academic outcome is not enough to make you motivated. You need to have a sense of self-efficacy in managing the challenging you face. However, it often feels that there is no time for it!

Our advice is simple: *regardless of how soon you need to submit your assignment, the moment that frustration and anxiety kicks in, develop a 'reflection' diary where you identify key causes.*

Anxiety causes can relate to specific thoughts/dilemmas or just uncertainty. As your mind is trying to overcome various challenges, it tries harder and harder with the result of creating many and different scenarios.

However, these scenarios generate a considerable burden in your mind. You do not know which is the right one to choose.

Breaking down the components that contributed to your emotions is KEY! Hence, you need to start with it.

Interests Matter!

This issue remains one of the more difficult topics to explain in this guide, but it is worth it! You need to remember that your effort is only an outcome of perception.



To perceive that there is something 'valuable' to be gained is the motor that enables the emotional 'juices' flowing. However, this process is more complex than it sounds.

It takes time to identify your interests **so that** you are willing to engage with a challenge when things get tough. However, it will generate enormous relief once

you know that your efforts are invested into something that remains meaningful.

For example, if you have to complete an assignment in *Finance and Accounting* you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information that you need to study. Understanding and applying ratios can be really challenging! Especially, when you don't have the background experience.

However, whilst thinking about the specific challenges it is important to identify (a) *how* and (b) *why* the skills and knowledge you are going to develop will eventually contribute to your capacity to read 'financial reports' and identify important trends.

Such capacity is directly linked to personal career development. Building up this interest is going to take time and cannot happen by just reading a book or talking to other people. However, it is important to remember that there cannot be anything else that will keep you going apart from the inner satisfaction. Remember that you are investing effort into something because you believe that it is going to add something valuable to your personal experience.

Relationships

The last challenge we need to address concerns the domain of 'relationships'. Such relationships can involve friendship, intimacy, family, etc.



However, it is evident that the psychology of the MBA is particularly affected by the lack of awareness about the impact of relationships.

For example, the lack of communication between students, the sense of isolation and separation, but also the possibility of misunderstanding contribute to significant psychological challenges.

It is evident that challenges associated with relationships cannot be reduced or eradicated. However, we have significant experience with MBA students whose call for help was directly related such challenges.

Our advice is to identify the range of emotional and relationship-associated challenges you currently experience in your life.

It is also imperative to have a back-up plan of counselling support and help. Finding help through a counsellor or psychotherapist can prove an enormous relief.

However, it is important to identify the person that you believe that can understand and work with you. Universities often offer counselling services. Such services are often focused on undergraduate students and lacks considerable professional expertise.

We advise you to first consider the types of challenges that could emerge in relation to your current relationships. Then to identify a strategy that will enable you to address those persona/psychological challenges in an effective way.

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