Career Development and Counseling in an International Company in Shanghai

A Minor Field Study
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Oksana Olsson
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Abstract

The aim of the study is to understand the significance and the impact of the career development and counseling with consideration of cultural aspects in an international company in Shanghai, the People’s Republic of China. The aim has been achieved through three research questions. What experiences do employees have from career development and counseling in an international company in Shanghai? What contributions from the company do employees perceive to be necessary in experiencing an ongoing upward trend in their career development? What kind of cultural aspects influence employees’ career development in an international company? The field study is conducted through the Cultural Intelligence Theory. A qualitative approach has been used in the study. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with employees and one in-depth interview with a HR manager in an international company in Shanghai.

The experiences that the interviewed employees at the international company have had from career development and counseling, which is defined as a professional guidance of the individuals and a process of helping an individual discover and develop his/her vocational and professional potentialities, are quite positive. For maintaining constant progress in their career development, employees have suggested some practical actions that can be taken by the company. The interviewed employees’ viewpoints are that managers in international companies give them freedom of actions, which leads to more responsibility and creativity, allow them to make mistakes and learn from them, support them in their career development, provide regular feedbacks on their performance.

Keywords

Career counseling, career development, cultural intelligence, globalization, Human Resources Department.
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Introduction

The study explores the experiences that employees have from career development and counseling in an international company in Shanghai, China. Furthermore, it considers cultural aspects and their influence on employees’ career development in an international company. Since the 1970’s, the process of globalization has accelerated dramatically. The opening of countries’ boundaries, people migration, and technological innovations allow different nations interact and interconnect with one another. The globalization process has an impact on every sphere, e.g. economic, political and cultural. But its biggest impact can be seen in the worldwide economic integration (McGrew, 2011). Widespread free-market capitalism now enables individuals, corporations and institutional investors to reach the world faster, farther, deeper and cheaper than ever (Friedman, 1999: 7-8).

The spread of free-market economy has played a crucial role in China and has led its economy to become the second largest in the world. Only three decades ago, Deng Xiaoping (a politician and reformist leader of the Communist Party of China during 1978-1992) presented a new economic plan in China. One of the most important reforms was the replacement of central planning with a free-market economy. Deng also implemented the “Open Door” policy, which allowed China’s economy to open up to the rest of the world. Such turn around rapidly lead to dramatic increase in foreign trade and investments, which contributed to the construction of new factories and the creation of new jobs (Copper, 2003).

The inexorable integration of markets and technologies is even clearer. Foreign direct investments in China were nearly US$ 111.7 billion in 2012. Comparatively, in 1978 the figures were insignificant (CNBC, 2013).

The increasing number of new jobs and technological advancements has created a huge selection of employment opportunities in China. Nowadays, younger generations have the possibility to choose their future profession independently. In comparison, during Mao’s era, young people who did not have a chance to receive education were forced to work in the agricultural sector (Zhang, Hu & Pope, 2002).

The process of globalization has brought its changes even in career guidance and counseling in China. This area is still relatively new. It is important to note that in China career guidance and counseling is not implemented in the earlier stages, e.g. at schools (Zhang, Hu & Pope, 2002).

During my studies at the Bachelor of Arts in Study and Career Guidance at Stockholm University, I have always been interested in how career counseling develops after a person has been employed. The career guidance and counseling can be implemented not only during the earlier ages, when young people have to make their education and career choices, but also during the whole professional life, whenever an individual has to make a career decision.

During my internship in an Indonesian company in Jakarta, I realized that the career counseling support employees in their professional developing. That knowledge from my internship in Indonesian company inspired me to study how career counseling is implemented in big companies in China. First, China, with its fast growing economy, has been influenced by Western business practices for a long time. The Western tradition in company structure and organization has been implemented in China (Ma, 2002).
Secondly, Shanghai, where the field study has been done, is the world’s fastest growing city, and it has been attracting foreign companies for the last century (Chen, 2009). The major foreign companies have their headquarters located in Shanghai (Broadhurst, 2011). Thirdly, the foreign companies introduce new technologies and innovations in different areas to the region, which is the reason why landmarks in the production are rapidly changing, which are leading to the continuous of new professional profiles. It takes time to adapt in this jungle of new occupations and professional help is needed. Career development within one company is getting very important, both for employers and their employees. Professional counselors understand how important it is to learn about career development and counseling work and the opportunities that are needed for a successful career path in international companies.

**Aim of the study**

The aim of the field study is to understand the significance and the impact of the career development and counseling with consideration of cultural aspects in an international company in Shanghai.

**Research questions**

1. What experiences do employees have from career development and counseling in an international company in Shanghai?
2. What contributions from the company do employees perceive to be necessary in experiencing an ongoing upward trend in their career development?
3. What kind of cultural aspects influence employees’ career development in an international company?

**Definition of words**

Career counseling is “a professional guidance of the individual or a small group by use of standard psychological methods. It is a process of helping an individual discover and develop his/her educational, vocational and professional potentialities” (Srivastava, 2007). There are three large categories of career counseling: help in making career-related decisions, placement (focus on placing students or workers in particular jobs) and coaching and mentoring (Brown & Lent, 2013).

Career development can be defined as an ongoing process in which individuals’ progress through a series of stages, each of which is characterized by a relatively unique set of issues, themes, and tasks (Werner & De Simone, 2009).
Background

The background chapter is to provide the basic yet necessary knowledge to understand the chapters that follow. In this chapter, two main topics, Shanghai and foreign trade and the role of career guidance and counseling, which play a fundamental role in choosing a job, are discussed. In addition to this, an introduction to career development and counseling and career counseling as a part of Human Resources Department will be described.

Shanghai and foreign trade

Shanghai, due to its convenient geographical location, its seaward orientation and its easy access to the Yangzi River, has been one of the most important trading ports in China for a long time. In the 16th century, the trading was already established with some western countries, i.e. Portugal and Spain (Zhu & Qian, 2003). In the middle of the 19th century the number of foreign firms, operating in Shanghai, reached to more than eleven firms, which consequently lead to an increasing number of foreign population in the city (Wolfgang, 2011). During the first half of the 20th century Shanghai was transformed into the industrialization center of China. After the “Open Door” policy was implemented in the late 1970’s, Shanghai got a status of “Special Economic Zone” for foreign firms (Wolfgang, 2011). The main purpose of the Special Economic Zone, which granted special privileges to foreign companies, was to attract foreign investments and technologies to the region. According to China Daily, about 60 multinational corporations have opened their Asian headquarters in Shanghai over the past few years (Xinhua, 2012). In September 2012, about 77 percent of Shanghai’s 393 regional multinational headquarters were involved in manufacturing and about 30 percent of them were involved in the service sector (Xinhua, 2012). Nowadays, Shanghai is the largest port in the world in terms of total cargo transported (Luo, 2012) and as the main financial center of China, its ambition is to become the leading International Finance Centre in the world in the nearest future (Luo, 2012).

Rapid economic growth and the constant increase in the number of foreign companies, which bring along innovations and new technologies to China, lead to an increase in the number of new jobs and a huge diversity in occupations that emerge (Zhang, Hu & Pope, 2002). That is why it is continually becoming more important that people with the right competence occupy the right places in society (Medin, 2011).

Role of career guidance and counseling in choosing future vocation in China

In China the number of young people who choose to pursue higher educational universities has dramatically increased. Though the higher education system is quite young in the country, it is similar to the higher education systems of Britain and the USA. Today the country provides educational services to over 23 million students in higher education institutions (Brandenburger & Jiani, 2007).
The career guidance and counseling services play an important role in people’s life when they choose their future career. The globalization process has its impact on the development of career guidance and counseling theories in China. It is getting more and more important for young Chinese people to choose the right career and to find a good apprenticeship (Zhang, Hu & Pope, 2002).

According to the history of the career guidance and counseling, which is described by Medin (2011), there has been a long tradition of vocational guidance in China. In the late 1980’s the western type of career guidance and counseling model for higher education was introduced in three main universities in China: Beijing Normal University, Central China Normal University and Shanghai Normal University. Nevertheless the career guidance and counseling that was introduced more than 20 years ago is still implemented only in higher educational institutions and not in schools in China.

In Medin’s study (2011) the findings show that both career teachers and students at Beijing Normal University believe that career guidance and counseling should be basically provided in schools so that students will obtain the capacity or to make better career choices and apply for jobs that suit them in their future lives.

The students who were interviewed in Medin’s field study were worried about their future in the labor market. According to these students, one of the remedies to such worries is to receive career counseling services early at the university (Medin, 2011).

The career counseling is an important part of not only the process of making career-related decisions but also the professional development of the employees in the companies. Its importance is already increasing in the companies and this can be explained by technological advances, emergence of knowledge work, and the demand for information and their relationship to globalization (De Sylva, 1997). A career counselor can help employees to increase their employment potential for personal and professional growth and to find ways to improve their skills and develop their personal qualities (Zhulina & Ivanova, 2009).

**Career development and counseling**

Career development is generally seen as a long-term process in which a person’s progress in learning and work is managed. How good this process is undertaken has a significant effect on various aspects of an individual’s life some of which are the sense of purpose, future changes in intrapersonal qualities and the salary (Watts & Sultana, 2003).

Traditionally, career was defined as hierarchically progressing up in an organization or a profession. However, in the face of the changes in the recent century this definition is no longer applicable to this concept. Due to the fact pace of changes in the new era, which is mainly caused by technological advances and globalization, so many organizations have been the subject of constant transformations and changes. That is why companies have been less inclined toward making long-term commitments to employees. Companies are more concerned about how flexible employees are in performing different tasks and roles in the system. Therefore, it is employability and not employment that protects job security. So, it is employees’ willingness to learn new skills that helps them to maintain their employability (Watts & Sultana, 2003).

So, nowadays, it is increasingly observed that careers are created and not chosen through the choices that people make during their life about learning and work. In this sense, career development must be accessible to all rather than being made available to a small group.
From this perspective, career development is not something private and a value in possession of individuals but a public good in a country scale. This can be justified by three main arguments. First, it positively influences effective learning; second, an effective labor market needs it as important part of itself; and third, career development can contribute to social equity, supporting equal opportunities and promoting social inclusion (Watts & Sultana, 2003).

For employees to be able to manage their career development effectively, they can be supported in three forms: in developing their career management skills, in receiving high-quality information on the opportunities they need help to reach, in receiving individual counseling to review the options ahead and to change move from information into actions (Watts & Sultana, 2003).

The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) Career Guidance Policy Review indicates an important task of schools is to equip students with the career management skills and provide necessary support to develop such skills. The OECD Career Guidance Policy Review also indicates that other institutes beyond schools should be involved in providing a range other services some of which can be tailored to particular groups and some offering public access. The OECD review has opened up the eyes of OECD countries to the significance of having a sound policy for career development and providing counseling services (Watts & Sultana, 2003).

**Career counseling as a part of Human Resources (HR)**

A Human Resources Department is a division of a company, which is charged with finding, screening, recruiting and training job applicants, including administration of employee-benefit programs (Investopedia, 2013).

In a society with increased individual responsibility and perspective the term career counseling, as a part of HR Department, seems to be more inclusive and applicable to a wider range of guidance contexts than the term guidance and counseling. The career counseling is characterized by being independent and impartial based on the needs of the individual where it offers individual tools and techniques to:

- seek knowledge and acquaint himself/herself with the education, training and employment;
- identify and articulate individuals’ needs, interests and circumstances,
- make a selection of relevant measures;
- take responsibility for person’s own career process,
- identify opportunities to realize his/her ideas and meet his/her needs. (SOU 2001:45)

A developmental conversation is the key part of counseling at HR Department. The main prerequisite for developmental conversations to be effective is that the manager is a good partner and a supervisor whom the employee can trust when he takes on the role of an interviewer. This will subsequently lead to the point where employee feels comfortable to open up and reflect on the current and future work situation (Hägg & Kuoppa, 1997).

In new organizations, skills are the main concerns nowadays and the solution is training which is generally considered to be more costly to the organization than employees. However, training can have long-lasting effects for a system if it receives a long-term...
perspective with the aim of aiding talented employees to grow within the company (Holmström, 2006).

Every employee feels the need to have the opportunity to learn and develop at work. Organizations can address this issue through drafting personnel policies, which provide life and career planning services and establish a reasonable balance of employees’ needs and organizational needs and output. For this purpose, the organization needs in-depth knowledge about counseling skills and human behavior and difficulties in decision-making. For this, a professional counselor can be compared to a psychologist (Mangell, 1995).

To address talent shortage and retention challenges, providing continuous on-board training is an essential component of every foreign company’s Human resources (HR) strategy in China. As knowledge and education is highly praised in Chinese companies, continuous training can not only improve employee’s ability but also boost their morale (EU SME Centre, 2013:6).
Theoretical Framework

The field study is conducted through the Cultural Intelligence Theory (Earley & Ang, 2006) as its main theoretical framework. Some parts of Hofstede’s Theory about Five Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 2001) is also integrated into the theoretical framework. The reason that explains choosing these theories is the fact that in international companies in Shanghai where the field study has been done, Western and Chinese cultural differences have an important role in various aspects of organizational career. An organizational career is a specific entity, which is offered by an organization to its employees, using its services (Glaser, 2009).

Cultural Intelligence Theory

Earley and Ang (2006) define “cultural intelligence” (CQ) as a process in which a person is capable to adapt successfully and effectively to new cultural settings, which are unfamiliar and connected to a cultural context. CQ is significant in assisting effective adjustment in cross-cultural environments.

CQ consists of three parts: mental, motivational and behavioral. Those skills that aid us in understanding different cultural behaviors and those behavioral routines that people are expected to follow in work are referred to as cognitive and metacognitive (mental) capabilities. The question is why people do what they do? CQ is formed by two main components, cultural knowledge which refers to facts about other culture and the operation of different elements within that culture that we are aware of and cultural thinking and learning which refers to our methods of gaining new information about the new culture. As we need to constantly adapt ourselves to new aspects of a foreign culture and integrate new features into our old system of values and identity, flexibility is critical to CQ (Earley & Ang, 2006).

Motivational means when a person feels enough energy and would inside himself or herself like to continue doing what he does even if he/she is going to face difficulties and failures. People’s actions are guided and motivated by three needs: enhancement (wanting to develop and having a better feeling toward themselves), growth (wanting to face challenges and make improvements in themselves) and consistency (wanting a predictable and continuous life). One important question arises in the face of these three needs, and that is “Am I motivated enough to do something here?” to answer this question it is important to know how a person’s actions are guided by various elements such as goals, cultural values and confidence. We gain energy from our sense of confidence to seek our personal goals and we double our efforts when we face challenges or defeats. Yet, the guidance and the intrinsic challenge that we need to plunge into our cultural world come from our goals (Earley & Ang, 2006).

The behavioral aspect is concerned with understanding how people’s abilities and skills develop over time and they are of a great deal of importance. CQ requires a person to have knowledge of what he/she wants to do and how to do it and he/she should have enough energy to keep trying. He/she is also required to be equipped with necessary skills and a repository of well-thought actions that suit a given encounter. A question that arises here is “Can I do the right thing?” to answer this question one should know what the right thing is and if one has the energy to do it. It means analyzing and understanding the real problem and filing it for future encounters (Earley & Ang, 2006).
According to Earley and Ang (2006), the process of globalization has removed not only geographical boundaries, but also physical boundaries like time and space from industries and organizations. They define globalization as an interactive social process in which the interrelation and communication among people and work in multicultural workplaces have increased. Working with people from diverse cultures can be as difficult for employees as for the company as it can lead to misunderstandings (Earley & Ang, 2006). That is why new skills such as sociability and adaptability to people from different cultures are gaining more importance in the twenty-first-century (Earley & Ang, 2006). To be able to interact in the global workspace, people should be aware of different cultures, they should be able to identify and analyze them, and develop efficient interactions with them. That is why employees need to develop their cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2006). The Human Resources Department of a company, especially in international companies with multicultural workplace, is responsible for building those new skills in employees. People who are culturally intelligent can be seen as a source of competitive advantage for global multinational companies (Earley & Ang, 2006).

**Five Cultural Dimensions**

Professor Geert Hofstede, an influential Dutch researcher in the area of organizational culture and management, recognizes five indicators that show differences and similarities between different cultures: Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism (IDV), Masculinity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) and Long-Term Orientation (Hofstede, 2001). 

**Power Distance Index** (PDI) indicates how much the unequal distance between powerful and less powerful people are culturally accepted and treated with respect. There is a link between decision-making in companies and how much power is centralized.

**Individualism** (IDV) describes individualism and collectivism where the former indicates people’s inclination toward self and their focus on one’s needs and interests rather than public needs and conventions and the latter shows people’s tendency toward collective action and behavior and their focus on social organizations.

**Masculinity** (MAS) and femininity indicators describe the differences between opposite sexes and the roles they play in the society. In high masculine societies (Japan), values that are masculine such as material success, assertiveness, and being tough are highly regarded and only women of the society are concerned with the quality of life. However, in feminine societies (Sweden), both men and women have concerns about quality of life.

**Uncertainty Avoidance Index** (UAI). Uncertainty as an inevitable reality of human life is tightly linked with anxiety and human has long tried to make ways to avoid this fact. One of these ways is technology, which provides us with a defensive system against other uncertainties caused by others’ behaviors, beliefs, religions and laws.

**Long-Term Orientation** describes the values that a society is more keen to preserve. Values such as perseverance and wealth are recognized as long-term orientation and values such as protecting one’s reputation, respect for traditions and fulfilling social duties are known as short-term orientation.

In the analysis of the result all five dimensions are taken into account.
Method of research

This chapter discusses the research method of the study, which is a qualitative one. Furthermore, the setting of the study, selection of the respondents, interviews, field study challenges and ethical perspective will be following.

A qualitative research

In this field study, a qualitative approach was used. One reason why qualitative research was adopted for this study was the subjective nature of this type of research where data is rich and interpretations of high importance, which in this case help the researcher to gain broad understanding of various aspects of people’s work experiences (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). A quantitative research study could not meet the needs of the study as it is mainly concerned with objective measurement of data through tools such as questionnaires and surveys, which are prepared in advance and deprive the researcher of having face-to-face interactions with participants for in-depth analysis and interpretation of collected data (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011).

In-depth interview was chosen for this study to seek the information of personal experiences from interviewees about their career development and counseling (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). According to Marshall and Rossman (2010), in-depth interviewing is widely used among qualitative researchers. Furthermore they describe three general types of interviews: informal, the interview guide or topical approach, and the standardized interview. In this study the interview guide was used, because it is more structured and the interviewer prepares the interview questions in advance. This type of interview seems to be the most typical for the studies in which qualitative research is used (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

Setting of the study

The selection procedure was so: a number of international companies were contacted and asked for their participation in the study. If they agreed to participate a meeting session was scheduled and if they could not they would either introduce other potential companies or simply reject to participate.

The setting of the study is an international company in Shanghai, China. The company was founded in 2006 in Shanghai. It is an independent developer and publisher of high-quality products. It is the largest independent Western IT company of its kind in Shanghai. The company has two offices, one in the United States, and another in Shanghai. The company opened its office in Shanghai eight years ago. The company maintains its production in Shanghai, however their main markets are in the United States and Europe. In the Shanghai office there are 50 employees, and ten of them are foreigners. The CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of the company and two of the six managers are foreigners. The main policy of this company is to develop products of high quality and to set standards by introducing products which can compete with those of the other branches of the same company.

Choosing China, Shanghai as the location for collecting data can be explained by the fact that contact persons at Fudan University and at Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai were ready to help with finding and contacting companies who had no problems with participating.
in conducting the study. Another reason is that Shanghai is an international city where a lot of foreign companies are represented and most people employed in international companies can speak English.

The company has a strong tendency to hire highly experienced Chinese work force and it avoids losing them by offering wages higher than other local businesses. However, it should be noted that high importance is also placed on attitude, personality, ability to learn and motivation not only than just on pure experience. The employees usually learn about the company and available positions through their friends who work there or through advertisements on the companies’ web site.

The official language that the employees are required to speak in the company is English. It is also observed that the company keeps recruiting new employees and this is mainly due to the fact that the company is expanding.

**Selection of respondents**

The criteria for selection of respondents were to find interviewees with high level of education and at least two years of experience working in an international company in Shanghai. The CEO of the company helped to contact those employees who met the selection requirements of the study.

All the subjects, both Chinese and foreigners, hold diplomas from Universities or higher institutions in China or abroad. They are also able to speak English. However one Chinese respondent preferred to conduct an interview with the help of a professional interpreter. For the purpose of having a clear picture of the study and the findings, two groups of employees were interviewed. The first group included employees who have improved their qualities and improved their career on a continuous basis. The other group includes HR managers who spare no effort to help employees gain growth in their career. The table below shows four male and four female interviewees. All of them are highly educated and benefit from two years of experience working in the company. The variable in the last column, which is indicative of employees’ growth in the system, shows the first position that employees were hired in when they entered the company.

**Table 1. Description of Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Position</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>High Education</th>
<th>Years in the company</th>
<th>Job Position (when entered the company)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animation Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Animation Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Game play Programmer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Senior Programmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Designer / Producer</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Game Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Concept Artist</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2D Concept Artist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Interviews

In order to obtain an understanding of career development and counseling in an international company in Shanghai, data of the study was mainly collected from six Chinese employees, and two HR employees, one Chinese and one Western European in Shanghai, through in-depth interviews. I believe that a qualitative interview was the appropriate method as it allowed the use of open questions that led to richer answers (Holme & Solvang, 1991). Face-to-face interviews give a better understanding of and at the same time richer answers about employees’ experiences of career development and counseling in international companies in Shanghai.

The interview questions were designed in a way to obtain answers about employees’ experience of career development and counseling, which is “*a professional guidance of the individual or a small group by use of standard psychological methods. It is a process of helping an individual discover and develop his/her educational, vocational and professional potentialities*” (Srivastava, 2007), in an international company in Shanghai and what contributions from the international company employees could perceive to be necessary in experiencing a continuous progress in their career development. Employees were asked questions about their career path, skills, their experiences in their career development and counseling and the cultural aspects they observed and experienced in the company (Appendix 1).

Each interview was run in less than 45 minutes in the company’s conference room and recorded with the consent of the interviewee. All the interviews were run in English medium except for one which was run with the help of a professional interpreter from the same company as the interviewee did not feel comfortable with his English speaking. Some of the interviewed persons looked worried and felt shy in the beginning of the interviews but they felt comfortable as they kept answering more questions. The definition of “career counseling” was presented in the beginning of each interview.

The interviews were precisely transcribed afterwards for further analysis and interpretation of the answers.

After all the interviews were administered, it became clear that answers from the HR manager did not provide a clear picture of the HR role in career development and counseling. For this, one more interviewed was arranged with the HR of another company. This interview shed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Associate Art Director in 3D</th>
<th>Art Director</th>
<th>HR Manager</th>
<th>HR Manager 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate Art Director in 3D</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Director</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Manager 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
light on unexplored aspects of HR role in career development and counseling in international companies.

Field study challenges

The first challenge of the field study was to find the companies that would agree to participate in the study. Even with the help of contact persons in Shanghai, finding and contacting international companies and persuading them to participate in the study was a time-consuming task. The second challenge was when the interview with the HR manager of the first company did not provide enough data on the role of such managers in career development and counseling which brought the need for more interviews with HR managers. The third challenge of the field study was during the administration of interviews. Due to the fact that employees were interviewed in English, cultural differences interfered with the answers in a way that we struggled to obtain true answers on the questions. That is why sometimes I was forced to paraphrase some of the questions. The strategy was to go back to unanswered questions in a spiral manner after every few questions. The last and the most serious challenge was to help employees express their true feelings and thoughts as culturally they are conservative about speaking frankly about their situation in the company.

Reliability and validity

The reliability of the interview is secured by following a structured set of questions and routines and by having an unchanged interview manner, which means that there is an interviewer and an interviewee (Trost, 2010). Trost defines three main parts, which are relevant for a qualitative research, such as coherence, accuracy and objectivity. When I used the same interview questions, I had the intention to measure the same thing, and that is coherence. When I used recording device during each interview and then I transcribed them, it aims at having precision. Objectivity is also obtained when I recorded all the interviews in the same way where each interviewee was informed of the fact that the whole session was recorded.

Ethical perspective

There are four basic individual security requirements that must be respected when a study is implemented (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

Information requirement-All participants were informed about their role in the study, the study's purpose and that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any time.

Consent requirement– participants received information about the study in a personal email through which their consent to participate in the study was collected. Confidentiality obligations-Interviewees were informed that all personal data would be stored in a manner that made it impossible for them to be identified, i.e. that the data would be saved in a confidential manner.

Utilization requirement- Participants were informed that the collected data would be used only for research purposes and that personal information would not be given out.
The ethical problems of the research were raised by following these guidelines to meet the Council's research ethics (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).
Results

This chapter presents the results of the study by using sometimes information from interview transcripts. In this study, eight interviews were conducted; seven of them at one international company, and the eighth additional interview was done at another international company in Shanghai.

Animation Director

The first interview was with a Chinese woman. She is an Animation Director. She has six years experience of working in the company. She also has the experience of working in Taiwanese and French companies. She started her career as an Animator and after some years she was promoted to the position of the Animation Director. She has worked in this position for five years. When she joined this international company, she worked as an Animation Leader. There are three persons in her team. Her duty is to manage her team, cooperate with other departments, and solve technical problems.

While describing the differences working in international and Chinese companies, she gives an example by comparing a family-run Taiwanese company and an international one. She mentions that in the Taiwanese company, being family-run, the level of formality was low and that is opposite of international companies where the level of formality is high and they enjoy “world class managers”. Moreover, one person makes the decision in Taiwanese company and in international company the boss will hear all the voices before making any decisions.

She has not receive any help from HR Department about her career development, but she mentions that she constantly receives feedbacks from the Chief executive officer (CEO). She mentions that HR Department was “ineffective” in the international company. That is why during her career in this international company other company managers have helped her a lot in making improvements in her career and foreign employees. On the other hand foreign employees have managed to learn a lot about solving problems from their Chinese colleagues. She considers that there is a huge focus on people relationship in Chinese companies, which leads to a lot of fighting between different small groups within the company. But in international company the main focus is on the job and the task at hand. When there is a conflict, it is the differences of ideas about the work.

Chinese employees try to follow Western style of working in this company. They try to be braver, open and share their thoughts, which tend to be against the fact that for Chinese culture it is common to hide things and thoughts from public. However, foreign employees also learn from Chinese ways of thinking. For examples when there is the question of taking the best way or the fastest one to finish a task, Chinese incline toward the fastest while foreign employees opt for the best one. Whichever way is taken, the challenge provides a chance for both groups to explore new possibilities and their outcomes. She describes the company as an open-minded and creative one. CEO always asks every employee about any questions, problems, or their thoughts and he always gives them feedbacks.

She has learnt in the company from her Western CEO to be patient. She points out that Chinese people are impatient. The CEO allows people to make mistakes, but at the same time
he is expecting a perfect result. In Chinese companies managers always tell what employees should do, they give tasks. But in this international company the CEO describes the expected result and the task is to find a solution to achieve the intended result in its best form. She feels that she is more involved in a process of decision-making and at the same time she gets much more responsibility.

She mentions also that foreign employees in the company learn from their Chinese colleagues how to solve problems.

"Chinese, when they solve a problem, they choose not always the best way of solving it, but the faster one."

Whenever the team members have any problems or just want to share some information, they go directly to talk to her. They could have gone and talked directly to the CEO, but because of the language problems they can’t do it. She could speak simple English before she started working in international companies and after years of working in such companies she has experienced dramatic improvement in her English language. As a case in point, she mentions that she took extra English classes at her previous international company.

She mentions that company offers two language courses, English and Chinese. There are also some internal classes that are organized by the companies’ employees where they share their knowledge and experience.

She says that her ability to speak English and her knowledge about Western cultures and values that she gained from her foreign friends helps her in her career-path a lot. On the question about career opportunities, she answers that her position is already high, but she would like to be a big project manager and she would also like to try herself as a producer. That is why she is eager to take classes where she can improve her skills to be leading producer or a project manager. She mentions that it is possible to change from one area to another, if an employee is really interested in something. That will not be possible in Chinese companies.

**Lead Gameplay Programmer**

The interview is with a Chinese man. His is a Lead Gameplay Programmer and he has been working in the company for the last six years. He had the experience of working in Chinese and international companies before entering this company.

He describes his career path and says that he started as a Programmer in a Chinese company and when he started in this company he was a Senior Programmer and after five years he became a Lead Gameplay Programmer.

He says that the environment in the company is suitable for him. He points out that "the management is suitable and comfortable and the boss is kind".

While describing the differences working in international and Chinese companies, he names that the managers in the international company are open-minded. He always talks to the CEO and the Producer.

"Everyone can discuss everything with each other and you don’t have to hide it from each other."

He points out that it is not only about doing your task; it is about doing a good job together. In the company they use emails all the time, no matter if it is just a small thing or a very important one. Everyone should be informed about what is happening in other teams. In his team there are about 12 people and he is in charge. That is why whenever the team members have any problems or suggestions they discuss it with him. If someone in the team
wants to change the area, for example, if this person is more interested in doing something else and at the same time he has some skills. This person first will talk to Lead Gameplay Programmer, and if he thinks it is possible then Lead Gameplay Programmer will talk to the CEO and they will see what can be done for this person. He believes that his knowledge about Western countries and his experience in working in international companies helped him a lot in his career path. English is very important for communication with the CEO and Producer who are foreigners. He does not think it is difficult to adapt to Western culture and values because people in Shanghai are regularly in contact with Western culture through communicating with expatriates. The main motivation for him is his interest in game and in technology. Personally, he has never asked for any help from HR Department, because he joined the company when it was founded. On the question about career opportunities he thinks that in future he can be a Tech Manager. He believes that he has skills that he can share with others in the company.

Game Designer

The interview is with a Game Designer, who is Chinese. His career path started in a French company, where he was a Junior Designer and after some years he became a Lead Designer. He entered this company as a Game Designer five years ago. Although he is a game designer, he also sometimes performs the tasks of a Producer and he is also active in the Business Department of the company. He points out that working in international companies is a good possibility for career growth, especially if you have foreigners as mentors. During his work in French company he had two foreign mentors, who later joined the company and asked the interviewee to join them in that new international company. Communication skill has been the most important skill for him in developing his career. His ability to speak English and transfer his thoughts and ideas to his foreign CEO grandly helps him in his career growth. He says

“You may have an idea but you don’t know how to convince the boss, but I do!”

He gives some advice to his Chinese co-workers, and he says

“I say to Chinese that if you have something to say to expats, then go and say. They will understand you. As long as you speak, they will listen to you”. In the company people who can speak English are in main positions because they have to be able to communicate with the boss.

It should also be noted that another important skill that has helped him in his career is a presentation skill. Last but not least, his knowledge of Western culture and values has been influential in his career development. He mentions that books, movies, his one month language course in the US and his constant communications with expatriates have played the most important role in gaining his this knowledge. He says that it is important to understand the Western culture and values in order to produce a product that will be interesting for western people. And as in this company their main customers are from US and Western Europe cultural understanding is a game-changer factor. While describing the differences working in international and Chinese companies, he points out that western people put all their focus on goals and results, while Chinese people pay a lot of attention to people relations (Guanxi, in China, the system of social networks and
influential relationships which facilitate business and other dealings\(^1\) in the company. Guanxi plays a very important role in Chinese companies. In international company the CEO wants to hear thoughts of every employee and he makes his effort to make everyone talk and be heard.

His main motivation in his career is his interest in games. In his work, as a Game Designer he combines rational thinking, creativity and breaking things down into micro tasks. He says “This game job makes me express the emotional things in a rational way”.

That is what gives him satisfaction and at the same time motivation to continue working in this industry.

He mentions two language courses are available in the company, English and Chinese. In his previous French company, there was a Design Academy. People went to a one-week job courses in Paris.

He has a Chinese assistant who entered the company four months ago. He tries to help and support her, but at the same time he gives her a lot of independence in her work. He wants her to work directly for the CEO in future. He says “I give her a freedom to grow into the leader position”.

On the question about his own career opportunities in the company he answers that he would like to be a Project Leader. The challenge that he thinks he will meet is to work with a bigger team. But he would like to try it. His goal is to start his own company. He wants to move into a management role.

Senior Concept Artist

This interview is with a Chinese woman and she is a Senior Concept Artist. She entered the company two years ago as a 2D (two-dimensional) Concept Artist. Her previous company was Chinese and she worked as “background” for the Artist there.

Interesting part about this woman’s career is that after ten years of studying electronics in China, Germany and Denmark, she decided to change her major. She had liked drawing during all her life, but because of the pressure from school and her parents she had to study electronics. During her Masters’ studies in Denmark she understood she didn’t like electronics and decided to do what she really liked. She explains that this decision was really hard to make, but because she was far away from her home and friends, she could do it. When she came back to China she took one and a half years drawing course and started her first job in a Chinese company.

She found out about this international company through her friends and when she got the position she moved to Shanghai.

While describing the differences working in international and Chinese companies, the first thing she mentions is that Chinese do not talk about things, but they show the way they feel in their facial expressions. On the contrary, western people prefer to talk and they directly express their feelings when they like something or not. They also do not hold back their feelings when things go wrong. This is almost always misinterpreted by Chinese as a personal issue.

“For Chinese people it’s a personal attack, but for Western people it’s not big deal”.

The second thing she mentions is the hierarchy and relationship. Western companies do not spend much time on building relations, it is more about doing a job and all energy should be

spent on doing that job. In Chinese companies there are a lot of non-written rules, e.g. giving some smalls gift to your boss or your manager, or invite them for lunch or dinner. When she faces with any problems in her job she goes directly to the CEO or her manager and describes her problem directly to them. In Chinese company, first you have to think with whom you can talk and with whom you cannot.

Western people are more patient and they give you more chances even if you have already made some mistakes. They want you to learn from your mistakes.

“In China because of the huge population if you make a mistake that’s it, you will be changed. You don’t have another chance, so everyone works really hard”.

She has learnt from her time in Western Europe that if you really like something you should pursue it. Western people say what they like and do not hide it as opposed to Chinese people. As a Chinese, that makes her think that western people live freely and happier than Chinese. She believes that her knowledge about Western culture and values and also her good English help her in her career development.

When she entered the company she received a lot of help from HR Department. For example, they helped her with finding an apartment and some other organizational parts, for example, health insurance. There were even some parties organized by HR. They invited all employees and their friends to help displaced Chinese employees to make new friends. It was really helpful for her because she was new in the city and she did not have any friends.

She received also help from former Art Director, who was from Australia. He taught her a lot in her job. At the same time she helped him with the translation when he wanted to talk to someone who could not speak English.

She mentions that there are two main language courses in the company, English and Chinese. Besides there is also an internal course where more experienced co-workers share their knowledge with others in the company.

Her main motivation in her career is that she really likes her job. “It’s my interest”.

Her opportunities in the company she sees herself in the same position that she is in right now. She explains that she does not want to do any administrative tasks; instead she wants to put all of her energy into improving her drawing. Benefits of working in this international company are that there are more holidays here than Chinese government asks for. That makes it possible for her to spend more time on drawing. Difficulty in her job, she thinks, is that in China no one respects you as an artist, people jut steal your ideas.

“You don’t have copyrights in China”.

**Associate Art Director in 3D (three-dimensional)**

The interview is with a Chinese man who is an Associate Art Director in 3D works. He has been working in this company for almost more than three years. He has experience in working in Chinese, Taiwanese and American companies. He describes his career path started as a Senior Artist and after three years he became a Junior Artist and later a Lead Artist. When he joined this international company he got a promotion as an Associate Art Director in 3D works.

While describing the differences working in international and Chinese companies, he mentions that bosses’ mind is different. He means that the boss is freer in his actions and he gives you a lot of freedom. They use a lot of emails in the company and at the same time they
talk a lot with each other. Whenever a problem occurs he goes directly to his manager or the
CEO and he describes the problem. He is not afraid of talking to the CEO.
“I don’t worry about that I can make the CEO angry”.
People relation is really different in Chinese and international companies. In this company
you concentrate on work and not on relationship.
He gained his knowledge about Western culture and values from books, movies, TV shows,
internet and his daily communications with expatriates. The former Art Director (from
Australia) taught him a lot about different styles and how to make things more impressive.
“Basically I can call him a teacher of mine”.
His ability to speak English helps him in his work.
“I think I need to see the point what expats are saying in the company”.
He mentions about two possible language courses in the company, Chinese and English. But
he would like to take a course where he can learn more new things about technology and new
software.
He does not use any help from HR Department, but he thinks that they are very kind.
The main motivation in his career is to make a project style different from other competitive
companies. He wanted to do something different and now he is doing it. In Chinese
companies the boss asks you to copy a successful game with some small changes. Here in this
company they are creating something new and not similar to others’ product. His opportunity
in career growth is to become an Art Director, an Art Producer or a Project Leader.

Art Director (with help of an interpreter)

The interview is with an Art Director. He is Chinese and he has been working in the company
for almost five years. He describes his career path and he says that he entered this
international company right after graduation. His first job in the company was Drawing and
he did some basic artwork with the CEO and former Art Director.
While describing the differences working in international and Chinese companies, even
though he does not have any experience of working in any Chinese company, he says that in
Chinese companies boss gives you task and the procedure himself and he does not leave the
employee any freedom to think about the procedures himself. Besides in Chinese companies
boss will ask you to copy a successful game. But in this international company it is important
to create something new and a product of competitive quality and design. Western people in
this company spend more time on thinking and creating ideas, where such ideas have priority
over the job, and that is why the project can be sometimes delayed. Chinese people are more
focused on delivering the job in time and if there will be some time left then they will think
more about the idea.
“The key point is the mind side is different”, he says.
He gained his knowledge about Western cultures and values from books, internet and through
communicating with foreign people. He has regular meetings with the CEO, twice a week.
Even though the CEO can speak Chinese when it is a work meeting they prefer to use the help
of an interpreter.
He mentions about two language courses that are available in the company. He has never
taken the English class, because he has not had time. But he would really like to start the
class. He does not ask for any help from HR Department. If he has any questions he talks
directly with the CEO.
In his team there are six people and they are all Chinese that is why he does not need to do
any translations. He does not communicate that often with other departments where they have
foreign people. But if he needs to discuss anything he can always have an interpreter.
His main goal is to make the game more artistic and to make more beautiful pictures. That is
why he put a lot of energy into his work. About opportunities in the company he thinks that
he can be more involved in the Game Planning stage.

HR Manager

The interviewed HR Manager of an international company in Shanghai is Chinese. She has
been working in the company as an HR Manager for nearly three years. She has majored in
International Trade and Economy.
She describes her occupation as a combination of HR Managing and Office Managing duties.
She sometimes feels that her job consists of babysitting the foreigners and helping them solve
their problems. She encourages all of the employees to come and speak with her whenever
they have a concern or question. She wishes to assist them, and this is why she sees her main
purpose in the office as making the employees happy. If she cannot give direct answers right
away to the employees’ questions she often contacts some other organizations and tries to
find the answer or information in order to get back with the answers as fast as possible. She
does not often hold one-on-one talks with the employees. This duty is performed by the CEO
of the company or by the departments’ managers. But, when she holds these types of
conversations with the employees, they are usually arranged to address suggestions or
complaints from employees' side, or when employees wish to talk about their private life,
social insurance, or if they need assistance finding an apartment when they are relocating to
Shanghai. Disregarding the problem she constantly tries to assist them in any manner.
This is her first experience in working in an international company, despite her previous
experience in various Chinese companies. The main difference between working in an
international company and in a Chinese company is freedom. She explains it by giving an
e xample:

“if you have only worked in a Chinese company, before I worked in a Chinese
c ompany. The boss wanted us to work hard. She was constantly repeating “work,
work, work”. She was constantly stating that “now you are growing”. But in here he
“just finish your job”. Later, you can rest, and have some drinks, so it is very
relaxed. We are happy here. I think that this is the main difference”.

She says that she enjoys the atmosphere in the company, and that when work is finished,
people can talk to each other. She notes that there is not large population of elderly workers
within the company and this was the main reason she decided to join the company. In order to
keep a friendly atmosphere within the company, events and daily IU (I and you) lunches
organized by the HR Manager. IU lunches are daily lunches for five or six people. Each
Monday there is a list in which employees can sign up for the day they would like to have
lunch together. During these lunches people talk about their lives, news and share ideas. She
points out that these IU lunches are not common within Chinese companies. She says that
Chinese barely pay any attention to and put any importance on such events.
Company provides both Chinese and English language courses for low-experienced
employees. Some other courses are also provided which are organized by more experienced
employees to share their job skills and knowledge with their colleagues in the company. This
demonstrates that there is a possibility for a career growth in the company and there is also possibility to change from one area to another within the company. The HR Manager concedes her knowledge about “career counseling” is limited and she has abstained from applying it to her tasks.

HR Manager 2

Since the interview with the HR manager of the company did not provide enough data on the role of such managers in career development and counseling which brought the need for another interview with an HR manager of another international company in Shanghai. It was founded in 1852 in Western Europe. The company operates in 16 countries. However the Shanghai office was established in 2003 and it is just a production office. There are 62 employees in the Shanghai office, and four of them are foreigners. Two of the three managers are foreigners. However, all the middle managers’ positions are performed/occupied by Chinese employees. The companies’ system of values is based on qualities such as profit-orientation, customer-orientation, efficiency, commitment, respect for people and responsibility.

As employer, the company offers a lot of internal career possibilities around the world and it gives an opportunity for self-development. Future employees can find information about available occupations on the company’s web page.

The eighth additional interview is with the HR Manager of an international company in Shanghai. She is from Western Europe and she has been working in this company for many years. But she has been working in the Shanghai office for approximately two years. When she hires new employees, it is important for her that the person is suitable for the company and the team, and whether the person is committed to the system. Depending on the job position, she has different requirements. For example, for manager position she will be looking for a person with enough experience and a good level of English language. However, English language can be tricky she says; because if an applicant can speak good English it is not necessary for him to meet the other requirements. She points out that very often companies make mistakes when they hire a person with perfect English while they ignore other skills necessary for the position and that is mainly due to the fact that they are fascinated by the applicants’ high level of language abilities.

The company uses a recruitment company for a higher position. Otherwise, she prefers to save the job opportunity for the company’s employees who have the chance to meet the qualifications in near future. She wants them to grow and she tries to help and support them. But, in case the outlook for filling the position with a current employ is not good and the chances are low she opts for recruiting from out of the system.

She has two Business managers, one of them is Turkish and another is Chinese. Those two managers have their own teams with managerial positions, which are taken by Chinese people. She gives her managers freedom in their work with their teams. She has development talks once a year with old employees and twice a year or sometimes even more often with new employees. During these talks she works on making improvement plan together with employees. With the help of these sessions she can see a bigger picture of the organization and she will be able to see the potential workers that deserve and need support in their work. She points out that she gives feedbacks all the time, whether they are positive, constructive or destructive. She also thinks it is important and the best way to teach your team setting an example for them. People are very flexible in the company and they talk
every day. After one year working with her managers she can see a great improvement in their work.

In the Shanghai office there is an English course every Friday for those who want to improve their communication skills. She says that Chinese people are good at written English but not at verbal communication. She also offers a management course for her managers, which is organized by the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai.

Recently the company has established an educational Academy with courses for future managers. It is a one-week course in company’s home country. The focus is on communication, presentation and leading skills.

While describing the differences working in international and Chinese companies, she says that during meetings Chinese employees are not that talkative, "they don’t dare to talk when their managers are in the same room".

But she uses different methods to make them talk. For example, she asks them review the ideas they already talked about before the meeting. Also, when they launch a new idea, she often runs workshops, where people are put in groups of four working on ideas that they are required to present after a certain amount of time. She observes that Chinese employees tend to be more talkative and involved in generating ideas.

Those Chinese employees who have been working in the Shanghai office for a long time sometimes try to imitate western people behavioral patterns. During their time in the company they meet a lot of western people, and they learn from them through their personal and email communications.

She points out that communication is very important. Not only Chinese employees learn from her, but she also learns about Chinese culture and their mindset. This knowledge helps her and employees in their work.

HR Manager 2 has a better understanding of “career counseling” and she incorporates development talks, improvement plan talks and giving personal feedbacks into its definition.
Conclusion

This chapter presents conclusion of the study in relation to the research questions.

What experiences do employees have from the career development and counseling in an international company in Shanghai?
The experiences that the interviewed employees at the international company have had from career development and counseling are quite positive. The employees can see an upward trend in their career growth in international companies. The personal interest of the employees in their work and the companies’ philosophy makes contribution to employees’ managing their career development.
The employees in the company mention that the company has two language courses and sometimes other skill courses, which are organized by more qualified and experienced employees. However, no interviewee has joined the English class yet, even though it is against the intention of some of them would like to participate in it.
Those interviewed employees, who are in charged in the company, say that their international company is interested in its employees’ career growth and they intend to help and support employees in any possible way. The findings conclusively indicate that gaining knowledge about the target culture being the culture of the original company or having an acceptable level of English language command can have a significant effect on the general career development of employees.
However, in the company the CEO and managers run one-on-one meetings with the employees. HR Department in the company does not play a significant role in career development and counseling. It has more organizational role, helping employees with some practical questions.

What kind of cultural aspects influence employees’ career development in an international company?
Some of the points that are stressed by all interviewees are. The interviewed employees points are that managers in international companies a) give them freedom of actions, which leads to more responsibility and creativity, b) allow them to make mistakes and learn from them, c) support them in their career development, d) provide regular feedbacks on their performance.
The employees have also stressed on the positive and friendly environment in international companies and constant communication with the CEO and managers as other positive aspects of working in such companies. The interviewed mention that their foreign colleagues also learn from Chinese culture, for example understanding of Chinese way of thinking and by learning Chinese language.
The findings show that good knowledge about Western culture and values, and a good level of English language play an important role in employees’ career development. Six out of seven interviewed Chinese employees have had the experience of working in international companies. They understand the cultural aspects and they effectively employ this knowledge in betterment of their relationships and establishing a higher status in the company.
What contributions from the company do employees perceive to be necessary in experiencing an ongoing upward trend in their career development?

For maintaining constant progress in their career development, employees have suggested some practical actions that can be taken by the company. For example, several employees would like to have some extra skill courses, which can help them in their career development, which can lead to their career growth. The employees would like to take on more responsibilities and to be more engaged in projects and tasks in the role of a Producer recognized as one of the top positions in the company. Two of the employees would like to try themselves as a Project Leader and to challenge themselves by managing bigger teams. However, one of the employees does not want to be involved in a manager role due to her huge interest in drawing. She thinks that managing will take too much energy and time from her to draw. She is more interested in developing her vocational skills and that is why she would like to take some special courses in her job.

The additional interview with HR Manager from another international company shows that the HR Manager is willing to aid employees’ in their career development by offering her potential co-workers to take different courses depending on the skills they feel they lack or they need to make some improvements in. The company has started Academy for future managers in company’s home country. A one-week course can be taken by employees, who see themselves in a managerial position in future and need to make serious improvements in their vocational skills. HR Manager points out the importance of development talks and giving feedbacks, which can be seen as another way of contributing to employees’ career development.
Analysis

In this chapter analysis of the study is presented.

As it is mentioned by the employees, international companies provide more opportunities for career growth than Chinese companies. They explain it by the cultural differences and they recognize companies’ priorities as the most typical example. While in Western companies the final product is the goal and employees are encouraged to use their creativity and are given their limit of freedom to act individually when found necessary and to explore their ways around problems for the desired result, in Chinese companies managers give direct tasks and they do not leave a freedom of choice in employees’ action. This agrees with what Earley and Ang (2006) state about importance of developing employees’ cultural intelligence in order to be able to interact in the global workspace.

Another important cultural difference, which has been emphasized by several interviewees, is interpersonal relationships in Chinese companies, which are time and energy consuming. The interviewed employees of the company expressed their happiness about the fact that they do not need to be concerned about interpersonal relationships at work and they have the chance to concentrate all their energy and time on work. This concurs with what Hofstede (2001) describes about Individualism (IDV), which describes individualism and collectivism where former indicates people’s inclination toward self and their focus on one’s needs and interests than public needs and conventions and the later shows people’s tendency toward collective action and behavior and their focus on social organizations. The interviewed employees highlight the importance of spending their time and energy on their work, instead of dealing with people relationships in the company.

Further, the findings from the interviews show that the employees are aware of cultural aspects and they try to apply the Western style of working in their international companies. According to Earley and Ang (2006), nowadays, it is important to be able to identify and analyze different cultures, which manifest themselves in daily interactions in workplaces. Cultural intelligence, which is a process in which a person is capable to adapt successfully and effectively to new cultural settings, which are unfamiliar and connected to a cultural context, has gained a great deal of importance in multicultural work environments in the past years of economical and industrial developments.

The personal interest of the employees in their work and the companies’ philosophy give contribution to employees’ managing their career development. The company finds it highly important to contribute to the career development of its employees’ by aiding them in acquiring career management skills, providing them with high-quality information on the opportunities they seek, this agrees with what Watts and Sultana (2003) state about running counseling sessions where employees review their options and learn to move from information to action. The company tries to lift the spirit in its employees and motivate them by enrolling them in various training courses. This concurs with Holmström (2006), who believes if talented employees are aided to grow within the company, the effects of training for the system can be long lasting. The employees’ willingness to learn new skills by taking some extra classes can help them to maintain their employability. This agrees with what Watts and Sultana (2003) describe about employability, which protects employees’ job security.
The interviewees recognize the importance of Cultural Intelligence (in this case to be able to speak English, recognize Western culture and values, and to be able to apply them) in their career development, although they have never heard about this concept before. They know about Western culture and they are aware of cultural differences, and that knowledge refers to mental Cultural Intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2006). Having years of experience working in international companies, they have managed to adapt themselves to such differences although they have preserved their own cultural growth like the effort they put into acquiring a new language. Such behavioral Cultural Intelligence of some interviewed is strongly exhibited by them. They are aware of their abilities and skills and they have knowledge of how to reach what they want and at the same time they are full of energy and confidence in doing it. This agrees with what Earley and Ang (2006) state about behavioral Cultural Intelligence.

The employees have a positive experience from career counseling and development in the company, despite the fact that the role of a career counselor is presented by the company’s Chief executive officer (CEO). A developmental conversation, which is a key part of HR Department, is held by the CEO and not by HR Department. However, the employees feel comfortable to open up on their current and future situation during those developmental conversations with their CEO. This partially agrees with what Hägg & Kuoppa (1997) state about a developmental conversation as a key part of HR Department.
Discussion of the study

In this chapter the results of the study, chosen method and future possibilities will be discussed.

Results

The advantages with the field study are that the company has a positive view toward implementing career development and counseling, but there a question in who should play the role of the counselor whether the CEO of the company or HR manager. I believe that if the international company had a person who could provide professional career counseling, it could improve its employees’ career development better. The fact that the CEOs usually have tight schedules does not permit them to allocate enough time to career counseling no matter how strong they feel about it and how influential they may turn to be in sessions. That is why I consider that this role should be given to a professional career counselor. In additional interviewed person, although there was not a professional counselor, a dedicated HR manager was able to spend more time with the employees on their counseling. In spite of these different approaches, I think both companies are paying a great deal of their attention to this subject and they have so far put a reasonable effort into it which manifests itself in employees’ happiness to work in these companies.

I believe in our globalized world the importance of cultural intelligence (CQ) is increasing. Nowadays, we witness the presence of representatives of different cultures cooperating in multicultural offices. To be able to work effectively and productively, and at the same time to make improvement in your career development it is important to be aware about cultural differences in this multicultural workspace. As to my opinion as education and career counselor, we should have knowledge about different cultures to be able to help people with their education choices and career development. Either you work at school or in a big company, the world is getting smaller and the number of different cultures at one workspace is rising.

Method

The study was built on employees’ unique experiences of career development and counseling in international companies, and the interpretations and evaluation of these experiences. The study was conducted in a qualitative framework, which provided the basis for a deeper look into employees’ feelings and experiences through face-to-face interviews. The interviews provided the opportunity to obtain valid data on the innermost feelings and true position of employees toward career counseling and development. So by asking the following questions I was able to establish links between answers and find out their true feelings and needs. So, that is why so important to make sure that the answers were employees’ true feelings.

One of the demerits of an interview to be avoided is that the interviewers’ own views should not color the interviewees’ answers. This point was taken into consideration during the administration of interviews. However, there is no guarantee that the responses are not affected by the interviewer at all. Furthermore, employees are each interviewed individually, so that they are not influenced by any other employees’ responses or their presence. The recorder may have put a hold on the employees to give true answers, because it was noticed that they were paying attention to the recorder in the beginning of the interviews.
Future

For future studies it would be interesting to have a larger number of interviewees from different international companies and compare make a broad comparison between their experiences of career development and counseling in these companies in Shanghai. Furthermore, a comparison between experiences of employees from China and Europe can yield interesting findings. This research can also be conducted in mixed qualitative and quantitative framework.
References


Appendix 1

Interview questions to Chinese employees

1. Could you please describe you career-path?
2. What helped you to archive this career?
3. What was your main motivation in pursuing this career-path?
4. Did you receive any kind of counseling (positive/negative)? Tell me about your trainee program.
5. Did/ does knowledge about Western culture and values help you in your career development? If yes, where did you get this knowledge?
6. What did you do differently at this international company comparing if you were doing in Chinese company?
7. Explain please, how your communication is different btw Chinese/ Swedish?
8. Are there any differences in working in an international company or Chinese?
9. What are the opportunities/difficulties for you to continue your career growth in this company?

Interview questions to HR Manager

1. What is the role of the HR Department in the employees’ career development?
2. What kind of support does HR Department give?
3. What are their thoughts about career development in their company?
4. Are there any trainee programs for employees in the company?
5. How do you deal with cultural differences in the company?
6. What are their thoughts when they choose whom to hire, a Chinese or a foreign person?
7. Do you have development talks with your employees?
Appendix 2

Would you like to participate in my field study about career development and counseling?

Who am I?

I am a Swedish student studying my last term at the Bachelor of Arts in Study and Career Guidance, 180 credits at Stockholm University. Right now I am in Shanghai to do my Minor Field Study about the Career Development and Counseling in an International Company in Shanghai.

The Project

This research project is an intercultural study, sponsored by the Minor Field Studies – scholarship from the organization SIDA (http://www.sida.se/English/). My tutor in Sweden is Gunilla Höjlund, Senior Lecturer, PhD at the Department of Education at Stockholm University.

What do I want to do?

I would like to understand how an international company in Shanghai is working with the career development and counseling in order to cultivate its own human resources. The purpose of the field study is to understand the significance and the impact of the career development and counseling with consideration of cultural aspects in an international company in Shanghai.

What methodology will I use?

The method of the study is to do 6 to 8 interviews with Chinese employees in one international company in Shanghai about their career development and counseling. I am also aiming to do interviews with the HR Department in one international company. All interviewed will remain anonymous and the interview recordings will be deleted after transcription.

Questions?

If you have any questions regarding my research study, feel free to contact me. You can reach me on my e-mail or my mobile phone.

Thank you in advance!

Oksana Olsson
Stockholm University
E-mail: oksana.olsson@gmail.com
Phone: 18502114464