

# Education conveys a consultant's view of the business world

Further education: The part-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree course gives students broad-based knowledge of corporate management. What an experienced engineer really needs to be a consultant varies greatly from case to case.

VDI nachrichten, Bonn, 02/12/11, ws

Having obtained his engineering degree from Iserlohn University of Applied Science in 1997, production engineer Marijan Dzepina spent over ten years working in engineering for the recycling industry. During that time his interests gradually shifted towards the management and control of business processes using IT systems. Such IT-based modifications are often carried out by external management consultants. In a bid to increase his own skill level in this sphere, Marijan embarked on a part-time MBA at the University of Applied Science in Rheinbach near Bonn at the age of 35. Management Consulting & Strategic Management is the name of the two-year course.

Now, a year after graduating, Marijan Dzepina is head of the IT and Electronics Department at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt. "We're planning and building a whole new research facility. To achieve this, we need to work together in a team comprising scientists, finance experts and engineers like me," says Marijan, clearly delighted with his new job. "I would have found it hard to come to grips with all the different perspectives without the general knowledge imparted by my MBA studies," he explains. The further education offered at Rheinbach is absolutely in line with the new Bachelor's and Master's degree courses that aim to give students the skills they really need on the job. After completing a first degree, students are expected, first of all, to enter the world of work. Those who want to do an MBA will need to have a couple of years of practical experience under their belt. "In my group there were computer scientists, engineers, natural scientists and people with a background in the law. Very few already had a degree in business," reports Marijan Dzepina. "The experience that the different participants bring in means that, what the group is actually learning, is derived from a basis in fact," adds Christoph Wamser, the Academic Programme Director.

In addition to this, the renowned Staufenbiel Institute lists two distance-learning courses in its handbook. The Wismar University of Applied Science offers a two-year Master's in Business Consulting for students with at least one year's professional experience. Students are expected to attend seminars on three weekends per semester; these are held at various locations throughout Germany, with students attending the nearest one. The distance-learning degree offered by Ludwigshafen University of Applied Science is rather more specialised. It is an MBA in Logistics Management & Consulting for applicants with at least five years' on-the-job experience. Those who are not yet working or have just lost their job can also take a full-time course over three semesters at Pforzheim to qualify with an MBA in Human Resources Management & Consulting or attend Offenburg to obtain a qualification in International Business Consulting.

As well as the general MBA, there are numerous different variants of the degree, particularly in all aspects of engineering, from industrial management to technical

sales. The word "consulting" itself is less common in the titles, apparently due to the fact that the word can have many different meanings. Dietmar Fink, Professor of Management Consulting at Rheinbach, defines the job description in the following simple terms: "Consultants thrive by having better people than the clients they work for." What Professor Fink is thinking of here is a consultant's good advice on a company's strategic orientation. According to British economist John Maynard Keynes, however, the help they provide can also work the other way, like at the dentist: a small intervention can heal a lot of pain.

What does a company like Aachen-based P3 Group, specialists in engineering services and technology consultancy, look for in an employee, for example? The company currently employs more than 1,000 people across the globe, having started with three graduates from the local institute of technology in 1996. "The people who work for us now are engineers, scientists, business economists and much more besides," says spokesperson Vi Dao. "What we look for first and foremost is not their formal qualifications; it's their on-the-job experience, their personality and their successes to date."

Personality is a keyword: it's the consultant's own charisma that needs to convey to clients a sense of confidence in their professional expertise, like a good salesperson. Having an MBA after their name isn't much help there, says Vi Dao.

The MBA has lost a lot of its shine as an exotic qualification, given that all universities are in the process of switching to Bachelor's and Master's degrees. School-leavers can now study business administration without interruption with the new, stepped qualifications – and benefit from state funding instead of paying tuition fees. At Pforzheim and Offenburg they can even do this with a focus on the consulting industry. "These graduates start out as general messengers and assistants to senior consultants in the big companies," admits Rheinbach lecturer Dietmar Fink, "but in doing so they quickly acquire the necessary on-the-job experience." Engineers who come to the world of consulting later in their career will find themselves competing for jobs with younger graduates with a Master of Business and Engineering.

Furthermore, VDI Wissensforum offers horizon-broadening learning modules. Making a career jump from being an engineer with an MBA to landing a position with the Max Planck Society, home of numerous Nobel Prize Winners, as Marijan Dzepina did, can serve as an inspiring example. But, depending on career, age and personality, it's not for everyone. Good advice can help you get ahead.

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