MBA: Enabling multi-field competencies in a global market

MBA. Those three letters are a passport to a high-level career. In a global environment, companies ask for adaptiveness and intercultural competencies. Since the 50s, the Iaelyon has developed international programs answering that very demand.

— Steven Dolbeau

Double competencies is the very purpose of a master of business administration. From the beginning, they were designed for specialists and engineers aiming and boosting their career with more general skills,” asserts Marc Valax, Associate Professor and General management program’s director at the Iaelyon School of Management. Indeed, companies value the most adaptive people, and transversal education is one tool to achieve this aim. It is even more true on an international scale. Since its foundation, the Iaelyon has always understood this. In 60 years, it has developed several international courses and cooperation with universities around the world. The most iconic of those is without any doubt the General Management Program (GMP), which is the English version of the historic “Master MAF” program of the school. Open to pre and post experience, this one-year master aims at offering a general vision of management to alumni majoring in science with international ambitions. “I see it as a tool to put a distance from the pragmatic reality of a specific activity. It should enable the attendees to process a strategic vision on their own profession, to see the big picture,” explains Jérôme Rive, dean of Iaelyon School of Management. A goal highlighted by the school motto “Think Large.”

This program is also taught in other countries such as Poland, Hungary or Czech Republic. “Iaelyon is the only university in France to offer 23 programs taught abroad,” specifies Marc Valax of the Iaelyon. Courses are given in both languages: the local one and French. In Prague for example, the Iaelyon has established a partnership with VSE, the University of Economics. In 25 years, it has educated 600 alumni. Most of the participants are French speaking, but some also attract Czech citizens considering a new professional path. “One of them was for example a former French language teacher. She is now general manager at Manpower for the Central Europe area,” points out Hana Machková, rector of VSE.

Building on interaction

This international coloration is even more significant in the Iaelyon International MBA program, where a third of the students are not French. Recruited on an international scale, participants come from different cultural backgrounds and professional experiences. “Intercultural competencies are essential in our global economy. They are now indispensable, even for those who work in small companies, if they want their business to grow and develop. It is no secret that the best way to acquire these competencies is to spend time abroad,” says Richard Mitten, director of Study Abroad at Baruch College (City University of New York). There, seminars are interactive with modern teaching practices including case studies, references to concrete professional situations and in class role-playing. Participants are not only pushed to interact with the lecturers, but also to learn from one another.

With the same idea, Iaelyon also designed an Innovation and Management summer program for French and international MBA
students interested in new management styles. It is based on practical business concepts applied to real company concerns and projects. A mix of theoretical lectures, business cases, company visits and discussions with a philosopher is offering the participants an “out-of-the-box-approach.” These methodologies are meant to bring some adaptiveness to the students. “People with multicultural skills are more autonomous,” states Marc Cogy, President & operations general manager of the Japanese company Tozai Films Europe. It’s easier for someone with an Executive MBA to travel alone or to understand cultural issues in a negotiation.” Philippe Blésois, International Trade Expert at Solvay Business Services, supervises a team of Customer Service Representatives based in different European countries: “Every year, I take around twenty Jaelyn students in internships. Most of them are, sometimes, more independent than traditional business school undergraduates.” Companies also clearly look for managers with a real expertise in their activity area. Someone who can understand and apply its strategy in a global environment. “Businesses need to be competitive but also reactive. They need managers capable of anticipation and willing to support change from within,” confirms Marc Cogy, who was a metallurgical engineer before completing a management degree. “Pure experts are not inclined to disruptive evolution.” But for Marc Valax, director of the Jaelyn GMP, a manager with double competencies cannot be a “Jack of all trades, master of none.” “There must be some consistency in its curriculum. We choose people likely to finish what they have started. The quality of all our programs is mostly based on the students’ recruitment. They are selected from their academic record and after a face to face interview. But the main requirement is for them to be open-minded and able to learn.”

Research as an insurance

Unfortunately, all schools are not so hard to please. And this can become a problem in a global competition or to the reputation of MBAs in general. Hana Machková, rector of VSE, the University of Economics in Prague, regrets the lack of control over the offer. “Today, there is no comprehensive legislation. Especially for online programs. For us, it is very important that our program…”

Today, it’s important that students understand the global connectedness of things and know how business is conducted in other countries.

Because every country must learn to navigate intricate connections between national and supra-national economics, law and institutions, Europe is a perfect place for students to learn this. ""

Richard Mitten, Director of Study Abroad at Baruch College, City University of New York.

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leads to an actual degree recognized by both the academic administration and the labor market." The IAE Lyon dean Jérôme Rivé agrees to that: "There is a great diversity of practices. Pure online MBAs are questionable. In my opinion, interaction between the students is one of the most interesting tools of our programs."

Research is another asset of MBAs. "It ensures liability, knowledge, skills and abilities," thinks Marc Valax. That's why the IAE Lyon has implemented an International Management Professions' Observatory. Its main objective is to give the major trends of this peculiar labor market to the companies. It's also a tool for the school to adapt its teachings. The observatory looks ten to fifteen years forward. Moreover, most of the MBA's lecturers at the IAE Lyon are also researchers. To keep this DNA active even among the students, all MBA attendees have to write a Master Thesis. "It's a good way to get perspective over the student's all-day activities. People have to commit and get back to writing. Eventually, they learn to be understood by others and to put words on their visions," explains Jérôme Rivé.

At the end of an MBA, a participant should have a better resistance to stress and a larger point of view. They are more confident, result oriented and know better how to sell themselves to recruiters. Coaching sessions help them to get those qualities by putting them in an optimal performance logic. But in the future, MBAs will certainly have to evolve. According to the IAE Lyon dean, the market seems to have reached its peak: "We can already see some programs specializing in one aspect of management." An evolution that contradicts the essence of this program, which is supposed to give a general business view to their students, fears Hana Machková: "it would lose its original value to enable double competencies." For Richard Mitten of Baruch College, "the MBA should become even more practice-oriented, but should include time spent working in business abroad." As for online education, he recommends more of it, though he believes it is important not to lose the necessary face-to-face interaction. A prerequisite.

FOCUS ON

LYON, AN INTERNATIONAL CITY ATTRACTIVE TO MBAS

Located in the center of western Europe, Lyon becomes more international every year. Companies from all around the world settle in the city, seeking its renowned quality of life. This mutation implies for the local economy to adapt and look for new competencies, more suited in multicultural environment. "MBAs are an ideal tool for multinational companies. It ensures them to keep their talents while transforming those into a real asset for the future. It suits perfectly to engineers who want to evolve to a commercial or financial position," points out Philippe Bliesbois, International Trade Expert at Solway Business Services. In 2015, the Aderly Invest in Lyon agency, announced a 7% increase of foreign investments. Most of them came from European countries, even if the breakdown by country shows that the United States remains the largest investor with 9 projects. The United Kingdom follows with 5 projects, Germany with 4 and Ireland with 4. The biggest of all was the creation by Hexcel, world leader of the carbon fiber production, of a new plant in Roussillon, near Lyon. This investment of 200 M€ should create more than 200 jobs. Tesla Motors and Ubisoft also announced new settlements in the region. In his last study, the consulting firm EY placed Lyon as Paris first challenger in terms of economic attractiveness. In the near future, the Aderly will continue to prospect in North America, Europe, China and Japan, but also in Russia where a lot of potential has been detected. A global context in which the IAE Lyon MBAs can find all their purpose.