Business Brain

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BUSINESS BRAIN - PARIS-DAUPHINE UNIVERSITY

Jean-François Chanlat explains to Barry Mansfield how the dented prestige of the MBA can be restored by training candidates with practical experience in social sciences, language skills and a collective approach to decision-making.

MBA programmes are often criticised for being too theoretical and recruiting students with little or no real-world management experience. France's response to these criticisms emerged in 1999, when Professor Michel Kalika of Paris-Dauphine University, the international management science teaching and research institution, lauched an executive MBA programme in partnership with the university's Canadian sister institution, the School of Management Science, at the University of Quebec at Montreal.

In just a few years, the course, with its roots in both Europe and North America, has won recognition as one of the best in its class. Now, in its tenth year, Dauphine-Paris is set on forging new international partnerships to expand the programme further.

"Too many business schools are churning out students who will never end up in management."

'There is no single superior method of management, and that philosophy features strongly in the course,' says Jean-François Chanlat, director of the Dauphine-Paris Executive MBA. 'It's deeply contextual. You have to understand that the social, cultural, political and economic context is relevant and useful in managing your company.' This is why, Chanlat explains, the course places such a strong emphasis on social sciences.

INTELLECTUAL RIGOUR

The Dauphine programme is a bilingual course for managers with a proven track record in industry – the average experience of students is 13 years, meaning candidates are usually between 30 and 50 years old. They come from a range of sectors and backgrounds, seeking an improved understanding of management, but have little time for fads or simple techniques, according to Chanlat.

'They want to discover an intellectual value around the managerial issues,' he says. 'One of the aspirations of the programme is to educate managers to go further and equip them to take charge of a new department or division, or to launch their own businesses.'

EXPAND IMAGE

Jean-François Chanlat, director of the Dauphine-Paris Executive MBA.

Chanlat believes that too many business schools are churning out students who will never end up in management, and is he determined that Dauphine avoids this path. 'We don't have people who go into the financial sector after their studies. They may do a little consulting. It has become clear recently that in the US even some of the top schools are training people who are not ultimately entering a management position. That's a very real problem. We want to help people to be better managers.'

DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

Business schools have also been greatly criticised for recruiting students under the age of 30, because they have so little experience. The problem with accepting an intake of candidates from this demographic, says Chanlat, is that the educator must build on highly abstract foundations – and management is a practical experience.

Instead, Dauphine's students attend the course on a part-time basis, while continuing with their employment. The double diploma is taught in English and French, with visiting professors from Montreal travelling to Paris to deliver select modules. 'Diversity defines the quality of the course,' says Chanlat.

'That means diversity of age, gender, professional itinerary, industry sector and intellectual background. Normally you need a masters degree to be selected. But we do keep some places for people with relevant experience only. If a candidate has spent 20 years managing 500 people, but they have no degree, then clearly they are ready for the step up.'

STRONG VALUES

Chanlat is currently organising events to celebrate the Dauphine programme's tenth year and working towards developing an audience in other parts of the world. He believes the business world can benefit most from an equilibrium between individual goals and the collective, and economic and social issues.

Dauphine has strong values in terms of the so-called socially responsible manager. When a manager makes decisions, those decisions have economic, social and environmental consequences, Chanlat explains, and it is inadvisable to make a decision without integrating all of these considerations. This underpins the Dauphine-Paris MBA.