

The ENPC MBA

The Journey Continues



Alexandra Skinner talks to Dr Tawfik Jelassi and Alon Rozen »

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Q You have launched a new MBA specialisation in Enterprise Risk Management with the Ecole des Mines and will be launching an Executive MBA in Aviation Management with Airbus, ENAC (civil aviation) and Tsinghua University (in Beijing). Kindly expand upon this for our readers.

AR: We are quite excited about both of these programmes for different reasons. They are both part of our strategy to foster new corporate-academic partnerships for growth. In the case of the MBA with a specialisation in Enterprise Risk Management (ERM MBA), launched with the Ecole des Mines and several Fortune 500 corporate partners, this is quite revolutionary. Two of the top French ‘Grandes Ecoles’ are teaming up to offer a truly unique new programme which mixes the ENPC School of International Management’s core MBA programmes, taught by professors from around the world, with specialised electives in various aspects of risk management which are led by professors, industry specialists and researchers from the Ecole de Mine’s Centre for Research on Risk and Crises (CRC). This is a wonderful example of ‘co-opetition’ among traditional rivals, and the expression of a new MBA programme model in which leading international faculty, industry specialists and local researchers come together to create a unique offering. The programme is one year long and includes a study trip to the Sophia Antipolis industrial park and the CRC laboratory

in the south of France, as well as a “value chain + supply chain” risk management-oriented study trip to China. The programme launched in September 2011 and, despite the late launch date and limited word-of-mouth marketing, we immediately received inquiries from Asia, Africa, Europe and North America, which confirms the pertinence and attractiveness of the offer.

The Executive MBA Aviation and Aeronautics Management (EMBA-A) will be launched in 2012 and is another project that we are extremely excited about. The programme was developed following a request by Airbus to design a tailored program for its growing cadre of middle and top executives in China. In order to design an appropriate executive programme, we worked with France’s Ecole Nationale of Civil Aviation (ENAC), which is a grande école that focuses on aviation and aeronautics management as well as a top local partner. As Airbus is headquartered in Beijing, our search naturally turned to Tsinghua University. While four-party negotiations are never easy, we have been able to put together an incredible two-year programme which will be training high potential Chinese and expat executive managers in both fundamental MBA skills and skills specific to aviation and aeronautics management for years to come.

The whole process is similar to the “MBA+specialization” strategy we generally apply in which we identify a partner school and expert professors for their expertise and of our program



offerings. In fact, following the concretization of the Airbus program, we used the same strategy to rapidly develop an EMBA-A in Morocco, again with the ENAC as our international partner and locally with the Moroccan Airport Authority (ONDA) and the Mohammed VI International Academy of Civil Aviation. This program will also launch in 2012.

Finally, we have had so much corporate interest in these new Executive MBA in Aviation Management programs that we are considering adding it to our portfolio of specialisations in Paris for our full-time MBA program.

Q To what extent are you liaising with local and national businesses in order to understand the ROI expectations of employers?

AR: This is something that we are doing more and more of. As with the ERM MBA and top French multinationals and our EMBA-A with Airbus, we are increasingly developing programmes and curricula both with and for corporate partners directly. We have recently expanded our

Academic Advisory Council to include more members of industry from around the world and are in the process of creating a Corporate Advisory Board. We want to get more direct corporate input on how to keep evolving our programmes to best meet the expectations of corporate recruiters. In parallel, we are pursuing research projects with top corporate partners to help them and us gain further insight into key industries. We are now working to complete a year-long research project with Alcatel-Lucent (ALU) on the subject of Megatrends, which focuses on the evolution of the ICT sector, deep potential mutations in education, demographically-driven changes across developed and developing economies as well as the revolution brewing in a world in which people and objects are increasingly connected 24x7. Truly fascinating stuff!

In relation to ROI, the return is more often than not a quick win-win proposition for employer and employee alike. EMBA participants, who

are the most common recipients of employer financing, are able to ‘apply on Monday what they learnt on Sunday’, often resulting in new responsibilities or promotion during the course of their EMBA studies. We are now seeing high potentials being sent to our EMBA from further and further afield. For example, Saint Gobain is now sending a high potential from the Ukraine in order to prepare him for taking over the top executive spot in their local operations by the end of the EMBA programme. While others are coming from far afield as Dubai or even Mumbai, traveling to Paris one weekend each month over two years.

Q Over the last year we have continually highlighted the decline in admission standards across the board, which is somewhat disconcerting. What impact has this had on the volume and quality of applications you have been receiving?

AR: Because ENPC has such a good reputation as a Grande Ecole in terms of engineering and the quality of our student body, especially in France, we have found that there is often a self-selecting process where people don’t feel that they are ‘ENPC worthy’. On the other hand, internationally, many are surprised to see a business school tied to an engineering school. This means that in France we have to work hard at showing people that the mother school is not the engineering school and that we’re looking for different criteria and are open to a wider range of students. While abroad we need to explain a bit more that we are looking for a wide range of professionals and that engineers only represent 30% of our student body.

As the MBA market really took off in the 1990s, the numbers of MBAs offered proliferated and now we’re seeing the possible results of this supply-side saturation. On the demand side, young professionals know that an MBA can be a career accelerator and a key to management opportunities. That said, as generation Y (and now even generation Z) prospects are a little bit impatient in respect to career progression, there has been a tendency to try to apply for MBAs earlier and earlier. This may be dragging down admission standards elsewhere, however the ENPC MBA is accredited by AMBA and one of their key criteria is that all MBA participants have a minimum of three years of professional experience. In fact, our MBA participants typically have 6-8 years of professional experience, which rise to 8-13 for our Executive MBA. While a lot of professionals are looking to take their MBAs earlier, there is actually more and more room to do an MBA later too. As the financial crisis has seen many middle managers of a certain age losing their jobs, we now see many turning to an MBA as a lever to reboot their career or to refresh their skill sets for a rapidly-changing employment landscape. >

Q When selecting an MBA programme provider, faculty, reputation and curriculum are obviously key factors. However, how important are the people that an applicant meets when visiting a business school, be they alumni, students or staff members, in the decision making process?

AR: I hope that we're special in this area as we're a smaller school than our main competitors such as HEC and INSEAD, and one of the things to come out of this is that our curriculum and approach are perceived to stress the human dimension and a more one-on-one approach. We try to ensure this from the very first contact with the School. This way you really get to know people. Our Director of Marketing, Françoise Blanchet, very often gets into a career counselling type of conversation with our prospects as they are often in a career-transition phase of their lives. They want to know if this is the right thing for them to do now, if an MBA is a good investment for them, what kind of time and resource investment an MBA requires and what ROI they can expect. Very quickly you get into a discussion on life goals, objectives and balancing your professional and private lives.

We like applicants to get the full view, and so we put them in touch with students in the programme or alumni with a similar background in terms of industry, background or nationality, so that they can get a participants perspective which resonates with them. We invite them to sit in on classes, meet the staff and faculty, talk to students and alumni. Usually it's an ongoing discussion that goes on for a month or so. Those who are able to will visit us at the school but, because the MBA is so international, we also hold Skype interviews and try to find local alumni to meet with them where possible. We try to cater to individual requirements whilst at the same time getting to know the person. Once you get into the admissions process there are very few surprises for the prospect as they've had the discussions and the contact, so they know what they're getting into. The side benefit is that by the time a candidate applies, both parties have a good idea of how good a fit they are with the School so the process is quite quick.

Q MBA hiring and starting salaries have been increasing. Are you able to talk about the success ENPC graduates have enjoyed in the job market of late?

AR: As salary is a big concern for most prospects let's start by saying that on average our graduates have seen a 30% salary increase in the first post-MBA employment. That said, there are several non-monetary forms of ROI for our graduates that are as interesting but more difficult to quantify that we call geographical, horizontal and vertical mobility. The first refers to those participants who choose to do an MBA in order to increase their international mobility and land a

job outside of their home country – like landing a dream job in France for example. Others look to do an MBA in order to change sectors as they have been doing the same thing for some time and need a credible means of changing directions. The MBA opens many such doors. Finally, many prospects are looking to boost them vertically up the management career ladder to increasing responsibilities. We see the highest boost in salary in the latter group but probably more satisfaction from the first two.

For EMBA students, who work during the two-year programme, promotion opportunities are very often put on the table after year one with negotiations regarding salary increase, new responsibilities and more managerial responsibilities coming in year two.

The 'international study trip' has become part and parcel of most MBA offerings. However, the international exposure that the Tri-Continent MBA affords ENPC's students is exceptional. Kindly expand upon the aforementioned offering.

TJ: This is a really unique format as this is a full-time MBA and it's global. Students are with us in Paris from September to December and we teach them the foundation courses in business and management during the first semester. The cohort then moves to Philadelphia from January to June. Here they have the elective courses and they undertake their MBA master thesis. In July and August the students spend six weeks in Asia with three weeks normally in China and three weeks in Japan – in China we have a campus in Shanghai and in Japan our partner school has a campus in Tokyo. So, the tri-continent equation represents Europe, North America and Asia. I think that for someone who really wants to undertake an MBA with a strong focus on international business, there is no better programme than the ENPC Tri-Continent MBA. It is always possible to teach international business from one location, but it is a completely different experience to spend several weeks in prime business locations such as Paris, Philadelphia, Shanghai and Beijing. When our students are in China and Japan they take part in lectures on how to do business in those locations, they have the opportunity to meet with business leaders in global headquarters and to network with local alumni.

Q This summer you launched the ENPC MBA Paris social media campaign. To what extent has this helped you connect with new, existing and potential students and has this had any impact on application volumes?

AR: After including social media in our strategic marketing plan we started by hiring a social media specialist as an intern for six months to verify the potential of a web 2.0 strategy. Intuitively it was attractive but we did not know



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BIOGRAPHY

★ **Dr Tawfik Jelassi** is the Dean of ENPC School of International Management.

★ **Alon Rozen** is the Assistant Dean at ENPC School of International Management as well as a Visiting Professor of Marketing & Management.

how it would translate in terms of recruitment, image and engagement of both participants and alumni. Based on the encouraging success of the campaigns that we were doing across Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Twitter we decided to make this a permanent position and Liviana Sala is now heading up this area. In addition to organic social campaigns such as 'like' campaigns on Facebook or +1's on Google+, we've been working on deepening the connections with and among prospects, alumni, fans and friends. We've also done some paid advertising (pay-per-click) campaigns with LinkedIn, Facebook and Google with results that are encouraging.

We're a School which stresses e-Business, technology management and innovation so we need to be credible in the social media arena.

That said, beyond the technology, it's very important for us to 'keep it personal'. We don't have a PR firm doing it for us – it's real people answering real questions and with no fake personas or those kinds of games being played. We're a small school with a high quality program and we're trying to get that message out in a human way. On the web we're not trying to sound different than we are, just trying to let people know who we are and what we stand for while inviting them to speak to or interact with us if they want to know more.

Talking Points

Q Next year, the Graduate Management Admission Test will incorporate a new section on integrated reasoning, designed to test the advanced reasoning and analytical skills that students will be required to apply in classrooms. Do you think this will further assist business schools in the screening of candidates?

AR: The difficulty with changing the GMAT, even for the better, is that it makes it difficult to compare scores over time. For example, how will the new 700 compare to yesterday's 700? However, I think that they've done a good job in adding this new component, trying to make scores align over time and this is definitely a key MBA skill.

Our take on GMAT is that high scores are rarely 'false positives'. However, as education becomes increasingly global there is a greater risk of 'false negatives'. There are many talented people in the market for whom English isn't their mother tongue, and with the pressure of an exam, particularly in another language, scores may not reflect the quality of the candidate. If someone is coming from a native English-speaking culture, the GMAT is pretty representative but, when someone is coming from another culture, the GMAT is less credible in weeding out the good from the bad.

At the ENPC we've always used our internal tests in our recruitment process. Interestingly, in light of the GMAT changes, is that our tests have always included an integrated reasoning test, which has been our fall back method for testing applicants. With integrated reasoning we present a situation to someone and ask them what they think about it, what the options could be, what they might have done (or done differently), what recommendations they would make. The test doesn't stop at their written response; we then have a discussion about it at our admissions interview to also verify their ability to contextualize their reasoning.

With the sheer amount of reading and processing of information that you need to do in an MBA, we would be doing a disservice to accept someone who may struggle with English. In some cases, otherwise extremely talented candidates are encouraged to take a year to improve their English before re-applying. That said, as a school that stresses cultural diversity, we don't look only for students who speak with a perfect accent or have flawless grammar.



Q In trying to produce effective managers and the business leaders of the future, ethical, social and environmental concerns have been high on the list of many business schools. To what extent has ENPC integrated the aforesaid points into its MBA offering and how important is the triple bottom line - people, planet and profit - to today's high potential managers?

AR: Actually, we feel a bit like the Timberland of management schools in the sense that we have been walking the walk of corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethics and sustainability since our inception, but we have never really talked about it. Now that our competitors have started doing the same, we find it odd that they are talking about it as much as they do. The founder of the school, Dame Celia Russo, coined the school's slogan "in business to make a better world" 25 years ago, and CSR, a term no-one really knew much about at the time, has been a compulsory core course in our MBA since 1988. Talk about visionary!

In addition to these important issues, another key aspect we repeatedly stress throughout our programmes is multicultural sensitivity and multiple perspectives in an increasingly global business world. Our professors come from all corners of the globe and we ask them to use cases and articles from all of the continents to ensure that no one culture or perspective is unduly emphasised. Add to that a student body that counts 20 nationalities among our 45 MBA participants this year and you can see how ENPC's traditional emphasis on diversity continues to express itself today.

The Future

Q ENPC continues to evolve. What can you tell us about the next 12-18 months?

AR: In addition to the new Aviation and Management EMBA being launched in 2012, we will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the ENPC MBA programme in July; we're holding a worldwide alumni event with our graduates from China, Casablanca, Abu Dhabi, India, Buenos Aires and Japan.

ENPC has always had an entrepreneurial spirit of continually launching new ideas. There is always something in the works and that makes it an exciting place to work and be a part of. The education market is changing so quickly that if you don't constantly have developments in the pipeline, you can become outdated very quickly. We feel that we have a responsibility to keep innovating.

You can expect a lot from ENPC, but shhh; it's still a secret. However, we promise to share any scoops with the readers of CEO Magazine first (or at least immediately after we publish the official press releases). We invite readers to stay tuned as there are some interesting developments in corporate education on the horizon... ☐