Main cornerstones of a proposed MBA program at the University of San Jorge

Initial draft

The program is targeted primarily at small and medium-sized enterprises in the province of Aragon. In a second and third step, the target group could be extended to cover other Spanish regions and interested participants from abroad.

The program is based on the premise that in the future, working internationally is set to become the norm in every respect (technology, competition, procurement, HR, competitors, markets, production and suppliers). Protected national areas and niches are going to become increasingly rare or disappear completely. This process of internationalization opens up new opportunities but also poses an existential threat to anyone who is unprepared for it. The aim of the program is to prepare the next generation of proprietors, members of management and new management recruits for the internationalization of markets and other processes.

Up till now, management training – and the related literature – has been largely aimed at large companies, and has taken for granted structures, processes and resources that do not exist in smaller ones. It has also failed to support small enterprises’ strengths – their greater ability to innovate, their ability to respond more rapidly and their focus on people. The result is that small enterprises are often left up to their own devices. On the one hand the assumption seems to be that all companies simply can live from hand to mouth and do not need any good management methods. And on the other hand, there is a justified mistrust on the part of SMEs towards the methods and instruments promulgated by universities, the specialist literature and management consultants.

However the challenges faced by SMEs are basically the same as for large companies, and they therefore need methods that are equally good, but are properly tailored to their size, strengths and weaknesses.

An MBA course targeted at small and medium enterprises is emphatically *not* just a low-level MBA. Making a subject matter clear and comprehensible is more difficult than making it seem complicated and hiding a lack of clarity behind fashionable jargon. The proposed MBA operates on a clear theoretical and methodological basis, but de-mystifies fashionable trends and always remains firmly rooted in reality. It does not set out to impress, but rather to indicate practical approaches to problems.

Neither does it attempt to give the impression that there is one single answer (‘10 steps to guaranteed success’) or a right answer that merely has to be learned by heart and reeled off when required. It teaches people to recognise problems, ask the right questions and seek or develop for themselves answers that are appropriate to the capabilities of small companies.

The students are unlikely to be fluent in English – but in future, no company will succeed without English. Speaking foreign languages is not something exotic but rather a basic tool for everyone, from top management to secretarial level. But neither does it help to perceive this lack of English as a threat or hindrance. Similarly there is little point in setting up an English course that claims to enable participants to speak perfect English prior to undertaking the MBA. Gradual improvement of students’ business English must be an integral part of the MBA program itself.

The program should not take as its starting point the claimed state-of-the-art in the various specialist disciplines (controlling, marketing, human resources etc.) and should certainly not set out to teach this material in isolation. What it should do is to take as its starting point the challenges the company comes up against on a day-to-day basis in pursuit of its aims. The idea should be to develop intelligent answers to these challenges.

The students should learn to research independently and assess their results critically. They should learn to work both on their own and in groups.

Working with various different types of company (e.g. family companies, larger companies, digital companies) should develop an awareness that it is wrong to assume that nothing is changing – but equally wrong to think that the entire economy is going digital. The MBA aims to develop an awareness that different types of company require different types of solution.

International placements are an obligatory part of the program.

Wherever possible, students should work with real examples and be set realistic practical and learning tasks. Some of these could be set by partner companies in the province of Aragon.