

## LEARNING LADDER

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# Gateway to greater heights

The ESSEC & Mannheim Executive MBA Asia-Pacific programme helps working professionals to realise their full potential

MEREDITH WOO

HAVING an Executive Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree can help to open new doors.

It can catapult those in a specific, and sometimes technical, role to a managerial position, says Professor Cedomir Nestorovic, director of the ESSEC & Mannheim Executive MBA Asia-Pacific programme, which is now in its fourth year.

He cites the example of a manager in the information technology sector who became a managerial consultant after completing his Executive MBA.

And for those with no background in finance and accountancy, an Executive MBA enables them to converse comfortably with finance directors in their own firms and understand financial issues better.

The programme also offers participants access to a wealth of new ideas and insights on market trends.

For example, says Prof Nestorovic, a participant in the defence industry initially believed that digital courses would not have an impact on his business. But after completing the Executive MBA, he improved his company's digital imprint.

Prof Nestorovic manages all aspects of the programme, including curriculum design, staffing of professors and residences evaluation.

Believing that the programme director should interact with the participants, he teaches the first and last courses, as this enables him to measure the

participants' progress.

Feedback is also important to him — not just from participants, but from alumni, professors and business leaders as well, to help him to modify the programme accordingly. He assesses proposals for invited speakers, such as innovators from Philips and Danone, and company visits.

He has also dropped an irrelevant module and changed the syllabus of another to better reflect the economic and business realities in Asia.

Even the residence destination was recently changed from Washington DC, United States, to Mannheim, Germany, to benefit participants. A course on German industry DNA was also added.

"We see value in students learning more about German industry practices as there are some similarities to the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Singapore and in the region.

"Another change we made was to revamp the entrepreneurial segment of the programme, by introducing a partnership with JTC LaunchPad @ one-north that allows participants to work on real cases with start-ups here," he says.

Last year's projects included a wine business in Singapore and a sustainable tourism business in Myanmar.

## World-class quality

The ESSEC & Mannheim Executive MBA Asia-Pacific programme is accredited by the French Ministry of Higher Education and also recognised locally.

Prof Nestorovic explains: "The French Ministry is partially



One unique aspect of the ESSEC & Mannheim Executive MBA Asia-Pacific is its strong digital emphasis, says programme director Prof Nestorovic. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

involved in the review and management of the programme. This is good — it provides a third-party assessment of our work and also helps to boost its credibility."

Content-wise, the Executive MBA programme has a Pan-Asian focus, with courses such as Family Business in Asia, Islamic Business in Asia, and Big Data and the Bottom of the Pyramid.

Another plus — these courses are taught by ESSEC's Singapore-based professors, all of whom are engaged in some form of corporation with various companies.

Participants can easily seek specific advice on human resources or marketing challenges that they are facing in their companies.

"Our professor of marketing is

the ESSEC LVMH chaired professor of Luxury Brand Management and has close relationships with brands from the LVMH group.

"We also have an expert in negotiation, who used to train both European and Chinese managers in cross-cultural negotiations, so he has first-hand experience and competence in conducting negotiation classes," says Prof Nestorovic.

All of ESSEC's full-time professors have PhDs and are experts in their respective fields. Several faculty members fly in regularly from the ESSEC campus in France.

## Riding the digital wave

All companies today and in the future will have to face the digital challenge, notes Prof Nestorovic.

One important aspect of the

"The second part is selling because all companies now want to sell online, not only the pure players such as Amazon, but also car companies, for instance.

"This is why we have an e-commerce course that is updated regularly because of the changes in this field.

"Finally, all companies are exposed to social media, especially when risk management due to reputation loss is involved. This is why we have a course on Social Media and Digital Marketing."

## A meeting of minds

The Asia-Pacific track of the ESSEC & Mannheim Executive MBA programme is designed for professionals in their late 30s with an average of 12 years' experience.

There are only about 15 to 20 participants each year. The small class size affords participants the luxury of a direct relationship with professors and invited industry leaders.

Prof Nestorovic says that each potential candidate's motivation for joining the programme is assessed, to ensure that it aligns with the person's aspirations.

The French Ministry of Education also exempts a small number of candidates from the prerequisite bachelor's degree due to their impressive managerial experience.

He adds: "Every year, we accept one or two such candidates and they have proven to be among the best.

"Class valedictorian Mink Ong Liat Hong, from the 2015/2016 cohort, was one such candidate."

Ms Ong is currently the advisor to YTL Land, part of a Malaysian conglomerate; and the founder of Mystique Universal Sdn Bhd, which manages and operates international jewellery boutiques like Gubelin and Garrard for investors and brand principals of luxury brands in Starhill Gallery.