

Michel Kalika, Business Science Institute

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January 26, 2022

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The Business Science Institute focuses on one program – a Doctor of Business Administration. Its president, Michel Kalika, told the PIE more about its offer, and why the DBA market is in the same emergent position as the masters market found itself in a decade ago.

The PIE: Can you tell us about what you do at [BSI](#)?

Michel Kalika: The Business Science Institute is quite a unique organisation. I think we are the only organisation in the academic world that focuses only on the one program. We created the organisation in 2012/13, as a group of faculty professors from universities.

We teach in executive education programs and very often our students, [who are] managers, they come back a few years later telling us, 'OK, I hold my MBA. I appreciated the courses, but I would like to go further'. And they are thinking about doctoral programs. I am professor in the field of management, so don't be surprised – when we teach management, we teach our students to listen to the market.

“Our conclusion was that it's not easy for universities to answer the demand of managers”

Doctoral programs are [usually] for training young students who want to be a faculty members or professors. Very often in university, professors don't know how to answer that demand from managers.

Before BSI, I created in France the first DBA program in a university in Paris and our conclusion was that it's not easy for universities to answer the demand of managers.

So on one side, you have traditional university with doctoral programs. On the other side, you have some managers, holding good positions in companies, holding an MBA, telling you, 'I would like to work on that topic'. Traditional universities are not well adapted to answer the demand. And because we are professors of management, we think it's a pity. We cannot let traditional universities neglect these demands – that was the initial idea. To answer a demand.

So we said, 'OK to address the demand from international managers who are all over the world, we have to create a network organisation with a support team'. So people in Thailand, in Germany, Portugal everywhere, more than 100 faculty members all over the world answering an international demand.

Our hypothesis is that when we are specialised [with our one program], we are more efficient, more effective or more responsive. It's not a critique of university, you know? But a public institution, a large institution, is not always very reactive, very responsive.

The PIE: How does it work with the faculty you have?

MK: Our faculty are in different universities, different business schools, in around 20 different countries. Their main position is in their university, of course, but we can say they work part time for us if – there is a condition – they share our project.

[Usually doctoral students] are young students coming and telling you, 'I would like to prepare a thesis under your supervision' and you tell him, 'OK, you will work on that topic and the professor will decide about the topic of the students'. In DBA, it doesn't work like that.

[The managers] arrive in the program with their idea. A logistics professional might like to work on green logistics, someone who follows Islam might like to work on Islamic finance. Our solution is we go and look for colleagues because we know them and it's easy to find them in our network. Once a student told me, 'you are a matchmaker'. Yes. We organise match, between managers and faculty.

The PIE: What other projects have your students worked on?

MK: We have more than 108 theses that have been defended. One manager was in a large retail company in Switzerland, managing people, his main issue was how people will be able to develop their capabilities to face more challenges, more competitiveness and so on.

“A Chinese manager working in Australia made his thesis on the role of networks on the decision of students applying to university”

Another example is a Chinese manager working in Australia who made his thesis on the role of networks on the decision of students applying to university. What is the process of decision? What is the role of networks and social networks in that decision? Because his job was to recruit Chinese students for Australian universities, he wanted to understand in a better way what the decision making process is. Some students are in Africa, they are representatives in some governments or ministers. A lot of topics are more and more in relation with sustainable development issues.

What is interesting is that sometimes students pay [program fees] themselves, and then after one or two years, the company pays and we reimburse the student because the company understands the added value of the process. This kind of program is useful for the people... but it is useful also for companies.

We also produce books [which...] is a way for the doctor to create impact and to disseminate the result of their research. You know, managers, they don't read very often academic journals. We all know that academic journals, they are read by faculty, not by managers. So we told our doctors, 'OK, you have been working three or four years on your topic. You have some competencies. You create knowledge. Publish them in a book and integrate all your recommendations with your managers'.

For us, a DBA is not only a piece of paper, it's not only a degree, it's more than that. It is the opportunity for a managers to create knowledge and then to disseminate this knowledge. I think that we are the only one in the world to do that.

The PIE: Where are your students mainly based?

MK: 46 countries. Singapore, China, Australia, Middle East, Africa, Europe, of course, Canada, United States. The only region where we have no student is South America. Maybe because we don't teach in Spanish. We teach in English, French, and German.

At the beginning [of programs], we organise face to face small groups – it can be five to seven to 10 students. For that we have today 10 locations, Shanghai, Bangkok, Paris, Geneva, Dakar and so on.

It means that our professors – not during Covid, of course – take the plane and they go and teach.

We have organised the same program online, meaning courses are recorded and we have an online follow up of our students. In DBA, teaching is important, but also important is the follow up of the students.

So every month we organised a meeting between our students, our faculty, and so we organise a program now online in English and French and German. Since December 2020, we are AMBA accredited and quite proud about that, you know, because there are not a lot of DBA program accredited in the world, only around 10, I think, so we are one of those.

“What we see is that in different countries, there is the creation of new DBA programs”

The PIE: How big is the DBA market?

MK: We were created in 2013 and today we have more than 200 managers in our program. What we see is that in different countries, there is the creation of new DBA programs. But my feeling is that today it's a situation of DBA market is the same as the situation of the MBA market 20 or 30 years ago. It is an emerging market and we just stand there in the growing phase. My conviction, my opinion is that this market will grow very rapidly in the future.

Another problem is that very often the faculty members in management are far from practises. Our DBA offers faculty at different schools the opportunity to work on conceptual issues with managers. It means that the students bring to the faculty, to the professor, the data, the cases. That's one of the motivation of the faculty. So it means that it is also a long life learning for faculty. You have a long life learning on both sides.