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Building on existing know-how

THE most successful companies in the world would not be where they are today without the leadership and foresight of highly knowledgeable professionals that form the managing boards of their respective organisations.

Interestingly, many chief executive officers around the world, such as Tim Cook of Apple, Jeffrey R. Immelt of General Electric, Shantanu Narayen of Adobe Systems, Datuk Seri Azman Mohd of Tenaga Nasional Berhad and Tan Sri Tay Ah Lek of Public Bank, all have a common denominator – a Master of Business Administration (MBA) qualification.

It is clear from this pool of public figures that an MBA qualification is something that is quite relevant to higher management across diverse industries and businesses.

Fresh graduates often face a

conundrum when looking for their first job since many companies are keen on employing individuals who have a certain level of job experience.

Their lack of experience makes it difficult for them to get a job while at the same time, not having a job equates to having a continuous lack of experience, leading to a vicious deadlock.

The challenges do not end after landing a job. Fast forward a decade or two later, these same candidates, standing on the brink of managerial positions, realise that their lack of higher academic qualification is haring them from being considered for much-deserved promotions.

This raises the age-old debate as to which is more important to employers: good academic qualifications or job experience?

According to Prof Loo Sin Chun, cluster chair of business and management studies at

Open University Malaysia, the simple answer is that employers are always hoping to strike gold by hiring talented individuals who have both academic qualifications and work experience as they are more likely to turn into capable, qualified leaders.

He thus emphasises the need for one to undertake postgraduate studies as it provides individuals with the edge they need to stay ahead in the highly competitive working environment, where it is common to meet many talented workers who have at least a bachelor's degree under their belt.

"There are some students enrolled in our MBA programme without much academic qualification who come to beef up their credibility. For these students, having a postgraduate degree is a matter of self-esteem and self-respect," adds Prof Loo.

All-round capabilities

A key strength of the MBA programme is that it encourages candidates to constantly interact with their peers and tutors via online forums or scheduled physical meetings. This feature, Prof Loo believes, is the key ingredient of MBA programmes that provides students with the greatest opportunity for growth.

"With a modern MBA programme, students receive many networking opportunities. Even those who pursue this programme online can develop leadership qualities when they conduct or initiate topics of discussions online.

"They do not lose out on the experience that those who go for physical classes get, as they still

receive the right training in communication and leadership. They also attain the necessary exposure to various theories and application techniques, allowing them to handle their jobs more confidently," says Prof Loo.

In a Forbes article titled *Five Reasons Women Should Get MBAs*, it is argued that the business school environment teaches individuals to speak up and defend their positions or views when challenged. It also trains individuals to make risky managerial decisions based on incomplete information.

Interestingly, the same article suggests that MBA graduates can let go of their inner perfectionists when it comes to completing tasks. This is seen as positive as it results in delivering timely outcomes more efficiently without compromising general quality – an ideal that will help many organisations in a fast-paced business environment.

Deeper thought process

"Students from diverse backgrounds are able to better appreciate other disciplines and the issues related to other business areas through the exchange of thoughts and ideas. This knowledge will help them communicate and understand people better," shares Prof Loo.

He believes the constant mingling and open discussion with people of diverse backgrounds and experiences will result in a new breed of managers who are more confident in daily undertakings and have broader views of how to tackle challenges.

This same sentiment was shared by Prof Chester Spell, management professor at Rutgers University, who believes that being able to step out from one's biased perspective and see things from a

new angle is what separates MBA graduates from other individuals.

In an opinion piece on Rutgers University's website, Prof Spell shares that from their many debates and dialogues with peers and professors, MBA students can increase their worth as they can create an arsenal of different problem-solving methods and ideologies.

Being able to summarise challenges in a problem, identify the pros and cons of different business techniques and come up with reasonings for decisions made as well as having strong analytical skills are some techniques that MBA students develop throughout the course.

The changing tide

From time to time, the media picks up on chief executive officers or successful entrepreneurs who shun the need for an MBA qualification. These individuals swear on the school of hard knocks and believe that personal experience is the best teacher for success.

There should not be any comparison in the first place, since the MBA programme, though versatile, is not a one-size-fits-all qualification that guarantees success.

What it does is it provides opportunities for people who lack managerial exposure to widen their skill sets and gain better insight into the different business areas of companies and their stakeholders.

There is no denying the possibility of achieving business goals or becoming a capable manager without an MBA qualification. However, in this fast-paced world, having an MBA may just provide the edge that could be the difference between a rough diamond and a polished one.

