

Maritime MBA's - a new learning opportunity

In September 2001, a new MBA programme in Shipping and Logistics was launched in Copenhagen by a consortium of eight Scandinavian universities. The course was to include all the tools of an international MBA curriculum, but with a maritime angle and case study focus, addressing all the themes influencing the industry, including environmental ones.

This project was extensively written about in BIMCO Bulletin No. 3/2000, under the heading "Boosting maritime management competence". Two years have now passed, and the first graduates have now completed the course. Mr. Peter Bjerregaard of the Danish Shipowners Association addressed the newly-fledged MBA's at the graduation ceremony, and excerpts from his speech are given below.

"More than two years of hard work and sacrifice has been rewarded by your graduation from what is probably one of the best educational programmes available in shipping - not just in Denmark, but internationally.

To me, today also marks the initial culmination of the ideas tabled about four years ago regarding the establishment of a Shipping MBA in Denmark. An idea which reflected the generally increased interest in academic education in the form of Master's Degrees, but also reflecting the fact that shipping and the maritime cluster is playing a significant role in Denmark.

Using the programme

Making plans and creating visions is much less demanding than convincing the industry that a programme is now in place and we - the industry - should make use of it.

Recruiting the required number of interested candidates from several countries is no small task. And, not least, students have to keep

steam up during weekends and holidays. Well done! and on behalf of the industry, thank you for this effort - and for making this an international MBA. Shipping is a global business.

For each one of you today, this represents the passing of a new milestone. Some of you - to the benefit of your employers and sponsors - will use your new skills in your existing job. Others may use the opportunity to climb a few rungs up the career ladder. Others may change job. Some of you will be returning to your own country after many months away, hopefully enriched by both a good education and a cultural experience.

From my perspective, today also symbolises what we have increasingly seen over the last 100 years: shipping is not just a secluded maritime activity; shipping has become an integrated part of international commerce - and an activity which increasingly operates under the watchful eye of politicians, governments, international authorities, the press and the public in general. Your immersion in international economics, new logistical challenges and environmental questions reflect this.

However, your studies also reflect an important shift which has taken place, from a focus on technology, speed and ship crewing to more stringent educational requirements for mariners, a greater emphasis on the environment, responsibility, safety and security, more control, information and knowledge, and the development of harbours, infrastructure, intermodalism and logistics.

The holistic view

Shipping has become a complicated affair, requiring a clear grasp of many different areas in order to be able to make money and get things done. I am sure that as part of your MBA you have acquired tools which you have used to analyse, construct solution

models and make decisions, but I also hope you have gained a good grasp of the big picture - a more holistic view of the industry. I also hope that you have not lost your enthusiasm for new initiatives or the willingness to take chances along the way.

In Denmark, we naturally feel that we have many good qualities, including a high level of education, but we must not be blind to the fact that we may have lost some of our willingness to take risks. I hope that the foreign students have critically examined some of our weaknesses, and that Danish or Scandinavian colleagues have acquired some foreign habits.

Generally speaking I hope that you have all extended your networks. The concept of networking is certainly nothing new to the shipping industry, but even so, hopefully your MBA studies have added a new dimension - whether it be international contacts or across sectors, not only between you as individuals, but also between companies.

A growth industry

It has recently been reported in the Danish press that an MBA degree is no longer a sure path to a top job. I'm not sure that it ever has been a guarantee, but I attribute much greater weight to the fact that you have acquired an MBA which is geared towards a growth industry.

Even though the present golden times are not necessarily going to continue, I am in no doubt that increased trade and globalisation will create continued growth, and hence opportunities. It is, however, just as certain that in tandem with this growth in international trade, new "rules of the game" will continue to be implemented - rules which will require ever increasing expertise to implement and follow.

"Lifelong learning" is a common mantra today and not just as a nice phrase in a ▶

◀ toast speech, but simply because it is true - and a real requirement.

This is also true for the maritime sector. I therefore hope that this MBA programme will demonstrate to smart young people thinking about entering a maritime career that this industry too can offer lifelong learning opportunities.

A career in the maritime sector has more opportunities than a life at sea, although there is nothing wrong with that. I am convinced there is a growing need for a hybrid shipping expert, with a navigator or engineers background and an academic commercial education on top.

Common sense approach

It is, however, just as important to maintain a human dimension in management and business - a good helping of common sense. For a number of years, mariners have been acquiring new and effective tools in their daily work, making many things routine. They have also received better training, yet inexplicable accidents continue to happen. They are now therefore also receiving training in bridge discipline.

You have also acquired new tools which will hopefully allow you to navigate more securely through both good and bad times, but always remember to look out of the window - that is what will make you excellent leaders and employees.

You may regard this event today as the clos-

ing of a chapter in your life and your career - actually it just the beginning - the opening of a new chapter. Congratulations and good luck to you all."

Enthusiastic students

The course seems to have generated enthusiasm from amongst the students too. Here are some excerpts from a speech made by a representative of the student body at the graduation ceremony:

"Students strong on economics have been confronted with technical theories about shipbuilding - and the technically well founded students have worked hard to learn marketing and finance. Everyone has been challenged in new areas, but at the same time it has been possible to support each other in the weaker areas - which is a strong advantage of the programme."

"This diversity of working knowledge gathered in one MBA classroom also require lecturers able to match this high level of experience - not an easy task - but it has been done."

"It has proved to be possible to establish a common learning platform able also to account for the individual interests and purposes. We were given the opportunity to influence the planning and contents of the programme during the course..."

Ultimately, of course, the bottom line is expressed in a final student comment: "Hopefully, the future supply of highly-qualified shipping MBA's will be acknowledged and



Peter Bjerregaard

used by shipping companies and supporting industries of the maritime cluster." In these times of falling birth rates in the western world and increasing competition to entice students into all manner of different fields, it is important that initiatives such as this are recognised and their graduates employed. Otherwise, it will be even harder to persuade young people to consider a career in the maritime industry as a valid option. ■

Editor's Note: Further information on the MBA programme in shipping and logistics is available on the following website: www.shippingMBA.com