

UCT's Executive MBA programme recognised for its distinctive approach

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The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is ranked 46th in the world, and the best in Africa, for its Executive MBA programme according to the QS Global EMBA Rankings for 2019.

Acting director of the UCT GSB, Associate Professor Kosheek Sewchurran, believes that the school's EMBA programme is one of a kind and is delighted that the ranking recognises its stature. "We've really pushed the boundaries of what business education can be," he says. "In a sense we have been the pedagogical equivalent of a venture capitalist - investing in our own ideas to build a degree that is truly distinctive."

It has been a team effort, he adds. The EMBA depends on a strong mix of academics, practitioners and professional support staff – as well as, of course, talented students – to function effectively.

The prestigious QS ranking uses a methodology that combines input from thought leaders in business and management, assesses each business school's reputation amongst academics and global employers, and takes the demographics of the EMBA cohort and other programme-specific indicators into account.

The UCT GSB's EMBA programme is one of the fastest growing postgraduate degrees at UCT and is known for its focus on the practice of management and leadership rather than a traditional training in business functions. Prof Sewchurran explains, "we can lay claim to being the only true practice degree in Africa. Managing is an embodied experience and can be overwhelming. To help students navigate this they need more than theory."

"The reality is that managers don't operate on a plane removed from the world around them, where they have all the answers and can employ abstract, rational thinking to lay out their options and pick the best. They are constantly in situations where they have limited agency and that require ongoing adjustments rather than pre-designed plans. This requires wisdom and you can't teach that – it only comes through practice."

The EMBA provides reflective strategies and practical insight and builds students' capacity to live with disharmony and complexity that come standard in the world of business today. EMBA alumnus Paxton Anderson says that the degree offers a more experiential, emergent style of thinking and exposes students to different ways of viewing the world. He says, "Often this shift in perspective or a process of questioning closely held beliefs can lead to creative entrepreneurial breakthroughs."

Many EMBA alumni have achieved just that and have gone on to run successful businesses across Africa, notably in areas which require managing complexity in highly innovative sectors.

Phathizwe Malinga, CEO of SqwidNet – licensed network operator for Sigfox in South Africa and subsidiary of Dark Fibre Africa, credits the skills he learned on the EMBA for preparing him for his leadership role by transforming his way of thinking and enhancing his strategic decision-making abilities. "It gave me the confidence to navigate complex problems with integrity and humility. I learned that there are many truths and I no longer feel the need always to be right. I have learned to listen."

Another EMBA graduate, Buhle Goslar, is Chief Customer Officer at JUMO - a financial technology platform that connects under-served customers in Africa and Asia to financial services. Goslar believes in the power of industry disruption to drive broader access to health, education, financial services, transport and communications. She says, "market disruptors are, out of necessity, lion-hearted - they are not afraid of tension and complexity. Instead, they seek it out as a vehicle to seeing the world as it really is. They ask 'why not? If not this way, then how?'" She also believes that successful disruptors find

creative ways to learn, something the EMBA provides.

Prof. Sewchurran notes that becoming a leader and strategy practitioner in complexity requires a change in being, doing and knowing. Accordingly, the EMBA focuses on character development as a foundation before adding more technical skills. “We have focused on disclosing new worlds and opening strategy as opposed to trying to simplify the world through theories.”

“The essence of practice in management, of really coming to grips with the lived experience of disharmony and complexity is a crucial skill for leaders in disruptive and uncertain times,” he adds.

“The EMBA challenges students with the realities of leading in a complex world. To navigate this world, they need to be able to reflect on their context and who they are, in order to make sense of where they have come from and step boldly towards the future.”

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