

EPFL EMBA: a new innovation-minded approach

The Management of Technology programme got a make-over this autumn. It's new name is the EPFL EMBA, but it's not just the name that's changing. The approach experienced an overhaul, too, and is now focused on innovation and modern teaching methods that blend practical experience and online classes. The programme now caters to employees and entrepreneurs alike.

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EMBA class of 2018.

How does one go from an idea to a wildly successful commercial project? The EPFL EMBA seeks to provide the answer. Although the programme offers solid foundations in the major subjects studied in all MBAs (finance, accounting, law, economics, etc.), the EPFL EMBA stands out with its highly innovation-based approach. Formerly known as the MoT (Management of Technology) programme, the degree that was dubbed the EPFL EMBA in the summer of 2017 has been innovation-focused ever since.

“By conducting a survey of our graduates, we learned that their expectations revolved around three factors,” explains Tilo Peters, the programme’s Executive

Director. “Being able to keep working throughout the programme, getting an EPFL diploma and developing their innovation skills.” This shift is particularly visible in classes such as *Design Thinking* and *Future Trends & Disruptive Technologies*, as well as the focus on problem-solving. “Innovation is more than a simple idea – it’s a concrete project designed for commercial purposes. The programme helps you learn the tools you need to analyse the market, assess potential demand and transform your idea into an innovation.”

This aspect of the programme obviously relies on the emergence of new technology – and particularly that which is cultivated at EPFL – but that’s not all that goes into it.

“Innovation can be technology-oriented, but it can also mean developing new organisation processes and structures. We help our students implement innovation better on a daily basis to provide added value.” Another advantage of this approach is an increased ability to adapt to changes in the market, the arrival of new competitors and the advent of new business models.

TRAINING WITH HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

The EPFL EMBA was designed to expose students to real issues, increasing their knowledge as well as their soft skills. They have to complete a company project from A to Z based on an innovative technology or service, and carry out every aspect of its development and marketing.

“The programme aims to provide the ingredients for financial success. You establish a business plan, plan the project and create marketing tools – everything from conceptualisation to closing a sale.”

It’s easier to use concrete examples with a class size limited to 36 students, the cap enforced since EPFL fully took the reins of the MBA. By contrast, the MoT, which was co-organised with HEC Lausanne, accepted over 80 students at a time. The programme is now accepting employees as well as entrepreneurs and the number of female students has risen, making it a more diverse environment.

Each class is jointly taught by presenters from both academia and the business world. They share their experiences with students and provide a straightforward view of the challenges, opportunities and possible stumbling blocks they can



Three questions for **Danuta Cichocka** (EMBA’16), founder of Resistell

Tell us about your background.

I started my career as a researcher in microbiology. For several years, I had been keen to add a commercial dimension to my career. I was thinking of joining a start-up before setting up my own company. To reorientate my career in this way, I first needed to acquire strategy and project development skills.

How did EPFL’s EMBA help you?

The EPFL EMBA was invaluable. Its approach – adding a commercial dimension to innovation – was perfectly in line with my career aspirations. I was able to acquire the skills and knowledge that I was lacking in the areas of strategy, marketing and intellectual property. The course also taught me how to give better presentations and to put my ideas to better use. Moreover, the EMBA provides excellent networking opportunities. I was able to meet other people working in life sciences who helped shape my entrepreneurial project.

At the end of the course, I set up my own company, Resistell. Over 700,000 people die each year from antibiotic resistance. Our technology aims to reduce the waiting time that follows a resistance test to these substances from several days to several hours, which will reduce mortality rates and medical fees. Without the insight I gained through the EPFL EMBA, I would probably never have seen the business opportunity behind this innovation.

What stage has Resistell reached today?

We have produced initial prototypes and developed a design concept for our final product. We have also invested a lot of time in marketing, particularly for our logo and website. I would certainly have focused less on these aspects had it not been for the experience I gained from the EPFL EMBA. In June 2017, Resistell was chosen above six other start-up nominees as the winner for the Swissbiolabs Award in the “pitch” competition. I would definitely not be where I am today without EPFL’s EMBA.

→ Also read about Christoph Müller (EMBA’14) on page 20.



expect. The EPFL EMBA also features blended learning, using e-learning modules to familiarise students with the main concepts of future classes or to help them review previous lectures. All candidates with at least five years of professional experience are eligible to apply for the 16-month programme (must be available on Fridays and Saturdays). ||

→ For more information and enrolment, visit emba.epfl.ch.