



Nurture a truly international outlook

The globetrotting OneMBA programme's aim is to develop management skills by learning from worldwide local businesses

By Paul Dinsdale

Next month, over 100 top executives from across the world will visit South Africa as part of their executive MBA programme. The trip aims to combine classroom teaching with valuable community service and to give participants an opportunity to learn from local businesses, as well as offering their own expertise.

The visit is organised by the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM), Erasmus University, in conjunction with OneMBA, which claims to be the only truly global executive MBA programme.

During the week's visit, executives on the programme will work in teams with micro-businesses and not-for-profit organisations in the townships surrounding Johannesburg and Cape Town. Each team will prepare a presentation in support of their allocated local organisation to win additional aid of 23,000 South African rand. As an extra test, participants are not allowed to use traditional methods of presentation, such as PowerPoint, and are encouraged to find creative



Team effort: participating executives in a dance class with township children

ways of persuading the audience to donate to their business.

The OneMBA programme has an annual cohort of around 100-120 executives, based in five countries: the Netherlands, the US, Brazil, Mexico and China. The programme, which has run since 2002, is designed by collaboration between leading business schools in the five countries.

Over 21 months, executives experience business in seven countries on four continents – the US, Latin America, Europe and Asia – and spend a residency in each country. There they have a mixture of teaching, team projects and insights into the country's business culture.

Brigitta Theleman, programme director for OneMBA, who is based in

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, says that the programme has a focus on global management skills and aims to give solid experience of business practices in the five countries. "Each school recruits its own cohort and executives continue working full-time during the programme, and have a residency in their own country every six weeks," she explains. "The full cohort of students then comes together in North Carolina and Washington for a week, and then visits the other countries as well, namely Brazil, Mexico and China.

"One of the most valuable elements is working as a team with other executives, in their home country and then with the other countries, which gives a great deal of experience of working across national boundaries and different business cultures."

The eleventh cohort graduates from the programme this month and has recently visited Xiamen in China, where they attended sessions run by Chinese tutors and met local business leaders.

Lorna Goulden, 48, graduated from the OneMBA programme two years ago. She worked for electronic giant

Philips in Rotterdam in the Netherlands for 18 years, and then set up her own business consultancy on innovation and strategy. "When I was looking for an MBA, I wanted one with an international outlook, and the OneMBA had all the ingredients I was looking for," she says. "The programme has given me the extra tools I needed to approach issues such as disruptive technology on a global level, as it gave us insights into how organisations react to change in different cultures."

Rakesh Sinha, 45, a regional finance director for Unilever in Rotterdam, graduates from the OneMBA programme this month. He says an important factor in choosing the OneMBA was that the average age of executives is around 40. "I wanted an MBA where the students had a substantial amount of experience in business, as this means the level of discussion is deeper," he says.

"I've worked abroad for the last 12 years, so I wanted an MBA with a truly global nature. The residencies in different countries were very useful, as we get an insight into different business practices around the world."