

Business Education

After the hiatus IMD seeks to stand out from the crowd

In his year as president Dominique Turpin has reversed a slide in revenues and sought to reaffirm the school's global ambitions, writes Della Bradshaw

Dominique Turpin's webpage contains not one but three biographies. Or, to be more precise, one biography in three languages: English, French and Japanese. It is, perhaps, typical of IMD, the Swiss business school where he has been president for the past year and a professor for at least 20, and which claims to be one of the world's most global.

Yet the 54-year-old Prof Turpin is undoubtedly a Frenchman, from his accent to his mannerisms. And despite his assertion that IMD is a school that specialises in executive education, he clearly still has a soft spot for its MBA programme, of which he was director for four years.

"We have a small programme, we don't make money. But we can test new ideas and materials with the MBAs. I think there is an agreement among the faculty that we should not cut it."

With just 90 students on the full-time MBA programme and a further 60 on the Executive MBA – an MBA for working managers – fees from the programmes are small beer compared with the total revenues for the school. In 2008 revenues peaked at SFr128m but dropped in 2009 to a disappointing SFr100m. Still, Prof Turpin is confident that the school is back on track; for the 2010 calendar year, the school posted revenues of SFr104m (\$127m).

But when Prof Turpin took over as president at IMD a year ago, reversing the decline in income was only one of the problems facing the school.

He was appointed from within IMD

to replace John Wells, who had been president for a little more than two years. A seasoned Harvard professor, Prof Wells' style of management proved to be at odds with the collaborative culture of IMD, which was built up over 15 years by the school's founder and president, Peter Lorange.

When Prof Turpin took up his new role, morale was low, in particular among the non-academic staff, who are arguably as critical to the success of an executive-level business school as the teaching faculty.

When Prof Turpin announced his management team, it included three academics and three administrators. "I think it was well received," says Prof Turpin.

"We were sending a signal. One of my objectives was to rebuild IMD, staff and faculty."

But the hiatus caused by Prof Lorange's retirement and Prof Wells' truncated tenure has thrown IMD off its stride strategically, concedes Prof Turpin.

"We were late arriving in China," is one issue he points out. Now the school is trying to forge links with companies in China, south-east Asia and Latin America – today Japan is IMD's biggest corporate market. "We need to bring knowledge into the classroom of what is going on there," says the president.

He is acutely aware of the issues and the timescales involved.

"South America is not going to globalise the US way or the European way. Pretty soon the Brics won't need us any more."

The growing importance of emerging markets is one of the factors that is dramatically changing the way the executive education works, but there is also a higher demand for a personalised service.

"We will have to be more proactive in service before and after the programme," admits Prof Turpin.

But as the market is growing, so is the competition, he says. "The US is



Dominique Turpin:
'We want professors who have a global sense'

Charlie Bibby

Popularity barometer shows size is no obstacle

There is a new kind of competition between business schools these days. As well as the highest GMAT scores for the entering class, the most cited professors and the highest salaries for graduates, schools are competing for the highest number of "likers", the latest hip phrase for those who follow business school news on Facebook.

The difference in numbers is surprising. At the latest count – although the figures change daily – the Wharton school at the University of Pennsylvania was leading the field of the top US schools, with 14,983 likers, followed by Harvard Business School, with 13,090. Stanford had 5,058 on its MBA programme page while MIT Sloan is rated by 4,311, possibly due to the small intake on the MBA programmes run by these two schools.

In the Midwest, the Kellogg school at Northwestern University had just

1,428 followers and Chicago Booth 1,290 on its "Considering Booth" Facebook page.

In Europe there are similar discrepancies. Oxford's Saïd school has 2,833 likers on its admissions page on Facebook and Cambridge's Judge business school 1,083. In Spain, IE Business School, the master of marketing, tops the scoring with 8,188 likers. Esade and Iese Business School, both in Barcelona, scored 4,983 and 4,293 respectively.

Of the other top European schools, Insead had 8,588 on the "liker index" and London Business School 12,853. But IMD topped the lot in Europe with 13,029, neck and neck with Harvard. All of which is food for thought: of all the top schools on the list, IMD has by far the smallest MBA programme and among the oldest programme participants.

the biggest market in the world, but it is competitive.

"There is more competition for business schools from corporate universities, for example. And everybody wants to be global. How do you differentiate yourself when everybody claims the same thing?"

Prof Turpin has sought to distinguish IMD from other schools by focusing efforts on five research centres: family business; supply chain; the chief executive agenda 2015-2020; boards and governance; and the impact of executive education. But having determined the strategy for research will not solve Prof Turpin's biggest problem of all: securing more faculty – the school has just 65 on the payroll at the moment.

"The problem we have at IMD is not to get business, it is to get the right faculty," he says. "We want professors who have a global sense."

Recruiting faculty at IMD is substantively different from at university-based business schools, largely because IMD does not operate a tenure system. Prof Turpin says this is no deterrent to the appropriate faculty, however.

"People choose to leave the tenure system," he says. "What excites the people who come to IMD is that we work with industry on real industry issues. The participants don't care if you are an assistant or a full professor. They care what you are going to tell them."

IMD may focus on educating more mature managers rather than younger degree students, but it is no laggard in adopting technology. In preparation for its Orchestrating Winning Performance (OWP) programme in June 2010, the curriculum director wanted to use the iPad in the classroom, but Apple was not allowing customers to make bulk orders for its new product.

To overcome this, iPads were purchased individually and the cost reimbursed by IMD. "Every member of staff went out to buy one," smiles Prof Turpin. "We got 500."

This year Prof Turpin says that the programme directors wanted to go one step further. So on day one last month, they taught all the participants how to tweet. Whether they tweeted in French and Japanese as well as English is unclear.

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