

Executive MBA opens leaders up to a world of new possibilities

In Summer 2017, IoD East Midlands spoke to **David Radley**, Associate Director - Geotechnics, at BWB Consulting Limited, about his experiences as he set off on an Executive MBA at Nottingham Trent University. Two years on, he tells **Rob Beswick** how he found the course, and why he still thinks it's an ideal pathway for other senior business leaders

Two years ago, David Radley was awarded an IoD scholarship by Nottingham Business School. At the time, he told *IoD East Midlands* that the Executive MBA at Nottingham Trent University had 'opened his view' of the world, allowing him to broaden his experience in a way no other qualification could.

An account manager and geotechnical engineer with BWB Consulting Limited, David is as likely to be found in muddy boots, a hi-vis jacket and a safety helmet on a building site as he is in boardroom attire. He took an MBA as a challenge to develop his managerial skills, building on his previous experience - including an MSc in Geotechnical Engineering, Design and Management and status as a Chartered Engineer.

"I switched firms earlier in my career to develop my technical skills, and the MBA has given me the opportunity to develop my management skills in much the same way," he explained.

What was clear from the outset was that David has always taken career and professional development seriously: "My career has been one of continual professional development; it is a philosophy I swear by."

"Undertaking the MBA was the next logical step for me."

It is a step that has gone well, as when I caught up with David more recently he was still clearly enthused by the process as he brings this chapter of his CPD to a close. Graduation is not too far off (July), after completion of the primary component of the MBA; a business research project on the sustainability challenges facing BWB's developer



David Radley pictured at RedR's Royal Event, where HRH Prince Charles was keynote speaker. RedR UK trains lifesavers to work in global emergencies and natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods and drought. Photo by Chris Andreou for RedR UK

clients. That final report allowed him to take a considered look at the property development industry as a whole.

Much of the data and conclusions gathered from that final report and the other MBA modules have been fed back to the boardroom throughout the duration of the course. So there has been a real benefit for BWB - David has in effect offered some free-of-charge management consultancy services - but how has it helped him?

"Looking back over the MBA, the biggest benefit I've derived is that it has taken me into different areas and broadened my perspective. I've a better understanding of how the different pieces of industry fit together. It has also allowed me to develop my strategic mindset so that I can fit those pieces together."

"The MBA has really opened my eyes to a much bigger picture - given me a more wordly view, as it were."

Crucially, the MBA has helped him consider the role of the company's stakeholders, too. "We have been heavily involved in improving the sustainability of everything we do, and that naturally brings us into contact with people and businesses outside our usual field. Doing the MBA has allowed me to focus on their needs and their goals, and to understand where we can

collaborate with them better."

What has been interesting for David is how colleagues have responded. "You do get the odd groan at meetings when I come out with 'MBA speak'", David admits. "But the overall response has been excellent. I have found that many of the company's directors recognise the value and the impact it has had."

He accepts that the MBA isn't for everyone, however. "In my field of work you get a lot of engineers who aren't interested in the managerial side. They are technical specialists - they want to get out there, honing their technical skills as geologists and engineers, etc. Not everyone is commercially focused. What the MBA has done is confirm my interest in the management side of business, as well as the technical, which should stand me in good stead for the rest of my career."

So what area does he think has been most improved by undertaking the MBA? "Everything," David jokes. "If I had to pin it down to one thing, I'd say my ability to reflect."

"I've always focused on achieving goals, but never really stepped back to consider how they were achieved. I was too busy pushing on with the next task. The work environment does not give you much opportunity to reflect, but the final module focused on just this. It was

great to step back from 'doing' and instead consider how and why things played out the way they did.

You develop a better understanding of the challenges others' face and it allows you to make better decisions that are for the good of the business."

Indeed, perhaps the best thing he has learnt is to "look beyond the curtain"; "if you aspire to lead, you have to develop a real-world view and a 360 degree perspective."

Interestingly, during his MBA one of the biggest firms in his sector, Carillion, collapsed. "You look at a company like that failing and wonder if they had too many people at the top focusing on short-term goals, rather than a long-term sustainable perspective."

BWB Consulting Limited takes the development of its people very seriously and has an academy to develop the skills of its staff and management, but the MBA has given David even more than would be possible through an in-house training regime, because it took him outside his usual network. "The contact with others in the group has been very enlightening. We had a very mixed group, from all sectors, large and small businesses.

"There was a great diversity of thought around the table; we all tapped into the thinking processes of different sectors in a way I didn't think was possible. It was a real eye-opening experience."

"Each group session was an example of cross-sector pollination of ideas, philosophies and responses to challenge. Our discussions were very intensive and lively at times - I think MBAs attract a large number of extroverts! - but we all learnt a great deal from each other.

"There was a great diversity of thought around the table; we all tapped into the thinking processes of different sectors in a way I didn't think was possible. It was a real eye-opening experience."

To highlight this, David pointed out that his group contained "people from BP, BWB - we're not a small business by any stretch of the imagination - but also owner-managers."

"One of our cohort used a module to ask for help on developing his business as, by his own admission, 'he didn't have the headspace' to do strategy. He

was too busy being the business. For him, the MBA was a great chance to start to see how he could become more strategic in the way he developed it."

For David, the process has been very memorable - and one enhanced by the staff at Nottingham Trent University. "I've been there three times now, so you could call me an advocate. It's a great place to study - a good mix of industry, business and academic.

"The best thing was the lecturers running the MBA often had business/industry backgrounds that enabled them to 'walk the talk'."

It's clearly something he'd recommend to others. "Absolutely. It's been a great experience. It's funny but at the start of the course a lecturer said to me 'don't expect this to change you... some people come here thinking they're going to have a spiritual experience, but that's not going to happen'."

"Funnily enough, it was for me. I loved it: it has really changed me as a leader and a person. I've got a much more holistic view of industry and stakeholders and how I can act, lead and think strategically. All in all, a very memorable experience and one I'd strongly recommend."

ENTERING AND WINNING AWARDS WILL HELP TO SERIOUSLY GROW YOUR BUSINESS

... but don't just take our word for it. Here are two clients we've worked with recently who are happy to share their experiences with you...



Shahid Sheikh, OBE
Managing Director,
Clifton Packaging Group Ltd

"In 2014 I set a new strategy for Clifton which was to grow the business to a £30m turnover within 5 years. In order to do that I decided to focus on 4 key areas:

1. Product innovation (and I mean genuine, industry-leading innovation)
2. Export and international trade
3. Continuous and significant investment in technology
4. Gaining recognition by way of entering awards in local, national and international awards including the Director of the Year Awards

So far we have more than doubled our turnover in 4 years and plans are in place for us to reach our £30m turnover milestone.



Pete Frost,
Managing Director,
Unity

"This year marks our first foray into Awards and I'm liking what I'm seeing already. We've entered 3 awards including the IoD Director of the Year Awards and been shortlisted and / or won in 2. Winning the IoD Director of the Year Award was huge for me and for my business. The additional recognition it's brought to us as a company is fabulous and has clearly set us apart from our competition. I made 3 appointments to go and visit other finalists and winners and talk about what we offer as a company and how we could help them grow. Over and above winning the award, we've also won 1 piece of new business from those 3 business meetings and I'm confident that the other 2 will convert too."

Good things happen when you let people know just how great you are. If you would like some help in getting your achievements noticed (and having many new doors open) then speak to The Awards People about crafting your award-winning award entry.

WWW.THEAWARDSPEOPLE.CO.UK 01509 815 011