

MBA in Russia: What Differs?

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When selecting an MBA, you should always bear in mind that the degree is merely a means that can help in personal development.

Nearly every applicant takes MBA study as an investment in their future career ("... As soon as I complete my MBA a lot of well-paid vacancies will be available to me. So I should suffer a bit, spend a sum of money and time for study in the following two or three years, and afterward ...").

But those who believe that an MBA diploma will ensure them a high-paid job and they will never have to apply efforts make a serious mistake. You should pay attention to not only the content (theory) of the selected MBA but also to how confidently you will be able to use these tools after you graduate from that business school.

Usually applicants' first question when choosing a business school is how prestigious your MBA diploma is in Russia.

In Russia, the MBA diploma is treated very differently from company to company. There are companies (typically public) headed by experienced executives of the Soviet epoch. At best, they ignore a "newfangled thing" — like your MBA diploma — but what's worse is that they are afraid of employing you because you "may become a troublemaker" with all your foreign views.

At the opposite end, there are heads — "fierce pro-Westerners." They are not aware of the quality of Russian MBAs and will not even distinguish you with a Russian MBA diploma among other candidates. They only value foreign MBA diplomas.

Most other companies rate MBA diplomas according to how prominent the university is, and this depends on the quality of higher education provided by the university. They cannot even imagine that the quality of higher education and MBA programs is measured by different criteria.

When you seek for "your" MBA program, you always apply two sets of criteria:

- Price
- Quality (value) of the program.

You can estimate financial aspects of MBA study quite easily (the fee, discounts, credits, extra costs), but to evaluate the quality of the program (namely, its future usefulness) is a much more difficult task. And this difficulty is caused by the fact that applicants do not know definitely what is really valuable in the program and so fail to anticipate all the potential benefits of such and such MBAs.

This mentality is typical for us as we follow the analogy with the higher education system within which knowledge is delivered for use in future.

Learners at business schools where they study theory for two or three years and learn through

case studies (imaginary situations) start to approach real working situations at the end of their study when preparing diploma projects. Such business schools offer little more than studying a conventional higher education program.

But why should business school learning patterns differ from that of any other higher school? The answer is simple: The profiles of business school and university learners are different. You may recall from your own experience: Young applicants to universities who have just left high school want to study in a definite speciality but are not quite aware of their future job. Universities see their key task as teaching broad knowledge in the given speciality to students. Provided that the university is authoritative, its authoritative lecturers (professors, doctors, etc.) will impart knowledge in a profound and systematic way. However, it is not practical either.

MBA learners have experience in management and continue working when they study for the MBA. Business schools that fail to link these processes admit fairly that their programs are too academic. Typically these are business schools based at universities, usually at economic departments, with the same lecturers and approaches to teaching. As a result their learners attempt real working problems leaving aside new knowledge and skills and try to acquire new managerial tools through case studies at their business school. Business schools that link these two processes are practice-oriented. There are such ones here in Russia.

If you look at Russian and foreign business schools, you will find MBA programs of both types — academic and practice-oriented. The principal difference between Russian and foreign markets is that academic MBA programs prevail in Russia, whereas abroad the focus is made on practice. Such a difference is underpinned by a short history of Russian business education and traditionally strong Russian pedagogy. Anyway you can find in Russia both foreign academic MBAs and rigid practice-oriented Russian MBAs.

To avoid misunderstanding, you should always ask who are your MBA lecturers? What are their contacts with business? There are three typical answers:

- They are scientists who analyze our industrial enterprises;
- They consult our industrial enterprises on a regular basis (this is better);
- They are practical businessmen and teach at our business school (this is what you are looking for).

If the latter lecturers are in the minority (or none at all) it is (alarm!) a purely academic MBA, and should you complete it you will acquire only broad theoretical knowledge.

You could be getting much more from the very beginning of your study.

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