

As I have come to the end of my MBA journey I feel the time is right to reflect on the journey and decide if it was worth it in terms of the finance's, time and effort involved in completing all of the modules required to achieve this qualification. The TL;DR version for this is yes but. For everyone else please do read on.

Why do the MBA?

Before deciding if the MBA was worth completing, it's worth spending a small amount of time on reflecting why I started it in the first place, without knowing what the goal was it's impossible to determine if the eventual outcome was good value (value by its very nature being highly subjective), there were 6 main reasons why I started the MBA.

1. My career was not going in the direction I wanted it to, I was finding it impossible to break out of being an engineer and I wanted something to prove I could be a good manager while I hadn't got the opportunity to get the official experience.
2. I was bored, not from a work standpoint as there was plenty to do but intellectually I just wasn't being stretched to do new things, it was more of the same technical work and I craved originality.
3. I've wanted to do a master's degree since my undergraduate degree and I finally had both the time and resources available to make that a reality.
4. I had the choice of an MSc or an MBA as well as business or technical (such as an MSc in Computing) as I wanted to be challenged I decided to take the difficult route and do something I hadn't done before to fully test myself and really get out of my comfort zone.
5. Some people while I was discussing this with them effectively told me it was a waste of time to do an MBA (at that point at least) as "you won't use it so what's the point", that was almost enough on its own to prove them wrong, (I do want to add other managers since have been far more supportive).
6. Ultimately I want to be a CIO or similar and having the background the MBA gives you while not necessary or a requirement would give me the confidence that I could do that role.

Why choose the OU MBA?

Again, as part of the "value" of the MBA I need to take into account why I chose the OU MBA in the first place, I had 6 reasons for choosing this MBA over others.

1. The OU was one of the few places I found that had a technology specific MBA, I am and always will be a technologist first, understanding technology and how it can be applied is what first motivated me to do my undergraduate in computer science.
2. The OU allowed for a true fully distance learning experience, as I didn't have enough leave each year to go to the required study time at the nearby universities even part time, distance learning was my only option.

3. I could not afford to take a year or two off just to study, I am not an executive and do not have anywhere near the savings or financial capital required for that.
4. The OU is compared favorable to the other local university's MBA (University Of the West Of England) and was about half that of the other nearby one (Bath University) in terms of financial cost, as I was fully self-funded this was a key factor in if I could do it or not.
5. The OU MBA is triple accredited making it one of roughly 1% of business schools globally to achieve certification from all three major business school accreditation organizations.
6. The OU is well regarded in the UK and is generally seen as a "good" university.

What did I learn?

The content of the vast majority of MBA courses is the same with only the elective modules being different, I covered as part of the core modules:

- Change management
- Managing people and organizations
- Marketing and marketing analysis
- Operational management
- Corporate finance
- A dissertation based on a real work problem or opportunity
- Attended multiple day schools to work with other students on complex issues

For the technology specific modules, I covered:

- Developing a technology strategy
- Managing technological innovation

For my elective modules I covered:

- Project management (to APM PMQ or PRINCE2 practitioner level)
- Strategic Human Resources Management

You can see there is a wide range of topics and experiences covered, far more than I was ever likely to cover in my daily working life and in some cases I would never have likely touched (Corporate finance being a prime example), I enjoyed every module I took even if some parts of them I didn't, overall the positive parts far outweighed the negative parts.

Final thoughts

The MBA helped me focus my mind and other than the obvious learning aspect which I found very stimulating, the OU MBA focused heavily on the practical aspects of management and was always

focused on how theoretical aspects could be applied in a real life work environment, for the first 18 months of the MBA I was not a manager and I found trying to apply the things I was learning to be difficult although I could see how they could be applied to the organization at large, so I would advise anyone pursuing this to have management experience so they can relate the theories to their management practice.

For anyone considering this MBA I have a few words of advice, firstly consider if a technology specific (or any kind of particular) MBA is what you should do, although I enjoyed doing those modules I do feel that the more generalist pathway may be more valuable longer term and the additional choice of modules available (as there were less mandatory ones) would have let me explore some different areas of management that I have not yet had the opportunity to do, I would also have liked the additional days schools available in the generalist path which is something I didn't think I would have wanted when starting on this path.

Ultimately the MBA is worth it as long as you are prepared for the hard work (at least 2 hours a day 7 days a week), the constant fretting over coursework and if it's good enough, all of the things you need to give up to get through it and more important than anything else you need a goal. This is the thing that keeps you going through it all, the burning reason why you're doing this, you need to be prepared to do it on your own and if you do take the plunge you will have an unparalleled opportunity to work with people from vastly different industries, different countries and most importantly different experiences, but most importantly of all you can prove to yourself above all others that you really can do it.