

Campus

## Egg in the economy's beer

**ETH Zurich trains “executive MBA supply chain” managers. The course has now been certified by the European Foundation for Management Development. ABB manager Daniel Helmig and graduate Stephan Tschudi speak about the demands industry has of the executive education program and how the economy benefits from the next generation of managers studying here.**



Daniel Helmig (left), ABB Group Senior Vice-President of Supply Chain Management, and Stephan Tschudi, Division Manager at Frutiger AG, see great potential in supply chain management. (Photo: ETH Zurich)

**Mr. Helmig and Mr. Tschudi, what is meant by supply chain management?**

**Daniel Helmig:** Everything from the supplier and production to a product reaching the end consumer. It covers all the processes connected with material flow and its planning. The supply chain is a key pillar in generating profits. In particular, there's still a lot of potential in supply chain management. [ETH Zurich's MBA Program](#) incorporates these very points and teaches students the expertise the economy needs.

**What are the challenges of supply chain management?**

**Stephan Tschudi:** These days, production locations are spread all over the world and companies buy globally. The challenge is to have the right amounts at the right price, at the right time and in the right place. No company or supplier wants to have a huge stock nowadays, so it's extremely important to optimize the related processes.

**Helmig:** The level of vertical integration, i.e. a company's in-house manufacturing, has increasingly been outsourced in the last 20 years. Besides the globalization trend, a major part of the value is also added outside the company. At ABB, for instance, 65 percent of our expenses are external. If the company also wants to observe the current trends, such as sustainability or the share of the CO<sub>2</sub> footprint, it needs well-trained people who understand the whole value chain and know how to handle it.

**Do you find the MBA course prepares the students for these challenges?**

**Helmig:** Absolutely, otherwise we wouldn't endorse it. At ABB we'd already looked at other MBA programs thoroughly and I talked to graduates. Thanks to the degree, the students bring considerable benefits to the company.

**Tschudi:** What makes the course so special is the combination of business administration and the focus on supply chain management, which enables the students to make holistic decisions.

**What are the advantages of the MBA?**

Helmig: ETH Zurich's quality standards also apply to the program. Then there's the rigorous student selection procedure. I also accept the policy of only taking students with a previous degree, even if it isn't standard practice in most MBA programs.

Tschudi: ETH Zurich's scientific approach is complemented by lecturers who come from industry. I studied at ETH Zurich myself and know how high the teaching standards are. My employer at the time, Hilti, supported the program from the outset and is on the advisory committee, so the quality of the education was already known.

### **How important is the current EPAS Accreditation?**

Helmig: It's always good if a course not only enjoys a good reputation at the university but also receives positive feedback from external peers. One indication of this is the fact that 25 students have enrolled for the fall term. Word has clearly got around in the industry. Prospective students are considering where to invest their time, and only where it makes sense of course.

Tschudi: It's mainly important internationally. Whilst ETH Zurich is well-known in Switzerland, in English-speaking countries decisions are often made based upon the accreditation. It is helping the degree to make more of a name for itself abroad.

### **Who would you recommend the degree to?**

Tschudi: It's the ideal extension to degrees in management and business administration for an ETH-Zurich graduate, both at SMEs and big companies.

Helmig: I pick high potentials in supply chain operation middle management; these are the only people we're prepared to fund the course for. For us, high potential means that the students selected can still climb two rungs up the corporate ladder.

### **Part of the MBA program takes place abroad. How important is that?**

Tschudi: It's vital for the students to experience other cultures. The graduates gain a real insider view if the stints abroad are organized by foreign partner universities. It's not enough to sit here in Zurich and talk about our globality; you have to get out there and experience it for yourself.

Helmig: ABB is active in 100 countries all over the world and some of our students have already worked in Japan or Russia. Gaining a different perspective to the one you know from your career up to now is crucial. The students who went abroad in recent years came back full of beans, and that carried over to their work.

### **The students come from industry, trade or administration. Wouldn't it be better to organize the degree into the separate divisions?**

Helmig: I worked in the supply chain of the automobile industry for 20 years. The divisions aren't all that different when it comes down to the technical requirements. You learn a lot from the other fields, too; only ever working in the same industry can cause "blind spots", so the combined approach makes a lot of sense.

Tschudi: Many people bring a lot of know-how to the table. For them, the degree is also an investment in the future. I don't know

whether I'll still be working in the construction industry in 10 years' time, so it's good to get a different slant on things.

## The program

The Department of Management, Technology and Economics at ETH Zurich offers an [Executive MBA in Supply Chain Management](#). The 18-month part-time degree provides comprehensive training in corporate management with a focus on supply chain management. In addition to the classes in Zurich and excursions, the students also learn about the corporate practices in Russia, the USA, Japan and China during stays abroad. The degree has now been certified and accredited by the European Foundation for Management Development.

## The people

**Daniel Helmig** is Senior Vice-President of Supply Chain Management at the ABB Group and has an MBA from Michigan State University. He held regional and global managerial positions at automobile manufacturer Ford and the semiconductor group Infineon for many years. He is responsible for selecting the ABB students for the MBA program.

**Stephan Tschudi** is a division manager at Frutiger AG. He studied culture technology and measurement at ETH Zurich and did an MBA ETH SCM, of which he is Alumni President. Prior to that, he held various managerial positions at Hilti and Holcim in the field of logistics and supply chain management.

## Reader comments:

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