

Rolf D Cremer describes EFMD's innovative Strategic Leadership Programme for Deans

Stepping into the role of the dean

**Never
walk
alone.**



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I enjoyed meeting other deans and sharing our common concerns. The quality of the lecturers was excellent and I found numerous ideas and methods to apply to improve my work as the dean of a business school. I recommend the programme

Jon Foster-Pedley, Dean and director
Henley Business School, Africa

Hardly anybody embarks on the long, difficult and actually quite risky path of a career as a professor in order to become the dean of a business school. Few are prepared when it hits them. But it should be clear that the responsibilities and tasks of a dean, let alone the expectations levelled at a new dean, are diverse, depending on the institution and the situation of the school, and distinctly different from those demanded of a senior professor.

In my own case, I was asked point-blank in March 1987, at the then private University of East Asia, now University of Macau, whether I would accept the deanship of the School of Social Sciences immediately after the then dean had been dismissed under a cloud. I had been one of his critics. Declining the offer would have meant agreeing to live with whatever appointment would otherwise have been made. I accepted, at age 37, hardly even knowing how to spell the word "dean".

What rescued me was the friendship, openness and mentoring of two experienced deans at the university, the Dean of the School of Management, Professor George H. Hines, and the Dean of Arts and Professor of English, Matthew Macmillan. They came to my office the morning after I had signed and said: "You are one of us now".

What is SLP trying to achieve?

This is the spirit of the EFMD Strategic Leadership Programme for Deans (SLP). The SLP brings together deans new to the role with experienced and successful counterparts in an intensive three-day workshop in Brussels. They are all experts on deanship, not experts on human resource management, knowledge management, teaching technology or fund-raising.

This article sets out the objectives and building blocks of the programme, highlights the profile and calibre of the group getting together and sharing and discussing their experiences and problems, and some experiences and examples from the first edition of the SLP in autumn 2017.

The objective is, actually, not too different from what helped me in Macau almost 40 years ago: to ensure, as much as possible, that new deans are successful and enjoy this incredibly challenging, often difficult but also often most rewarding stewardship while feeling not alone but part of a great group of international business school leaders.

What is the Scope of SLP?

Each setting into which a new dean steps is, of course, different. It does make a difference, for example, whether the school is part of a larger public university or a small private business school. Neither are the challenges the same depending on whether the school is financially sound or it is fighting for financial stability.

Leading a school in an established institutional and regulatory environment is different from one in a still-developing environment. Taking over from a successful and popular predecessor is a totally different story from being brought in on a rescue mission.

An academic culture emphasising research has other priorities and constraints compared to a university tradition that is primarily teaching oriented. A school that has been in prominent international rankings such as the *Financial Times* has different expectations from internal and external stakeholders compared to one that is struggling to find a place and to get solid programmes rolling.

However, regardless of what the particular challenge may be, it will always be imperative to be mindful of everything in the school and its environment.

Steven C. Wheelwright, emeritus professor of Harvard Business School, used to state that 95% of being a successful dean was doing the normal things well. Normal things are those that have to be done in any school at any time and in any place. And advancing those normal things everyday takes a school closer to the goals formulated within its general strategy.

Theodore M. Hesburgh, looking back on 35 years of his presidency of the University of Notre Dame, summarised the requirement of comprehensive leadership of an academic institution in these words:

"To be great, an academic institution needs a great faculty, a great student body, and great facilities. In order to have all these things, it needs substantial endowment, which means you have to learn how to raise money – lots of it. And, finally, a great university needs to be imbued with a great spirit, which is an inspirational and cohesive kind of ambience, and not just a lot of separate parts that operate around a central heating plant."

In the language of business schools nowadays, this defines the landscape of a dean: managing faculty; recruiting and selecting students;

providing facilities; managing revenues, including fund raising and costs; and creating and fostering a sense of identity and spirit.

The SLP, thematically, follows this idea of covering most, if not all of those five key tasks. It does so by picking selected topics based on real-life business schools.

Who participates in SLP?

We decided early on that key to a useful leadership programme for deans would be to bring together the right sorts of people and to find formats of discourse and interaction that would allow participants to share their problems, settings and experiences.

This meant staying clear of generalisations and instead focusing on actual, real-life experiences – either from experienced business deans and university leaders ("been-there-done-that") or from those stepping into the role and the concrete challenges they have been facing at the start.

In more than one way, the essence of the programme thus resembles a case study approach, with the protagonists being present and available for intensive debate with participants.



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The programme provided three kinds of benefits – sessions led by highly impressive established deans, giving insights into the strategic dimensions of developing business schools internationally; working with a peer group of deans, learning from our challenges and ways of addressing these, again with a strong international profile; and gaining insight into EFMD itself, its accreditations and view on developing business education internationally. To my delight, the working relationships and peer groups formed during the course have been sustained and it has been a pleasure to catch-up with colleagues subsequently

John Finch, Head of School

Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow



95%

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How is the programme structured?

The SLP is a three-day workshop on the premises of EFMD in Brussels. Each of the half-day sessions, with only minor deviations, has the same clear structure.

Each day begins with a short review of the previous session and a look-ahead.

This is followed by an impulse statement of an internationally renowned, successful dean or president. The focus, in each case, would be on a strategic issue related to one or more of the five tasks outlined above.

Invariably, the speakers take from their own leadership experience at their school. Depending on the speaker, and entirely at their discretion, the impulse statement could also be a substantial account of a key challenge they have faced but would be open for questions and comments at all times.

In 2017, outstanding examples of speakers

included Professor Santiago Iniguez of Instituto d'Empresa (IE) in Madrid, who talked and discussed with participants the strategy that under his leadership took IE from a good business school to an outstanding business school and eventually to a university.

He recalled the role of the dean in framing the landscape, defining the values, providing cross-cultural leadership, and exposing and instilling passion.

Another hugely relevant insight came from Professor Professor Edeltraud Hanappi-Egger, President of WU in Vienna. She provided a splendid illustration of modern faculty performance measurement and diversity management, notably regarding female faculty, and presented how-to-do-it advice for faculty management and recruiting.

Professor Per Holten-Andersen, President of Copenhagen Business School, gave a fascinating account of how to align the strategy of a school



with the role of business in society. In his session, the relationship between democracy, the welfare state and a strong economy and the pivotal role of business education were passionately discussed.

The case of the creation of the China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) in the mid-1980s provided an excellent case of the challenges of establishing a new school in an unregulated and uncertain environment. All of these speakers will be part of the 2018 programme.

Perhaps the most innovative and successful element of the strategic leadership programme is a new type of session under the heading "What could I have done better?". In these sessions participants, who volunteer for the experiment, tell stimulating stories about their experiences in their early days as deans. The cases, as it has turned out, are more or less examples of errors of judgment, even of failures, out of which much can be learned.

A typical example, in 2017, was a case from EDHEC Business School, told by Professor Emmanuel Metais from his first days as a dean. He introduced a case of tuition fee increases, and the turbulences it created for two long years.

Alternative courses of action as well as similar cases at other schools were discussed. The critical role of timely and clear communication with external and internal stakeholders as a central task for deans became obvious through these and other cases during the workshop.

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This programme is a great opportunity to share best practices, to discuss future developments for business schools and universities and to understand issues faced by schools and universities due to various factors: legal, political, financial, economical, social etc.

The seminar format, with a small and international cohort (less than 20 participants), some convivial moments and an intensive timing (three days) gave us the opportunity to discuss our own experiences with a combination of case studies/ experience sharing, intensive discussions and workshops.

I found out that deans share many common issues and challenges to instil critical thinking, resilience and strong values.

Virginie de Barnier, Dean

Aix-Marseille Graduate School of Management, France

How to be part of SLP?

In 2017, 19 new deans from all over the world registered. The 2018 SLP takes place 24-26 October 2018, again at the EFMD in Brussels.

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About the Author

Professor Rolf D. Cremer is Chair of EFMD's flagship Strategic Leadership Programme for Deans. He is also former dean of the China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) and immediate past President and Chief Executive Officer of EBS University of Business and Law, Wiesbaden, Germany