

Creating a business case

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Introduction

As a potential EMBA-Global student, you are intellectually capable, ambitious and have already proved yourself with relevant experience as a manager. You have identified EMBA-Global as the right programme for your professional development, and want to continue to build on your career whilst using and testing the knowledge and skills you will gain from an Executive MBA.

The partner schools are proud of the role EMBA-Global plays in assisting a diverse range of organisations in developing their talented managers. This document is designed to help you structure your case for support.

There are no “magic formulas” that will guarantee support – but this document is designed to help you make a persuasive argument. A significant proportion of EMBA-Global students have successfully negotiated funding contributions from their employers. We hope that this document will help you achieve the same success.

Section 1

a. Questions to ask before you start

Who will be making the decision? Our research tells us that normally there will be at least two other people apart from yourself involved in this – potentially your line manager, your HR manager, functional head, department head or even the CEO.

What level of support already exists? Your organisation may already have a tested group of programmes. Or you may have to make the case for an MBA from scratch. Position your case at the right level.

How does the programme fit with the needs of the business? Demonstrate how the key concerns and challenges of your business area can be met through the programme's academic content and softer skills development.

How does the programme fit with my career development? Signal to your organisation that you are serious about your development, and where the programme content, the academic and softer skills development and the structure will enable you to achieve this.

Why EMBA-Global? Our research tells us that the most effective examples of the three-way partnership between you, your employer and school will be to choose a reputable, highly regarded programme that offers you rigorous and relevant content and a relationship that will enhance your personal and corporate brand.

What will I bring back to my organisation? EMBA-Global students can clearly show benefits from the earliest stages of the programme, bringing back knowledge and perspectives from the programme and their fellow students.

What commitment am I asking for? Don't leave gaps. Be clear and realistic on what you require in terms of funding support and time, and the requirements of the programme.

What commitment will I be prepared to give? Employers may require a variety of commitments from lock-in periods post-programme to agreements to refund tuition in the event of your leaving the organisation. This is your opportunity to reinforce your own commitment to your organisation and the contribution you will be making now and in the longer term.

Have I got all my facts assembled? Check with the admissions office to ensure that you have the latest fees, facts and figures to back up your case. Remember that EMBA-Global is continually being evaluated and updated so find out about any innovations or changes since you first researched the programme.

Am I prepared to persevere? Research tells us that a significant proportion of applications are turned down first time. Be prepared to go back and defend your case.

b. The starting point

You will always be the best judge of how the different components of the EMBA-Global programme meet the needs of your organisation. Your challenge is to:

- show the value and benefits of EMBA-Global to your organisation, your unit, your department, your team and to yourself
- make a clear statement of what the commitment will be (financial and non-financial) from your workplace
- show what your commitment is in return, both during and after the programme.

Where there is an existing process within your organisation to gain nomination or apply for support for your development, make sure you are fully aware of the process, who manages this, and what critical deadlines are involved to ensure that you will be a competitive candidate. You may need to go through an internal application process first, or may only be allowed to apply once you are assured of your place.

c. Creating a case

It is likely that you will already be familiar with writing comprehensive reports and analyses. A case requires you to be more structured, and to be relevant to your audience. The objective is to give the audience the information needed to be able to make a decision.

Who is your audience? The most usual combination of stakeholders will include your line manager, department head and HR manager. As you write your case, check on assumptions. How much do your audience know about the MBA world? What do they understand about Executive MBA formats?

You will have spent time analysing and reviewing many business schools and programmes. Ensure that you give enough information. If the knowledge level is low, the best place for detailed appendices, course descriptions, ranking information etc., is in a supplementary appendix.

d. Structure your case

Start with your proposition and recommendation and work backwards from this point, with an overview of the analysis and recommendation supported by detail.

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Section 2

a. Your business case

This is where you demonstrate, as persuasively as possible, clear business needs that can be met by EMBA-Global.

- Do you need to make a case for an MBA?
- Or specifically for EMBA-Global?

Although this is your business case, it is not (at this point) about you. It is about the needs of your business, the value of doing EMBA-Global, the return on investment, and a recommendation that you should receive support for this.

b. The business need

Briefly outline key challenges, changes and predicted trends in your sector and workplace. This does not have to be detailed – but does need to be relevant. How does this translate to the goals of your unit, department, team and your own role and personal career objective?

Successful business case studies have been phrased in general terms or been highly specific. You need to know where to “pitch” this in your organisation.

General: *“Our company needs employees with the appropriate management skills and techniques to enable them to be better managers and to provide an environment where staff can motivate themselves and take responsibility.”*

Specific:

Rapid expansion through acquisition and/or mergers.	Entering new markets and territories.	Changes in regulatory environment.	Maintain, sustain or growth of position.	Developing human capital to a culture of innovation.
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General: *“I will acquire better understanding of international management practices, and be prepared for a more senior role.”*

Specific:

Detailed understanding of company valuation process and investor relationships.	Understanding new business cultures to establish offices in China.	Make informed decision making utilising tools and frameworks.	Build upon technical expertise to lead teams as a general manager.	Obtain a market perspective on where our company stands within our sector.
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c. Return on investment

Take ownership in discussions with your manager on what the expected return would be. Establish how your increased contribution will be measured both during and after the programme at the level of getting and applying new skills and knowledge, and what the expected results would be at an organisational and/or personal level.

Data from rankings and research surveys indicates significant increases in responsibility levels for budgets, size of teams and other resources.

Hiring MBA candidates from outside the organisation carries a cost implication in terms of time and effectiveness in a highly competitive marketplace.

Companies are increasingly measured and benchmarked in their policies and activities in supporting and developing employees into senior management and board-level positions.

Additional value is created by establishing links with the partner schools.

You will effectively be the bridge linking your organisation to:

- World-class faculty
- a programme of annual events and activities
- networks across the School communities
- invitations to business speaker series
- contacts in research and consultancy
- the content and delivery of the independent research courses¹.

d. Your analysis

The rationale for an EMBA-Global is the next stage in the process. Support your choice by identifying the components of EMBA-Global programme that are particularly relevant to your organisation's needs.

Whilst it is tempting to show the entire programme, it is likely that out of the business needs, there will be two, perhaps three areas that are particularly important or relevant to your case. They may also reflect your own business role and goals. As before, you have the option to be specific or general.

Programme feature:	Return on investment:
International Assignment to locations such South Africa, India, Ukraine and/or China	Outsourcing key business functions to Hyderabad over next 20 months.
Diverse, experienced and international participants	Need to work effectively with new project team based across three continents.
Skills development in team building and leadership	Reduce delivery slippage by 10% in next 10 months.
Decision making and risk analysis	Conduct feasibility study for relocating site to Eastern Europe.

Curriculum – features of EMBA-Global:

- a top-ranked, rigorous and highly-regarded programme
- teaching from world-class faculty at London, Columbia and HKU Business Schools
- the philosophy of balanced excellence with total integration of theory and practice
- acquire command of fundamental disciplines and management tools
- emphasis on applicability, breadth and depth of knowledge and skills
- emphasis on acquiring depth of understanding of business cultures in an international context

¹ The independent research courses are your opportunity to add real value to your organisation. See Section 4 for further information.

- multi-city teaching affords credibility in and depth of understanding of multiple business environments.

Interpersonal skills development:

- emphasis on strategy, leadership and personal development through team-based learning
- skills building to current and future job requirements.

Network:

- close contact between faculty, industry and government organisations
- the diverse background of the students both in terms of organisations represented, work experience, academic background and nationality
- other participants will have relevant sustained experience and are able to share best practice
- instant access to a combined network of more than 64,000 alumni worldwide.

Comparisons

This is the logical place to indicate your research into other programmes, especially if there is a group of schools that your workplace has used before, or other good schools that are closer to your workplace. Many effective business cases present a brief table of schools reviewed, the final shortlist and data to support your proposal.

You may need to outline the case for EMBA-Global as a multi-city partnership programme, versus domestic or single-school programmes:

- the ability to tap into resources, faculty and networks of three partner schools
- enhance your credibility and effectiveness in multiple business settings.

EMBA-Global also offers the following advantages over a full-time MBA:

- minimises disruption as you do not have to leave the organisation (but be realistic about the extent of the workload)
- value of development of talented individuals where new MBA “hires” may not be effective within your existing organisational structure
- the opportunity to test theories in practice and develop your career whilst maintaining or growing managerial responsibilities
- a peer group with more sustained and relevant experience who is in employment and who will be facing or have successfully managed similar challenges to those you have identified.

Company

Supporting employees on MBA programmes is a clear signal of an organisation’s commitment to succession planning and developing their management group.

Programme Structure

EMBA-Global Americas and Europe

- EMBA-Global has one intake each May and runs for 20 months.
- The intensive timetable features full days of lectures, group work and assignments during study blocks.
- Core courses are taught in a residential study block format that means you study over several consecutive days per month – alternating between London and New York.
- Both schools make an equal contribution to the teaching of the core courses, with faculty travelling to teach wherever the class is in residence.
- You have access to the elective portfolios of both London and Columbia Business Schools, as well as to electives offered by HKU Business School.
- You also study in one or more other markets as part of the International Seminars or Assignments.

- The collaborative learning environment means you learn from the experiences of your fellow students, as well as from faculty.

EMBA-Global Asia

- EMBA-Global Asia has one intake each May.
- Typically, you will complete the programme in 20 months, but certain elective choices may enable completion in 16 months.
- The programme's residential study block format means you study over several consecutive days per month in one of the learning hubs.
- The intensive timetable features full days of lectures, group work and assignments during study blocks.
- Core courses take place in four learning hubs: Hong Kong, Shanghai, London and New York. You also study in one or more other markets as part of the International Seminars or Assignments.
- Each of the three schools makes an equal contribution to the teaching of the core courses, with faculty travelling to teach wherever the class is in residence.
- You have access to the elective portfolios of London, Columbia and HKU Business Schools.
- All teaching is delivered in English, using a collaborative style that means you learn from the experiences of your fellow students, as well as from faculty.

The detailed schedule of the core requirements can be downloaded from the programme website and be shown either within the case, or as an appendix.

e. Recommendation

At this point, you will have:

- shown the business need
- provided the analysis of programme choice to resolve meeting the need.

Now you come to the recommendation of yourself as a suitable candidate for support. Even though this is about your case for support, you will still need to ensure that you highlight the aspects of your personal development that are most important in the context of the business need and your career development plans.

General:

“There is a clear business trend in the marketplace to value the qualification of an MBA. This can be seen in the increasing desire of companies to employ and develop people with all-round business knowledge in addition to their technical expertise. Our company is no different as it is important for managers to be far more than specialists in their own fields – we need business managers as opposed to managers of business functions.”

“I believe that it is the right time to undertake an MBA programme because I do not wish to be restricted to technical management positions and the programme will increase my opportunities to enter the more commercial side of the business. Although I have the necessary industry experience and knowledge, I cannot progress to more senior positions without the commercial and marketing skills acquired through an MBA. The MBA will equip me to have the transferable skills to handle project management in any fields, and work at a strategic level anywhere within our organisation.”

Specific:

“As a manager/executive in X department, I am tasked with delivering on ...

*“I have demonstrated experience, skills and strengths in ...
I have achieved ...
This is a solid grounding on which to develop my skills and knowledge of
I have had the benefit of attending courses in (example) with the following outcomes...”*

If your workplace already offers significant development opportunities through various courses, you will need to clarify why EMBA-Global is preferable to taking a number of short non-degree courses in specific subjects, attending a corporate university or doing an MBA with another recognised school.

If you have already benefited from such courses, you will want to show clearly how you have translated the learning and experience into tangible results in your current role.

The value to you:

- improve my career prospects within the company
- opportunity to diversify within the company
- improve chances for promotion
- enhance my standing within the company and protect current employment prospects.

Therefore, EMBA-Global will offer value to the organisation and to you personally.

Undertaking an MBA programme is a major commitment. You will need to demonstrate, in a way that is appropriate for your workplace, the level of your personal commitment to doing the programme, to your workplace, and how this aligns with your ambitions to take on specific roles/responsibilities and your own desire for learning and development.

Section 3

a. Support request

Whilst there are varying levels of commitment, to gain the most value in an EMBA-Global programme, there is a strong need for support in three key areas:

1. Project work

Your employer should be prepared to offer work-related projects that will allow the application of the concepts learned on the EMBA-Global programme to the organisation. Projects enable the student to apply their learning, facilitate the transfer of learning back to the workplace, measure the return on investment, get insights from fellow students and faculty, and may be used to expose the student to different parts of the business and different teams.

2. Financial support

Please see the website for the current tuition fee and details of what is covered by the fees.

Tuition fees include:	Additional costs include:
Course materials and course textbooks (i.e. not additional reference texts) for the core courses	All travel costs
Hotel accommodation during all core courses	Course textbooks for the elective courses
Hotel accommodation for the required international assignment	Hotel accommodation during the elective courses
Lunch during the core courses	Hotel accommodation for additional international assignment (if selected)
Opening dinner and some other meals during residential block weeks	Additional international assignment supplement (if selected)
	Other meals during the residential block weeks

You can show the financial request within the case, or in an appendix attached to the case. Be realistic about the costs and supplementary costs. You may also need to request additional funds for accommodation, for travel, for materials, or for a second international assignment.

Look at funding options so you have a “package” to request, and can offer different positioning. Outside of 100 per cent funding, students on recent intakes have been financially supported in a variety of ways, including matching funding, percentage splits, reduced hours, tuition reimbursement at key stages or after successful completion of parts one and two, and bonus payments.

If you are paying part of the tuition yourself, we offer a staged payment schedule to spread your payments over the programme. Please contact the relevant admissions team to discuss this schedule.

Company payment is invoiced in two instalments for the first and second parts of the programme. If there is a training and development budget, remember that there will usually be a budget year from which to draw the funds, and build this into your timing.

Invoicing Stages

A deposit will be required to secure your place. This is usually paid by the candidate and reimbursed by the company, but can be invoiced on request. Your tuition will then be invoiced in two parts, for terms 1-3 less deposit, and terms 4 and 5. Please refer to the relevant admissions team for details.

3. Time

In the business case, you will need to show how you will manage the time out of the office, and what you will do to minimise the impact on your team or clients. Remember to include the first residential block week, the required international assignment, any travel time and what your requirement is likely to be for study and research, which we estimate as at least 15-20 hours per week.

Allow time off to complete studies, but also to be aware that deadlines may conflict with business needs. Indicate clearly in your request the extent of the time required, and whether you will be using any personal time (agreed study days, unpaid leave, vacation, lieu time) for this.

It may be helpful to put the detailed schedules into an appendix, and to give a short table within the business case showing the requirements for EMBA-Global and, if appropriate, comparison with any other programmes.

b. Commitment and Conclusion

Your statement of commitment is critical and should show your commitment to the organisation, and to being a successful student on the programme. There are a variety of ways of demonstrating this commitment, and agreements will most typically encompass lock-in periods, reimbursement of tuition and other costs (whole or percentage) if you leave during or within a specified period after the programme.

"I am willing to commit to the time and dedication needed to complete the programme and to undertake specific company projects. The projects undertaken can be discussed with senior managers and can be tailored to reflect strategic areas currently needing analysis in the business."

"I would be willing to accept an addendum to my contract specifying a period of work after successful completion of the MBA, or undertaking to refund the costs of the programme if I should leave immediately after the programme is completed. "

This commitment ensures that you take responsibility for your learning, and repay the investment that will have been made in you.

Companies that want to develop and retain their top talent will actively create opportunities and planned career transitions for their top management pools, both during and after completing the programme. Whilst it is unlikely that a commitment of a specific role or project will be given at this stage, you must start this dialogue as soon as feasible.

Section 4

a. Independent research courses

EMBA-Global emphasises applying the theories learnt and relating this back to the sponsoring company, in the form of specific projects.

The independent research courses form part of the elective portfolio. They are supervised by a member of faculty and are usually done in co-operation with your employer, based on a company specific issue and will be of benefit not only to you but also the department and the organisation as a whole.

Your choice of research topic can be discussed with senior managers and be tailor-made to reflect strategic areas currently needing analysis in the business. Additionally, your report can be used as a launch pad to pursue areas of interest within your workplace, and explore areas that you would be interested in working in afterwards.

b. Sample timetables

Sample timetables for the Americas and Europe and Asia intakes can be found on the website.

Be aware that public holidays will typically be normal teaching days so you may have classes on bank holidays during elective block weeks or over Easter.

Conclusion

The EMBA-Global admissions teams are happy to contact your organisation to discuss the programme and benefits in more detail, allowing them to become partners in your development and the programme experience.

Please contact the EMBA-Global admissions office in your region:

The Americas:

Columbia Business School
Executive MBA Programs
Email: emba@columbia.edu
Tel: +1 (212) 854 2211

Europe, the Middle East and Africa:

London Business School
Executive MBA Programmes
Email: embaglobalinfo@london.edu
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7000 7475

Asia-Pacific:

HKU Business School
Executive MBA Programmes
Email: asia@emba-global.com
Tel: +852 3962 1262

We wish you every success in your application and proposal.

Appendix

a. A case model – for those of you who have not written business cases before.

Title Page	A cover page giving the title and the author, and the date of the report. Presented /Circulated to (names and titles)
List of Contents	Numbered headings and subheadings (e.g. 2., and 2.1, 2.2...), may be combined with title page for a short report.
Executive Summary	A brief summary of the subject of the report and recommendations .
Introduction	The objectives of the report and the problems it is to address. It may give background information, (e.g. the objectives of the company, or the reason for some strategy they have pursued).
Analysis	An analysis of the existing situation; identification of problems, causes and patterns; statement of assumptions.
Evaluation of Alternatives	It is likely that there will be several options to be considered (including doing nothing). Each of these alternatives will have its pros and cons. This section identifies and evaluates each of them.
Recommendations and Implementation Strategies	A statement and justification of the recommendation, with the steps needed to implement it. This should include the likely effect of following your proposals, and any possible circumstances that might make them inappropriate (indicating things that will need monitoring), together with what to do if those circumstances come about.
Exhibits and Appendices	Detailed figure analysis can best be shown in tabular or graph form as exhibits or appendices. Even qualitative information may be best shown in exhibit form. If this is done economically, it can be put into the body of the report; larger tables or figures may have to be appendices. But beware - do not put anything in an appendix that is not referred to in the main text, or that is not key to your argument. Appendices should not be used as a "brain dump".

With thanks to London Business School Professors Kim Warren, Gil McWilliam.

b. Extract from a business case used by an EMBA-Global student who successfully secured sponsorship

Program Highlights

- EMBA-Global is joint program between Columbia and London Business School (LBS).
- Starts May 2008 and lasts 20 contiguous months.
- Application deadline for early admissions: early December.
- Sessions are an average of 3 working days per month.
- For the first 9 months, classes alternate between London and New York. For the remaining 11 months, course locations are more flexible depending on electives selected by me.
- See the EMBA-Global brochure for more details.

Why I would like to pursue EMBA-Global

EMBA-Global is an excellent opportunity for my personal and career growth. Organisation X will also be able to benefit from my informed experiences. As part of the curriculum, I will be collaborating on company-related projects with students who are proven leaders within their respective industries. And, the courses are taught by some of the leading thinkers of our time (e.g. Joseph Stiglitz), and the valuable insight from these resources will undoubtedly be something I will be able to bring back to Organisation X.

I have been employed at Organisation X for nine years and have a significant amount of experience. On the other hand, I do not have experience working in the same capacity outside of Organisation X. EMBA-Global will expose me to how other companies run their businesses (management, finance, technology, best practices, strategy, etc.).

At the moment, Organisation X hires external consulting firms to lead and advise on projects. In general, we spend a significant amount of time to get the hired team up to speed and understand the documented and undocumented ways we do business. One of the reasons why we need to hire an outside firm is that our internal management does not have the external, cross-industry, or global experience, which the consulting firm has.

A good solution to this is to educate Organisation X employees who are capable, enthusiastic, and determined to gain a similar perspective, which these consulting firms are reputed to have. By investing the time in EMBA-Global while continuing to work at Organisation X, I can deliver the best of both worlds.

I believe that EMBA-Global, alongside my work within Organisation X, will give me a broader perspective on how to solve the tactical and strategic problems as we position ourselves for success. There are many more reasons why I would like to pursue EMBA-Global, which we can discuss in more detail if you would like.

What I need from Organisation X

In order to continue with the application process, I need the following:

- **Time Commitment:** I must have a written letter of sponsorship that approves the time commitment to the program. Over the course of 20 months, I am required to spend an average of 3 days per month in the classroom. As you can see in the attached timetable, most classes are Wed-Sat.
- **Financial:** As we discussed, the details can be worked out at a later date.

Organisation X students / alumni

- List of Organisation X employees who are students or alumni of EMBA-Global or any of the partner schools.