

BURNING DESIRE TO LEARN

Professor Muammer Ozer is Director of the [Doctor of Business Administration](#) (DBA) programme at City University of Hong Kong. He is a Professor of Management, holds a PhD in Business Administration from the University of Pittsburgh, and is also a graduate of the executive education programme of Harvard Business School. His research focuses on the strategies, behaviours, and performance of individuals, teams, and firms within the context of innovation and technology management, information technology, and international business. Professor Ozer talks about his work with the DBA and how the programme is developing under his leadership.

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme is all about building learning partnerships, and the keystone for its success is one-to-one supervision.

“We’re working with high achievers who tend to be demanding,” says Professor Ozer.

“Motivation is high, so the learning partnerships that we build up are mutually rewarding. Matching potential applicants with their supervisors is a crucial part of the picture, and we want to get that right from day one.”

The DBA learning partnerships involve working under the guidance of a mentor/supervisor. DBA candidates go through a structured programme of study, which will lead them to identify a thesis topic and then a thesis proposal, before embarking on a self-directed research study, all in close partnership with a dedicated DBA supervisor.

“We’ve had a careful look at the audience for our DBA projects,” Professor Ozer explains.

“We start out with what are often case studies of the student’s workplace. Then we engage in a spiralling out process to include other stakeholders such as investors, or executives in other companies in the same sector. Then we go wider still, looking at what governments might need to know to inform better decision making. Finally we look at whether we can make an academic contribution. And with the widest scope we aim to achieve societal impact.”

DBA research topics come from a wide range of areas.

“We’ve had mainstream business studies such as looking into the process of Asian venture capital funds, environmental themed studies such as clean energy, financial studies on the gold market and the internationalization of the RMB, logistics studies on risk management in container terminals — the list is long.”

What do students want to get out of the DBA programme?

"That depends. Some students want to use the DBA experience to improve what they're doing in their present company. Others see it as a stepping stone, a great opportunity to help them in starting a new business or moving industry."

Professor Ozer gives an example of one of these students.

"We had an applicant from a multinational financial company. He was trained as a financial expert, so I was thinking of various finance professors who might work as his supervisor. But it turned out that he wanted to study leadership so that he could take on a new role in his organisation, and so we started to look for a professor with relevant expertise in that area."

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"We also get other students who may have retired from the workplace and are looking to research an interest that has been gnawing away at them for some years. So really the name of the game is catering for individual learning needs — and being well resourced, that's something we can really deliver on."

How about programme support? Has that changed over the years?

"Yes, we've added a dedicated statistical consultant, as well as a tailor-made English course in academic writing. All students — even first language users — take this course because academic writing at this level is a specialized genre."

Social networking is also an integral part of the DBA experience.

"I call it *No presentations, No professor speeches!*" says Professor Ozer, somewhat tongue in cheek.

"We run dinners and other events where DBA students from all years, as well as alumni can get together and socialise. It's a lot of fun and things tend to flow well in a less structured environment."

Professor Ozer first came to Hong Kong in 1996. That was a time of uncertainty, just before the handover. But he fell in love with Hong Kong and its people at first sight, and has been working with the Department of Management ever since.

How do you like working on the DBA programme?

"Well, it's time consuming, and challenging. You are dealing with top people and that's a double edged sword. On the one hand you are working with highly motivated people, with a real will to learn. On the other you have to be on your mettle to deliver!"

"Most DBA students have already achieved so much in their lives and careers, but you can still feel their burning desire to learn — working with this special group of people is truly humbling and rewarding."

And that desire continues to burn brightly for many DBA students even after their graduation.

"After graduating, I thought my learning life would be at an end," said **Dr Noel Leung**, a 2011 DBA graduate.

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Professor Ozer in conversation with DBA alumnus Dr Charles Lee

"But then I realized that I might have some research potential. I modified my DBA thesis to produce some research papers, and one of them "Corporate governance and firm value: Evidence from Chinese state-controlled listed firms" was eventually published."

"Now it looks like my learning life is ongoing."

The DBA programme has proved to be a springboard to a new future for many of its students, and under the inspiring leadership of Professor Ozer, is set to continue to deliver outstanding learning experiences to future generations of students.

What are our DBA students studying?

The DBA programme attracts a diverse group of students who work on projects in areas such as manufacturing, IT and telecoms, banking and

financial services, education, consultancy, retail, logistics, and government as well as the non-profit sector.

DBA students study important issues on a variety of topics ranging from such basic necessities as rice supply to complex financial matters such as private equities and the globalization of Chinese RMB; from local issues like the competitiveness of Hong Kong manufacturers to global matters like doing business in Africa; from high-tech issues such as internet security to more mainstream business questions such as employee retention, and from large and multinational firms to street vendors and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). ■

Here are just a few examples of recent DBA [research projects](#):

STAYING AHEAD OF THE WAVE

Travel around the world's maritime cities — London, Antwerp, Kobe — and you witness historically important ports where the bulk of trade has now moved elsewhere. Ten years ago Hong Kong was the world's busiest container port. Now Shanghai and Singapore lead the way. To stay competitive, an understanding of the dynamics of port development is vital. **Dr Kenneth Wong, DBA'14** takes a critical look at the widely accepted three-generation model of container port development presented by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Based on a study of Hongkong International Terminals, he finds the existing model needs updating. Hong Kong's port development is a harbinger of a fourth generation. Armed with such a revision of theoretical analysis, Hong Kong may proactively plan for its future evolution, helping the port stay competitive and ahead of the wave.



The gateway to Hong Kong's container port

Photo courtesy of Hongkong International Terminals Limited

GOLD AND GLOBALIZATION OF THE RMB

Since the 'Nixon Shock' of the early 1970s, gold has no longer backed the US Dollar, or indeed any of the leading fully convertible world currencies. The precious metal however continues to play an important role in global financial markets, holding some of the attributes of both currency and commodity. Gradual moves towards the internationalization of the RMB are bringing renewed focus to the role of gold in currency issues. The Hong Kong gold market holds a key position in the international market, and the Chinese Gold & Silver Exchange Society (CGSES), plays a leading role in that market. **Dr Haywood Cheung, DBA'14** studies the factors that impact on the complex gold price mechanism. The CGSES started trading in RMB Kilobar Gold, the world's first offshore RMB denominated gold product, in October 2011. In the context of accelerated internationalization of the RMB, he analyzes the status of the RMB's internationalization and compares it with the internationalization of the Japanese Yen in offshore markets. He also analyzes interactions between the RMB internationalization, Hong Kong RMB offshore market and RMB Gold transactions.



Photo courtesy of <http://hdwallclub.com>



Ms Chiravongvit Vachiraporn enjoys some of the creative arts of Thailand

THE PATH TO SME SUCCESS IN THAILAND

If you travel around Bangkok, one thing you will notice is the large number of street level businesses. **Ms Chiravongvit Vachiraporn, DBA Cohort 2011** wants to identify factors that make Thailand's Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) successful, so as to help these businesses get established on a firm footing. SMEs are vital to Thailand's economy both in terms of employment and manufacturing, representing over 90% of the employment in some sectors. Her preliminary findings based on in-depth interviews with several small enterprises indicate that small business owners place great emphasis on the expansion of networks in the attempt to become well established companies, but that they often experience difficulty in accessing market channels and appropriate marketing techniques. The preliminary findings also indicate that most small business owners lack management expertise in business operations and do not engage in market research. For creatively oriented SMEs, lack of knowledge around intellectual property rights appears to be a major obstacle.

CHINA: DOING BUSINESS IN AFRICA

Last year, China-Africa trade reached US\$210 billion, with more than 2,500 Chinese companies doing business on the continent, according to Xinhua, the China news agency. However, Chinese firms face numerous cultural, political, structural, and labour challenges in Africa. Many Chinese firms wish to maximize opportunities in an era where China is keen to further expand its Africa business. But current literature on Africa Business offers scant help to Chinese companies entering Africa. In order to fill this research need, **Ms Dawn Chen, DBA Cohort 2013** has embarked on a study about how to do business in Nigeria whereas **Mr Frank Leung, DBA Cohort 2014** plans to offer suggestions to Chinese firms that are willing to explore opportunities in Ethiopia.



Production lines in Nigeria

Photo source: Paolo Woods/ INSTITUTE

RESCUING INDONESIAN BANKS

The financial crisis which started in 2008 saw the failure of many large and prestigious financial institutions around the world, and forced a re-evaluation of the role that banks play in society. Among factors affecting the success or failure of banks, two stand out: financial conditions, such as liquidity, profitability and availability of capital, and management. **Mr Ridha Wirakusumah, DBA Cohort 2008** focused on the management and operational actions taken by a group of investors, private equity and quasi private equity firms, in four key systemic Indonesia banks in the wake of the 2008 crisis. He found that carefully formulated managerial actions are necessary to turn ailing banks around.