

Springboard into academia 'to give something back'

When Lynne Sprugel moved to Hong Kong in 2014 to oversee operations for her US-based employer, she already had thoughts of doing an advanced degree as a way to help her career and, in due course, perhaps move into academia.

But hearing more about the CityU DBA from then students, and confirming the flexible part-time schedule could fit in with business and travel commitments, convinced her that was the programme to go for.

"At some point, I would like to teach in order to give something back to the industry by helping younger people coming into the retail, procurement and supply chain sector," says Sprugel, the vice-president and managing director of international sourcing operations for a sporting goods and outdoor equipment retailer. "Besides that, I've always loved research, learning and the chance to refine my skills, and I'm not the sort of person to just sit around."

After completing the introductory courses and working closely with her supervisor, the thesis topic she settled on was "Shift Disruptions



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Transforming the Apparel Global Sourcing Landscape".

With the sector now seeing so many changes, an initial challenge was to narrow down the number of issues to study from the 22 she first identified to the most significant three.

These centred on shifts of sourcing from one country to country, for example, from China to Vietnam and Bangladesh; new supply chain and business models; and the effects of new technology on processes within the supply chain.

Along the way, she came to appreciate that in-depth research required qualitative



Lynne Sprugel is using her findings to write and speak and offer advice.

and quantitative analysis, as well as critical and design thinking in deciding how to approach a problem.

"When I started reading the journal articles, I was amazed by the information there and saw how academics look at specific topics in a different manner," she says. "I was also excited by the opportunity to create a bridge between what's happening in the academic and business worlds."

One outcome of her research was a clear framework to help the industry identify shifts and risks, assess mitigating factors, and look for early signals of emerging trends and their possible longer-term impact.

Sprugel is making use of her findings in a number of ways. First, she plans to write two or three journal articles as a

contribution to the academic world. To assist practitioners in the business, she is looking to create a primer explaining the key elements of her research and how to apply them in the day-to-day work environment. She has already accepted invitations to speak at various conferences. And she is talking to different companies on ways to implement the research in their business processes and, in doing so, how to continue to update and expand the findings.

"I finished the DBA in three years, working on it most weekends after I got past the proposal defence and had survey results and data to analyse," Sprugel says. "Now, if I meet people with major business issues they want to research, I tell them this is the perfect programme for that."