

GSB's oldest short course gets a new lease on life

Issued by [UCT Graduate School of Business](#)

21 Jul 2016

The Programme for Management Development, which ran for the first time at the GSB in 1968, has received an influx of new energy with the introduction of new faculty and focus for the 2016 intake.

This September, the Programme for Management Development (PMD) will start its 96th cycle. Launched in 1968, the programme is the longest running at the GSB and this year it will have some new and improved features to ensure that it keeps going for the next few decades.

“There’s a reason that the PMD has endured for such a long time – the course has been doing something right all these years and it remains one of the most popular of the school’s short courses drawing participants from right across the continent,” says Beverly Shrand, a senior lecturer at the GSB and co-convenor of the PMD programme.

“But like all things in life, things change and it was important that we adapted the PMD to reflect new challenges in the environment,” says Shrand. “We wanted to take the best of PMD and build on that to create a programme that is fit for future purpose.”

Shrand and colleague Jenny Boxall, long-time convenor of The New Manager – another of the school’s cornerstone short leadership courses – have taken over the running of PMD from Bruce MacDonald, who stewarded the programme for more than a decade.

Boxall says it was a great privilege to take over the running of this “veteran” of the GSB short courses. “Middle management is a critical component of any business,” she says, “and as such it deserves a very specific focus.

“We find that middle management is a tricky time in anyone’s career – you have achieved some proficiency but people keep throwing more things at you. In belt tightening times middle managers are also often squeezed with increasing responsibility from the top and less support coming up from below.”

Boxall says that managers in the middle of an organisation have to rapidly acquire a new set of competencies and that the learning on the PMD is therefore structured around five key competencies of management: managing relationships; managing organisation – which involves understanding the nuts and bolts of how the business runs from finance to marketing; managing change; managing self (personal mastery); and finally, managing context (the big picture).

“The challenge is for participants to develop their ability to manage all of these layers and at the same time be able to pull them all together so that the organisation runs smoothly and moves in the direction it is meant to. It’s one thing to know something and another to take it forward and consolidate it,” says Boxall.

“Our goal is to develop a well-rounded, consummate manager,” agrees Shrand. “Of course that won’t happen in two weeks. But we allow participants to taste what this feels like by getting them to work on complex problems in real time and to reflect on what they are learning as they go along. In this way they emerge with a greater sense of cohesion and understanding of the many strands of competence demanded of them.

“By far the bulk of the learning on the programme comes from the group – learning from each other. For this reason, the more diverse the class – the greater the learning.”

To further embed this “taste of competence”, participants also take away with them a commitment to work on a real organisational challenge in their own workplace, ensuring a return on investment.

To guide people through this learning experience, the course has a high concentration of the GSB's top-rated senior faculty including professors Kurt April, Geoff Bick and John Luiz, as well as visiting stalwarts like Don Macdonald (financial management); Michael Harber (corporate governance/sustainability); Fortune Gamanya (lean management); Barbara Folscher (storytelling); Trisha Lord (time to think); and trend analyst Dion Chang will get participants to take a look into the future.

"The programme blends theory and practice in an easy-paced way. We have introduced a bit more reflection time into this year's programme to give participants more time to assimilate what they are discovering. The goal, I guess, is to deliver actionable knowledge. We want them to leave the programme with renewed sense of self and confidence knowing that they have the power to create the future rather than waiting for the future to happen to them," concludes Boxall.

For more on the Programme for Management Development at the UCT Graduate School of Business, please go to www.gsb.uct.ac.za/management-development. Please note the deadline for registrations is 12 August 2016.

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