

Why the executive MBA is gaining popularity again

The executive MBA, once a less-favoured part of management education, is seeing a resurgence with many opting for online and hybrid programmes.



[Sheena Sachdeva](#) | Nov 17, 2022 - 2:21 p.m. IST

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NEW DELHI: In 2021, Garima Arora, 30, made a shift into marketing and public relations. After six years in journalism, she was no longer content with being “paid peanuts”.

While promotions within the new job were hindered due to the pandemic, she found in Narsee Monjee’s Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS)’s 24-month online Executive Masters in Business Administration [EMBA] – with a

specialisation in digital marketing, leadership and strategy – the perfect opportunity to both upskill and groom for leadership positions.

“I realised I wanted to work in senior roles. While I shifted to public relations, I joined the company in a lower position, considering the industry shift. But I soon realised that the shift also required some upskilling,” said Arora.

As the pandemic made working from home more widely accepted, many employees opted to use the opportunity to pursue executive MBAs to either grow in their jobs roles but with better salaries, or hunt for leadership roles.

Neha K, 28, after working for around six years, applied for the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Lucknow's one-year EMBA, with specialisation in data-driven product management, in 2021. She wanted a “brand name” on her resume. “After joining as a marketing manager in a company, I didn't get the attention that people from big MBA schools received,” she said.

Ayush Kejriwal, 29, was simply bored being an operations associate at a Gurugram company. He'd been working for four years. Also in 2021, he, too, joined NMIMS' 18-month executive MBA but through upGrad, an online learning platform. Kejriwal, too, sought growth in skills and salary.

"EMBA is a generalist degree and students learn accounting, finance, marketing, human resource management and strategy, and other skills. Through these subjects, students can approach business problems and find solutions by applying a holistic perspective learnt through doing an EMBA. Such persons are much in demand within the increasing VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world. Also, an EMBA builds the capabilities required for future senior leadership positions,” said Gary Stockport, dean, EMBA, and professor of strategy, SP Jain School of Global Management.

Masters degree, brand

Most working professionals look for degree EMBA courses because recruiters look for candidates with master's qualifications from institutes of repute for senior positions.

“India is an academically inclined country. If you are not from one of the tier-1 colleges, you won't get that kind of attention in the corporate world,” said Neha. “Because I just had a bachelor's degree, my package was low and I wasn't given much of an opportunity although my skills were at par with [the rest].”



Garima Arora, a working professional and a student at NMIMS EMBA course with specialisation in digital marketing, leadership and strategy.'

Skill development

"EMBA focuses on a strategic understanding of businesses rooted in practical skill development," said Mahesh Gadekar, chairperson, Executive MBA, IIM Jammu. It launched its executive MBA programme in hybrid-mode – online and offline – in 2021.

Sejal Bhadulla, 26, with three years of experience in recruitment and talent acquisition, is in IIM Jammu's first EMBA batch and currently in second year. She joined the course to upgrade her skills and has received exposure through IIM's faculty and diverse professionals attending the course. Bhadulla wants to be in a leadership role three to four years after graduating.

Arora finds that subjects like business communication, managerial economics, and strategic communication have helped her grow within her current role. "I have applied the learnings in my job with appreciation from both clients and senior leadership," she said. "Qualitatively, I have become better in planning and strategizing, in objectively making presentations, which was lacking before."

Kejriwal learnt the basics of Python, Tableau, Power BI – all required for working with data – which he had long wanted to learn. "While I have been thinking about doing a course specifically in Power BI and Tableau, the NMIMS programme had a complete course dedicated to Power BI," said Kejriwal. He was also exposed to

the financial world and business subjects like economics and business strategies, along with programming languages.

The EMBA classes of IIM Jammu, NMIMS, and IIM Lucknow typically have professionals with seven-to-20 years of work experience, many of them working in big, multinational corporations.

However, learners with fewer years of experience also find the EMBA courses helpful for networking with and learning from senior members of industry. “The alumni status that IIM Lucknow gave me led me to be a part of so many networking events which helped me grow my circle. This opened my mind. It's not just the skills but also the understanding of the business which can be learnt,” said Neha.



Dr Mahesh Gadekar, Chairperson, Executive MBA, IIM Jammu

Classroom online

Several learners were initially sceptical about joining online courses and joined institutes that provide live classes or follow a hybrid structure.

Arora found NMIMS' curriculum rigorous, including online classes Monday to Friday, weekly assessments, and term-end exams. “Although it's challenging, I think it's worth it,” she said.

“It's not like a full-time MBA nor a distance MBA,” added Kejriwal, “but online learning through proper classroom learning. We had live lectures and we could directly speak with faculty. We were also provided with a buddy to help us guide through issues.”

Curriculum, eligibility criteria

Most EMBA courses are open only to those with at least three years of work experience. IIMs Jammu and Lucknow have an entrance examination as well. “While the programme is generalist, we expect professionals to come with basic knowledge of the industry and analytical abilities,” said Gadekar.

Most institutes offer specialisations on the recent industry trends which could be in digital marketing, human resources, or data analytics. The programmes also include live projects for hands-on learning. IIM Jammu has global and rural immersion programmes to place students in different contexts leading to new learning opportunities.

SP Jain has an executive career acceleration programme (ECAP) woven into its 18-month part-time course and focuses upon the student's career development plan and soft-skills development.

Gadekar added: “Management is more of a diagnostic part – how you look at specific issues, how you apply your learning to those issues and provide solutions.”



Neha K, a working professional and a recent graduate from IIM Lucknow's EMBA program

New jobs

Specifically for working professionals, most EMBA programmes don't come with full-fledged placement services. But the institutions support students in other ways.

NMIMS provides students with alumni support and a network, putting EMBA graduates in touch with job opportunities. Arora said: "I am enrolled in an alumni group on LinkedIn and Facebook where job opportunities are shared often, and alumni refer to alumni." Arora's been getting job offers even before completing the course.

Neha, similarly, got a job through the IIM Lucknow alumni network, with a better salary and position, in a global digital marketing firm.

In Kejriwal's business analytics course, an industry leader is assigned to mentor and guide each student through the shift into business analytics. "The most wisdom you get is from the industry experts. The course also provides classes on resume-building and interview skills," said Kejriwal. He recently bagged a job in data analytics, not through the programme, but thanks to its rigorous curriculum, he stated.

"Maybe the degree directly doesn't translate into a job but in terms of knowledge, it definitely helps," added Arora.

Future relevance

Gadekar noted that those who join the EMBA programme are usually mid-level managers and have already crossed some milestones in their careers. "However, they have an urge for formal studies and pursue EMBA as an aspiration. Some may have some other aspirations like PhD, or upskilling or entrepreneurship. The course gives exposure and helps learn new things," said Gadekar.

Plus, the EMBA is growing in popularity. "As far back as 30 years ago, an EMBA was on its last legs. But now it's more likely to continue for many decades to come," said Stockport. "The VUCA world will likely continue unabated and so will the need for the EMBA to professionally develop persons to help them reach their maximum potential for corporate success."

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by Sheena Sachdeva

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While promotions within the new job were hindered due to the pandemic, she found in Narsee Monjee's Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS)'s 18-month online Executive Masters in Business Administration [EMBA] – with a specialisation in digital marketing, leadership and strategy – the perfect opportunity to both upskill and groom for leadership positions.

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