

MBA ETH SCM Success Story

Developing the Supply Chain into an award-winning Business Partner



Angela Qu

Group Vice President and Head of
Division Supply Chain Management
ABB Management Service Ltd
Chinese
MBA ETH SCM 2011-2013

Angela Qu epitomizes today's global manager and citizen. A graduate of economics from China, she began her career at Siemens, where she spent 9 years working in a variety of supply-chain-related functions in China and Germany. ABB-Germany eventually recruited her in Germany in 2005, as global sourcing manager in Frankfurt area.

She was promoted to the Headquarters in Switzerland in 2009, where she became the head of Supply Chain Excellence team for the whole ABB group. Her responsible areas were Strategic sourcing process and Learning and Development program. Since 2012, she heads the Supply Chain of one of ABBs largest business units, responsible for more than 1 Billion USD in spend.

With typical understatement, she explains how her job requires managing «a very complex organization with around 300 people in worldwide teams. We have more than 30 reporting units, located in all the countries of the world, managing thousands of suppliers. The KPIs are percentage of cost reduction, payments terms and our footprint projects in emerging markets. Because our customers sometimes want to buy our products with local content, the task can be quite complex.»

For the mother of twin girls, personal logistics come on top of the job's technical challenges, working with staff and stakeholders in multiple time zones, ensuring both progress in the job as well as personal development. As a former L&D executive, maximizing the productivity of her people is close to her heart, a principle she applied to herself. Angela's own professional journey took her to the ETH, where she graduated from the MBA program in 2011.

«Since I knew it was very important to have a long-term perspective for our employees, I knew I had to have some kind of development program for myself. After many years of working in industry, I needed to refresh my knowledge and get up-to-date information and tools. I researched the market, looking for universities who could educate experienced professionals. The ETH course contents and trips – especially Russia and Japan – were very interesting. I already knew the Chinese market so I was keen to understand these unknown markets.

When I proposed this to my manager, he was very supportive because he also saw that ETH's MBA was a very practical use of my time, studying part-time in Zurich, rather than travelling to London or elsewhere, which would entail long periods of absence from the job.»

The MBA changed the way Angela worked and looked at the world. She summarizes how her traditional engineering focus broadened across functions and teams: «We are now looking at the total value chain instead of focusing on one function like procurement. We cannot always reduce costs just by negotiation with suppliers. SCM has to work with R&D and operation closely. We have to work with engineers to review design, and find the most economic way to build a product. We also have to work with planning department to hit very tight deadlines.

One of her recent initiative is to get SCM and R&D to work with key suppliers, which is called «innovation workshops», which is aiming at getting ABB products more competitive in price as well as getting to market faster.

The cross-functional systems approach Angela learned at ETH transformed her leadership role: «Today we are regarded as a valuable partner in the business, one who can provide a complete solution in procurement, integrating suppliers, logistics and customs clearance, delivery and quality, all at a much more competitive cost.»

«Today we are regarded as a valuable partner in the business, one who can provide a complete solution.»

The subject of Angela's MBA master's thesis was the design of the Supply Chain Excellence Program, which her team built up cross-divisionally and cross-functionally, with measurable business results. ABB was not the only one to recognize Angela's work by promoting her to head the supply chain of one of the largest business unit. The program won the 2014 Procurement Leaders Award for Learning and Development, cited by the «High Fliers» panel in London as putting «ABB [...] on its way to becoming a preferred employer for career-minded SCM professionals worldwide».