Why engineers should get an MBA

Georgia Tech Scheller College of Business
Many working engineers who want to advance their careers go on to earn an MBA to gain the business acumen and skill set essential for senior managers, entrepreneurs, and the C-suite. Ultimately, taking that next step depends on the individual and their career aspirations.

Engineers are problem solvers. They are strategic and analytical, examining complex issues from all angles. Their qualitative and quantitative skill sets differentiate them when they leave school and start a career in the business world. From the start, an engineer’s academic background and technical skills allow them to easily understand product design and build, enabling them to speak with customers, consult clients, and lead teams in a business setting.

However, many engineers are faced with an important question: Should I get an MBA to move my career forward? Today, nearly a third of employers across the U.S. are bumping up education requirements for new hires, according to CareerBuilder. Companies are looking for candidates with an MBA, a master’s degree, or higher to be innovative leaders with the critical business skills necessary to successfully operate in today’s global marketplace.

There are several factors to consider when making the decision to pursue an MBA.
An engineering undergraduate degree already makes you an attractive employee; companies are looking for people with a technical background who can understand complex problems. But adding an advanced degree to your education really gives you a competitive edge that expands your insight and understanding, as well as your career opportunities. An MBA differentiates you from the rest of the workforce.

Your technical background helps you relate to other employees who work on product engineering or research and development. With an MBA, you become the bridge between the tech experts and corporate leadership who make business decisions. Being able to understand both the technological and business sides of the equation, as well as the impact decisions can have on either, makes you an invaluable asset to a corporation in a highly competitive marketplace.
“My engineering degree and MBA enable me to understand the technology implications of what a company does, but also allow me to manage teams and make high-level decisions,” said DeAndre Jones, consultant at CapGemini. “I can lead a team of developers and confidently speak about our work to clients or senior leadership.”

“As an engineer, you’re an analytical thinker and familiar with looking at issues from all angles,” said Shay Ashmon, regional manager at NCR. “An MBA adds even more viewpoints, so it’s complementary. I can speak to the design and tech aspects, but at the same time speak about accounting and finance to executives. My degrees bridge the gap between technical and non-technical departments.”

An MBA supplements an engineer’s analytical expertise by providing a keen understanding of the fundamentals of business such as economics, accounting, finance, organizational development, and strategic development. By adding these strategic and
Ultimately, having advanced degrees on your resume sets you apart from the competition, giving you advanced knowledge, critical insights, and a more marketable skill set. An MBA provides the opportunity to analyze and appreciate the global perspective of your work in a different way, understand today’s complex business environment, branch out into new directions, and consider new career opportunities.

Qualitative skills, an MBA can provide the skills necessary for an engineer to develop into a strong leader adept at finding technical solutions while keeping essential business principles in mind.

"After getting my undergrad in Civil Engineering from Tech, I joined the U.S. Coast Guard as a program manager," said Trevor Clark. "The technical skills are extremely important for problem solving, but I want to move into consulting, and I know I will need those business skills too. A huge component of an MBA is management, soft skills, and networking, which will be instrumental in the consulting world."

At some point in your career, you will need to lead people, manage budgets or analyze the financials of a project. An MBA gives you tools and frameworks to tackle those types of challenges and learn critical business skills that complement your technical background.
After working a few years, many people consider returning to school for an MBA to gain the specific knowledge, experience, and business acumen to advance their careers. In fact, with an advanced degree like an MBA, you can earn up to 30 percent higher salary versus obtaining only a bachelor’s degree, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

A powerful differentiator in the marketplace, an MBA provides in-depth business knowledge and a profound skill set. Engineers with MBAs bring considerable skills to the job from day one, providing critical knowledge and fresh perspectives. Their honed ability to understand complex situations while being agile in a rapidly changing global environment make them key corporate players whether they plan to
advance in their current career, pivot to another industry, or start their own business.

“After my undergrad, I started out in cement manufacturing,” said Katie Baldwin, who now works as a logistics manager at Amazon. “I decided I wanted to get into consulting or business, and an MBA was a way to get there. At Scheller, 95 percent of our professors come out of industry, so you learn from their experience. My goal is to be a Fortune 500 CEO, and the MBA was necessary to get there.”

Jason Alcedo, who was previously in the Peace Corps, also pursued an MBA to further his career. After spending time in Ghana, he gained an interest in the funding aspect of the Peace Corps. He saw that fundraising really depended on leadership responsibility and a strong set of management skills.

“My MBA has enabled me to grow my career with a toolkit that includes data analytics, operations and process optimization,” said Alcedo. “That, combined with my undergraduate degree in Civil Engineering from Tech, puts in me in a good place to lead a non-profit focused on the developing world.”

Businesses are group environments where advanced people skills become important factors in career advancement. While engineers are expert problem solvers, they do not always learn the soft skills required for the business world. An MBA allows you to focus on people development, management skills, and leadership, along with rounding out your business knowledge regarding marketing, finance, and commercialization.

With an advanced degree — MBA or engineering — you can earn up to a 30% higher salary.

U.S. Census Bureau
Sam Gollin, a current Scheller MBA student, believes that the skills gained in his program offer a more holistic understanding of the business. “While my engineering undergraduate degree provided me the opportunity to be successful as a project manager at Delta, the leadership development that goes on at Scheller reinforces the skills companies want to see and continues to help me grow in a leadership capacity,” he said.

Stephanie Kalman, who now works at The Home Depot as a manager, sought an MBA so she could understand the big picture. She realized she was using her ISyE degree to propose systems that could costs millions in capital to implement, but it was those with the in-depth business knowledge and expertise that got to make the final decisions.

“My MBA has given me the business expertise to be a leader and decision maker at The Home Depot,” said Kalman. “My MBA has been fantastic in moving my career forward, and I’m able to better communicate with team members, make more well-rounded decisions, and have a broader view of how a company runs.”
When deciding whether to pursue an MBA, it’s critical to consider what you’re passionate about. Earning an MBA takes considerable time and money. Working before going back to school can help you determine the best career path. For some, it’s about rising to the C-suite of corporate; for others, it’s about starting their own company. Today, MBA programs offer curriculum specializations, practicums, and concentrations that provide a solid MBA core while allowing you to customize your studies to focus on the functional areas or industries that interest you most.

“My end goal is to start my own business after CapGemini,” said DeAndre Jones. “I knew that as an engineer, I wouldn’t be fully equipped with the knowledge I needed to understand the business side of things. That’s why I got my MBA.”
Ashmon is passionate about leading global teams at NCR. “Right now, I’m assigned to U.S. accounts, but I would like more global responsibility. With Scheller’s global business program, I’m well equipped to expand my role.”

For Alcedo, it’s non-profit work. “Cameroon needed civil engineers to help run clean water projects, so that’s where I went. My MBA helps me make an even bigger impact from a high level.”

KEY TAKEAWAY

An MBA helps you pursue your passion. When you commit to what you’re passionate about, it’s much easier to achieve your career goals.
You will consider many factors when deciding if an MBA is right for you. In a high-tech, global economy, it is an essential qualification for senior management and the C-suite, and it is an essential qualification for starting your own business. It signals you are a proven, multi-dimensional leader skilled at tasks that can be quite challenging. In short, an MBA provides you the knowledge and leadership skills to reach your full potential. And remember, your undergraduate engineering background provides problem-solving skills and critical thinking methodology that will always serve you well in any career.

3 MBA OPTIONS ENGINEERED WITH YOU IN MIND

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