

working WEEK

Denis McCarthy has been chief executive of the MBA Association of Ireland since 2001. He was president of the association for two years prior to that and worked as a manager with IIB Bank for 11 years until 2001. McCarthy graduated from University College Cork with a BA in Economics in 1978, before completing a postgraduate degree in Statistics at Trinity College Dublin in 1985 and a Masters in Business Administration in University College Dublin in 1988.

"The MBA Association's purpose is to improve the practice of management in Ireland," said McCarthy. "We do that through a range of events from guest speaker seminars and MBA management update modules, to major conferences headlined by Rudy Guiliani, Henry Kissinger, Denis O'Brien and Thomas A Stewart of the Harvard Business Review.

"We have over 2,000 members, from all areas of business life in Ireland, and the mix includes managers, CEOs and entrepreneurs – it's a diverse group, which is part of its appeal."

Q. What are the main responsibilities of your job?

An MBA has a shelf life of about five years. So we set out to provide a touchstone for MBA graduates to renew and upgrade their knowledge as well as providing a valuable networking forum.

The role of the chief executive is



Denis McCarthy

strategic. The aim is to map where the MBA organisation should be over the next decade.

Building relationships has been key with both business schools in Ireland and commercial organisations, to help us deliver the scope and scale of events.

We are all-island in scope and we have just launched a series of guest speaker events in association with InterTradeIreland along themes of entrepreneurship, leadership, innovation, strategy and competition, which will take place in Limerick, Galway, Belfast, Dublin, Cork and Waterford.

On a daily basis, my job is more practical. It involves coordinating events and people.

We have a very dedicated team of regional committees, all MBAs, who volunteer their time and talent to stage our events around the country.

Q. What are your main professional motivators?

Harnessing the latest in leadership and management thinking from the world's top business schools and bringing it to Ireland. That's been one of the most rewarding parts of the job.

One of our pipeline projects is a book of case studies, aimed at reflecting the unprecedented growth in the Irish economy over the last decade and the experience of indigenous companies. It is a collaboration with the JE Cairnes Graduate School of Business, NUI Galway and the School of Business at Waterford Institute of Technology. It should be on shelves later this year.

Q. What four words would you use to describe your work style?

I have been described on more than one occasion as a maniac with a mission.

Q. What was the best business decision you ever made?

Bringing strategic alliance partners on board. You can achieve so much more, in a much shorter timeframe, through partnership and collaboration. We have surrounded the MBA Association with strong strategic alliance partners such as Bank of Ireland, InterTradeIreland, Enterprise Ireland, Goodbody Stockbrokers and Hibernian Insurance. Their support has enabled us to open up our membership and deliver more good quality events.

Q. What was the most valuable lesson you ever learnt in business?

Never stop learning. Decision-making is always enhanced when you

apply an enlightened academic perspective to a practical business issue.

Q. Who do you most admire in Irish Industry?

At over 150 plus events in the last five years, we have hosted some very inspiring speakers, so the list is long.

It includes energetic entrepreneurs like Pdraig O'Ceidigh of Aer Arran, Martin Naughton of Glen Dimplex and Denis Brosnan of the Kerry Group, as well as luminaries from the political and business arenas, including John Hume and Tony O'Reilly, both of whom have made outstanding contributions to the political and economic development of this island.

Q. Is this where you expected to be five years ago?

When I joined, we undertook a strategic review of the organisation. We set out to move it in a self-financing, viable direction with strong membership and a dynamic programme of events. We have quadrupled our membership and grown our revenue.

We have an impressive list of international and Irish leaders inducted as honorary members so, in many ways, we have surpassed our expectations.

Q. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

I won't be resting on my laurels. We have a lot more to do. In five years' time, we'd like to think we will have captured the majority of the 6,500-odd MBAs on the island of Ireland. We hope to make a significant contribution to the issues affecting economic development in Ireland.