

Should I opt for a technical diploma or go for a master's?

Q I PERFORMED badly in my GCE O Levels 14 years ago and then dropped out from the Institute of Technical Education (ITE). But over the past 10 years, I have put in much effort and will be graduating with a bachelor of science degree in business at the end of this year. I will be 31.

I have functioned in various capacities in the business world over the past decade, so I have no difficulty communicating at different levels in an organisation. The major flaw in my career profile as I enter my fourth decade is a lack of technical skills.

As I begin looking for jobs, I am disheartened to find that the heart of any business lies in its core competency, whether that is pharmaceuticals or engineering. This means that without any specialised knowledge of these core competencies, I often find myself applying for the "general" sales or operations positions, which do not require a bachelor's, rather than for positions on the purchasing or manufacturing side.

This brings me to another crossroad. While I am keen to pursue a diploma in engineering (from PSB Academy), this will take another three years to complete.

I am also thinking of doing a master's in business, but I am afraid that at the end of the course, I would have absorbed a mountain of business concepts but would still lack technical skills.

In addition, age is catching up with me and I want to build up a career that will allow me to carry out strategic roles.

Essentially, my question is: Given my age, should I pick up a technical skill (electrical or mechanical engineering), or go for a master's?

A YOU say that over the past 10 years, you have functioned in various capacities in the business world. Have you asked yourself where your passion lies and what it is that you would really like to do?

I suggest that you assess your strengths and weaknesses. Once you have identified your interests and equipped yourself with your bachelor's, which you will obtain by the end of this year, you can then wholeheartedly pursue these interests.

You also mention that positions in purchasing and manufacturing have passed you by, but have you stayed long enough in an industry to gain the technical knowledge and experience you would need for such positions? To pick up specialised skills in a particular area, you might need to give yourself enough time on the job to achieve a certain level of competency.

As to whether you should pursue a master's in business, I would encourage it. Having the degree would be beneficial to your career, especially if there are opportunities for internal promotions. Your chances would be enhanced with the master's.



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