

HHJ (Hyväksytty hallituksen jäsen) i.e. ABM (Approved Board Member)

A great Finnish training success:

ABM - TRAINING PROGRAM FOR BOARD MEMBERS

Many small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are actually run by the entrepreneur himself or herself. The success of the company is based on the critical skills and the vast personal efforts of the entrepreneur. However, an SME faces various challenges at different stages of development, such as change of ownership, generation change, internationalization, fast growth, market disorders, and other turning points. In these situations the entrepreneur, the owners, and the investors need able advisors who are experienced in those changes and the business areas in question. The best way to bind these advisors to the company is by appointing them as board members.

Very often entrepreneurs and companies do not know enough such advisors to appoint to the board. Meanwhile, there are many advisors who know several business areas but lack an understanding of what board work includes and what the responsibilities are. This is one of the typical reasons why advisors are afraid to join a board of an SME.

Tampere CCI and a regional development organization for board work Hallituspartnerit ry have conceived and developed a training program to solve those issues. It is called the Approved Board Member (ABM) program, (*Hyväksytty hallituksen jäsen- HHJ* in Finnish) The innovative aspect of the ABM program is to combine two main issues and activate an unused or underused resource in a company. The first main issue is to spread knowledge about board work to people involved. The second is to introduce board work advisors and entrepreneurs to each other. The final objective is to get the board significantly involved in promoting the success and development of the company.

A successful Finnish-based tool for board work

The ABM program consists of:

- ABM introduction training,
- ABM course,
- ABM chairperson course,
- ABM exam,
- ABM theme training, i.e. strategy implementation, leading of sales, business economics
- the national ABM alumni seminar and
- the regional ABM alumni meeting.

The main aim of the program is to develop board work at SMEs. The guiding principle of the ABM course is to convey the knowledge required in board work in a short time. Feedback from participants at the course has been excellent and the course has beaten the evaluation high scores of all previous training courses of Tampere and other CCIs in Finland. The courses have been fully booked weeks, even months, in advance. An unprecedented phenomenon is that ABM course participants have been promoting the course on their own initiative. This has resulted in “word of mouth” marketing.

The newcomers in the program are ABM introduction training and ABM chairperson course. The introduction training is a very compact training and gives the participant an overall description of board work. The chairperson course gives the participant hands-on tools for the chairperson in order to be able to lead the board.

Real results gained

The ABM program has succeeded in contributing to companies’ competitiveness, developing their corporate governance and improving their business environment. Conclusion by analogy, ABM has been able to find a new niche in the education and training service of CCIs for their members and coming members.

ABM program has raised the profile of Tampere CCI and other CCIs in Finland as important business facilitators. It has offered something new to current CCI members, especially to a new group of people among the member companies. Financially the ABM program has been a success. Tampere CCI succeeded in setting the participation fee at a fair level and the costs were kept low.

In two years, the ABM course has been distributed to 18 Finnish CCIs and the Central Chamber of Commerce of Finland, a total of 19 chamber units. Course availability now covers over 98% of all members of CCIs in Finland. A total of 457 ABM courses were held between 2005 and December 2018 and almost 9000 persons have attended them. The ABM exam has been organized 23 times until November 2018 and over 3700 persons have passed it. In 2019, more than 50 courses will be held all over Finland.

Pool of Board Professionals

Finnish development organization for board work Hallituspartnerit ry (association) transmits board professionals to SMEs. They try to find suitable board members among their members and persons who have passed the ABM exam. There are eight of these associations and you find more information about them at this site: <https://hallituspartnerit.fi/>

Award

The ABM initiative received broad international publicity during the ICC's World Chambers Congress held in Istanbul in July 2007.

Additional information of the program:

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