

BUSINESS EDUCATION

Online Learning

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Blended approach extends reach

A mix of online and face-to-face teaching is becoming popular but it rarely reduces costs, writes **Della Bradshaw**

What a difference a year makes. Twelve months ago the most adventurous business schools were experimenting with e-readers – Kindles – to replace paper case studies and textbooks, and Facebook to boost student recruitment. Today, e-readers are passé; Facebook ubiquitous.

As tablet devices such as the iPad replace e-readers for both degree and non-degree learning, personalised electronic textbooks replace their paper counterparts, and web-based seminars – webinars – replace the classroom experience, technology is moving beyond its role in student support and becoming an intrinsic element of the pedagogy.

The lines between traditional face-to-face teaching and traditional distance learning programmes are blurring and “blended learning”, combining virtual with face-to-face teaching, is the latest buzz phrase.

One of the biggest developments over the past year has been the launch of high quality – and expensive – blended degree programmes. Earlier this month Brown University in the US, one of just two Ivy League universities not to have a business school, launched an Executive MBA programme with Spain’s IE Business School.

Half of the EMBA – an “Executive MBA” for senior working managers – will be taught face-to-face, the other half online, says David Bach, dean of programmes at IE. He is an avid



The lines between traditional face-to-face instruction and distance learning programmes are blurring

CJG Technology/Alamy

supporter of using asynchronous communications to improve quality of participation on these senior programmes.

“Everybody participates, even the shy people. You think twice as hard about writing something as you do about saying it in the classroom.” As a result, a 90-minute classroom exchange can become a three-day threaded discussion, he says.

The 15-month Brown pro-

gramme will cost \$95,000, more expensive than many full-time programmes, but Prof Bach defends the cost. “This is the Starbucks model, not the Walmart model. You don’t economise on faculty. Blended programmes are as expensive as on-campus programmes and they will become more expensive.”

Prof Bach believes people will be prepared to pay for the convenience of blended pro-

grammes. But other benefits to this technology include the ability of participants to select the way of studying that suits them.

Recognition that advanced technology can help students learn more effectively is spreading at the very top schools, those not usually associated with e-learning. And it is being regarded as enriching the on-campus experience.

At the Wharton school at the

University of Pennsylvania, Karl Ulrich, vice-dean of the school’s innovation initiative, believes that blended learning – or connected learning as Wharton calls it – can respond better to different learning styles.

“You can provide different ways to deliver a module. Our current learning technology is one-size-fits-all. I think we can be more respectful of student’s learning styles,” he says.

But connected learning can also help the school extend its reach. “What I’d like to do is to have students in internships take courses over the summer. If you can separate time and place, we can get our people out into the world a bit more.”

Recognition of different learning styles will be one of the selling points of MBA@UNC, the blended learning programme to be launched in July by the Kenan-Flagler school at the University of North Carolina (see page 2).

Like the IE/Brown programme, MBA@UNC is targeted at the top end of the market, priced at \$89,000 for the two years including books, student fees, and food and accommodation for four weekend immersions.

The two programmes are also both limiting the size of their inaugural intake, to 50 for the UNC programme and 24 for the IE Brown EMBA. Although technology has solved the problem of linking students across distance – 12 nationalities are represented in IE’s first cohort of 24 students – it has not enabled business schools to produce quality programmes at scale.

But that may be changing. At Ashridge in the UK, a blended learning master’s degree launched in April 2010 is proving that online delivery can result in geographical reach and scaleability, says Roger Delves, director of the programme.

He gives the example of a video lecture he recorded for the current class that could be used for participants on future programmes – there are four intakes each year. In a face-to-face environment, he would have to repeatedly teach the same class.

“The biggest breakthrough [in

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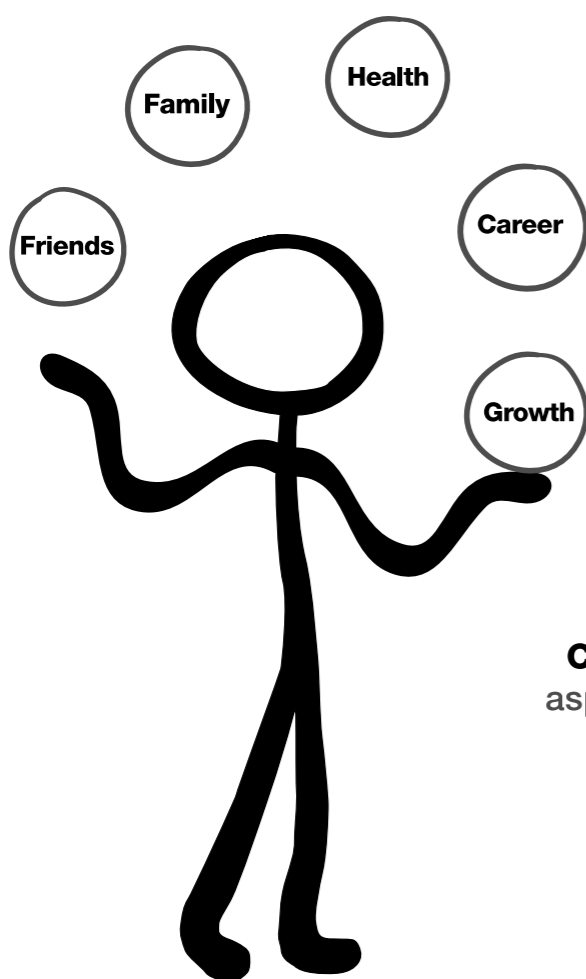
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Business Education | Online Learning

Maximum flexibility for unconventional MBA students

Profile
Kenan-FlaglerSchool aims at broad spectrum, writes
Rebecca Knight

Several years ago administrators at the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School noticed a gaping hole in their MBA offerings. There were large numbers of talented candidates who would like to earn a graduate degree at the school but, for a variety of reasons, could not uproot their lives and come to Chapel Hill.

"We wanted to meet the educational needs of a

broad spectrum of people who are qualified to get an MBA, but for whatever reason are unable to matriculate," says James Dean, dean of the school.

The answer was an online business programme designed for working professionals, known as MBA@UNC.

The programme, which will start in July, is targeted at students who require maximum flexibility. Perhaps they live out of state or even outside the US; perhaps their jobs require extensive travel or frequent transfers; perhaps they are members of the military, or are juggling young children or ageing parents.

"We're not looking to attract conventional MBA students, many of whom

are career changers – the engineer who wants to be an investment banker, for example," says Prof Dean.

"Those people need a full-time programme," he says, "because they need the infrastructure. Our online degree targets people who have reached a certain point in their careers, and want to accelerate, but can't move here to do it."

MBA@UNC, the first class of which is limited to 50 students, will have many of the same characteristics of the campus programme, say school officials.

Students are expected to meet the same admissions criteria required by the existing MBA programmes: the courses, designed and taught by UNC Kenan-

Flagler professors, are based on the same syllabus as the residential MBA. The global immersions will serve as a capstone to the programme, as in the traditional curriculum.

Even the price is in line with Kenan Flagler's similar programmes. Tuition for MBA@UNC is set at \$89,000 for the two years, including books, student fees, and lodging and food costs for four weekend immersions. This is the same price as the school's weekend MBA.

Tuition for the traditional MBA programme, inclusive of living expenses, for two years is roughly \$142,000 for non-resident students.

"Given the poor reputation of many online programmes, we knew

we'd have to stand up to criticism that we were doing something that might damage our brand, and, for better or for worse, we couldn't discount the programme," says Prof Dean.

"We've worked hard to



Susan Cates: The asynchronous component replaces lectures

ensure the quality [equals the traditional MBA]."

The delivery and structure of MBA@UNC – which involves both "synchronous" and "asynchronous" classes – is very different from the school's other offerings.

A typical course will include a series of asynchronous classes: course content that students may access at any time. "The asynchronous component is intended to replace going to lectures, but it will not be just video of a talking head," says Susan Cates, executive director of MBA@UNC.

Ms Cates says the asynchronous portion will include: videos of interviews with chief executives discussing particular business issues; documentary-style videos featuring faculty lecturing; and simulation software.

During the asynchronous segment, students will read assigned texts and case studies.

In the live, or

synchronous, class sessions, which will be held weekly, the professor and a cohort of 10-15 students will participate in an online classroom at prearranged dates and times.

These sessions, scheduled to accommodate students in different time zones, will use live, streaming video so that students and professors will be able to see and hear each other in real time.

Ms Cates says: "They will engage in a live class – it might take the form of a case discussion, they might break into small groups to role-play different activities and debate strategies, or they may go over a problem-set and quantitative reasoning."

The technology also allows for live office hours and student-led study-groups, all of which will be recorded, so students can revisit them, even after they complete the courses.

Students will also be able to attend an immersion group – short standalone classes offered four times a year – where they will meet fellow students and faculty face-to-face.

Participation in all of these will not be required, but students must complete the course material for each immersion online if not in person.

The first immersion class will take place in Chapel Hill, but the remainder will be held all over the world.

Mobiles and MP3s make their mark as teaching aids

Downloads

Does putting course materials on portable devices really add value, asks Charlotte Clarke

When I was at school, mobile phones and MP3 players were banned from the classroom. In no way were they considered to be an aid to education.

The same went for downloads. If pupils were to download anything, it would be their favourite piece of music in their free time. Now, however, these formats have united to become a means of furthering a student's learning.

"We are going through a revolution," says Ray Irving, head of learn-



While the technology of downloading is not new, doing so to portable devices, particularly mobiles, is

Dreamstime

ing and resource development at Warwick Business School in the UK. He explains that, while the technology of downloading is not new, downloading on to portable devices, particularly mobiles, is new. Increasing numbers of business students are carrying and

using these devices everywhere they go. This shows technology is clearly no longer a barrier for students. They buy the devices anyway, because they are cheap and multifunctional and they are accustomed to the concept of downloading. "It has become second nature to most," says Mr Irving.

As a result, business schools are web-enabling all their course materials for students to access in this way. But is there really an added value to this?

David Costa, dean and collegiate professor at Robert Kennedy College in Switzerland, admits the faculty at his school were doubtful about this new medium at first.

"Can you really study on a mobile?" was the initial question asked. In their minds, students needed to be sitting at a desk in front of a computer when studying, not lying on the sofa with their mobile.

But now, Mr Costa says, even the most ardent sceptics have been converted after trying it out for themselves. "People don't really want to be sat in front of a computer for hours," he explains, "especially those who work in an office all day."

Mr Irving at Warwick says that schools have now realised that activities done away from the desk, jogging or travelling for example, that they previously considered to be "dead time" can in fact complement the learning experience.

"Students can listen on the move," he says, "and it stimulates more senses than simply reading."

This new awareness of the benefits of downloads to portable devices as a learning tool is making the medium more varied and sophisticated. Raw recordings of lectures, directly

uploaded on to websites are now being complemented by podcasts that have been edited and indexed, or specifically designed for students to download.

Andrew Weir, an MBA student at Athabasca University in Canada, says one of the things he likes most about the online downloading format is the school library.

He says: "[It] has the ability to create a citation for the paper you need, a major timesaver when working on assignments and projects requiring significant research."

Some downloads have complete lectures that include comments from the students that were present. Others give short explanations of difficult

'Students can listen on the move and it stimulates more senses than simply reading'

concepts or key points with added features such as slide shows.

Claudia Luca, head of operations at Resource Development International in the UK says: "Faculty now take all their work through online platforms."

And students are also starting to get involved, posting content on to forums.

Mr Irving describes how one student recorded himself speaking the lecture notes. "The other students loved it; it was immediately shared with hundreds across the world and created a sense of authenticity."

More recently, downloads have interactive-based content. The Open University Business School in the UK,

for example, now has an MBA elective called "Managing in Action", which is designed to enable students to relate the material directly to their work.

All content is downloadable and in future there will be just one piece of printed material available. Students are encouraged to engage rather than become too attached to textbooks. This would counteract the issue of passive learning that some have suggested could happen using this medium.

Robert Kennedy College has invested in a customised platform to this end. "Most of our competitors use a standardised platform called Blackboard," says Mr Costa, "but we were keen to move one step further, in order to respond quickly to feedback from our students."

Mr Costa is also publishing a course textbook online only for the first time this year. "E-books are easy to update quickly when editions change," he says. "They also work well in remote places, where printed editions are often not readily available."

There is a concern that in spite of all these efforts, some will still be dismissive of the format. "My worry is that students think the content is less valuable because there is no beautifully printed book," says Devendra Kodwani, senior lecturer in finance and director at the Open University.

He advises students to separate the medium from the content and just take advantage of having another way of accessing content to enhance and support their studies.

Those whose student days were restricted to lectures, note-taking and queues in the library to borrow one book would no doubt agree that students are now spoilt for choice.

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Blended learning on the rise

Continued from Page 1

technology] has been around increased bandwidth," he says. "People can download materials quickly and the programme works seamlessly."

By reducing costs, Ashridge has been able to attract participants from countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, says Mr Delves. "This is an attractive product for people in developing countries because the costs are much lower [than on-campus programmes]."

Mr Delves says Ashridge has been particularly successful with this model because of the years of experience it has in developing online modules through its Virtual Learning Resource Centre – recently renamed Virtual Ashridge.

Elsewhere, the latest web technology is breathing new life into established programmes. At Queen's School of Business in Canada, which has been running a videoconferencing-based EMBA programme for a decade, improvements in web technology have

enabled the school to extend its reach, says Michael Darling, programme director of one of the three videoconferencing programmes taught at the school.

Increased bandwidth means students can view the synchronous video lectures from their desktops, eliminating the need to travel to a videoconferencing "boardroom". Students from Bermuda to British Columbia are participating in the same virtual learning EMBA team.

The UK's Open University is an established player in delivering programmes at a distance, and it is embracing the latest technology.

Martin Bean, its vice-chancellor, believes the ideal scenario is for students to consume content and undergo a comprehension assessment at a distance and then use the face-to-face meetings with tutors and professors to actively engage in discussion.

He thinks this is particularly appropriate in business education. "I think the real value of a business school is the community of learning."

Prof Bean says the demand for management education is growing to such an extent that online and blended learning will be increasingly popular globally. "The world simply can't build enough brick-and-mortar institutions to meet demand."

And, he believes its popularity will grow as the technology becomes more personal. "The technology is coming our way; it's now a lot more social, which works well with education."

That said, the success of blended learning – "supported open learning" as the OU calls it – will always depend on the quality of the teaching, he says.

For the OU, where fewer than 10 per cent of the 265,000 enrolled students live outside the UK, using technology to spearhead expansion overseas is a priority.

It has had some success, though, with podcasting, through iTunes University. Some 89 per cent of the 31m downloads of OU material on iTunes has come from outside the UK, says Prof Bean. "It's an amazing base of informal learning."

In praise of whistleblowers

Dean's Column

People with the courage to speak out have made the world a better place, says **John Board**

I was speaking recently to Peter Erskine, chairman of the strategy board at Henley Business School and of Ladbrokes, the leisure group, and the topic of whistleblowers came up.

This may not be surprising, given my background in finance and capital markets and his role as a chairman of a FTSE 250 company, but it developed into an interesting conversation.

We reflected on the visibility that whistleblowers have had during the past decade and ended up deciding that their impact on business has been both pervasive and positive.

Why is whistleblowing so prominent these days? In part, the answer lies in the impossibility of any regulatory regime to enforce complete compliance with rules.

Companies, whether financial or industrial, are larger and more diffuse than ever before and, with size, comes monitoring problems. These problems may relate to low-level inefficiency, high-level corruption or corporate actions against the interests of stakeholders or society.

There are also those who would argue that, in the absence of moral or ethical business behaviour, there is a need for whistleblowing.

When thinking of whistleblowers, we tend to think of events such as Enron and WorldCom but seldom of the individuals (Sherron Watkins at Enron and Cynthia Cooper at WorldCom) whose actions brought these scandals to public light.

While some famous whistleblowers managed to preserve their anonymity (for example W. Mark "Deep Throat" Felt on Watergate), many others have been punished for their actions – either by losing their jobs or by imprisonment (for example, Mordechai Vanunu, who revealed Israel's clandestine nuclear programme) and Paul van Buitenen, who accused European Commission members of corruption in the 1990s.

Equally, most whistleblowers are unknown and unreported – but their actions have undoubtedly served to



Sherron Watkins, whose action brought the Enron scandal to public light

Reuters

The majority of senior managers are now supportive of promoting an open speak-up culture

John Board, Dean, Henley Business School

alert authority, whether internal or external, to bad or corrupt practices. In addition, there are many who have attempted to alert others, but were ignored – almost every episode throws up the names of honourable people who attempted to do the right thing.

Although whistleblowers are seen in both a positive and negative light (martyrs for the greater good versus self-seeking publicists), their influence and impact on the way organisations operate should not be underestimated. Their actions in revealing scandalous behaviour have led to the worldwide strengthening of corporate governance frameworks, most notably through changes in legislation including the UK corporate governance code and the US Sarbanes-Oxley act.

In many ways these developments instil stronger ethics – follow the rules to ensure that the right actions are taken and being transparent in the process.

Despite the costs and operational challenges of implementing processes in order to comply with

these requirements, organisations are increasingly creating a culture that encourages internal whistleblowing or more broadly a speak-up strategy that goes beyond illegal or unacceptable behaviour.

It concerns the ability of individuals to raise broader business and ethical concerns from safety and security to incompetence and complacency. It is about creating an environment in which individuals are able and willing to speak out when the organisation takes a path they do not agree with.

This trend is highlighted in a recent PwC report. From a survey of more than 100 organisations they found that the majority of senior managers were now supportive of promoting an open speak-up culture.

Surely this goes beyond governance structures. So what does it mean for business schools? We have already seen the growth in courses in governance and ethics.

We are helping students to understand and evaluate risk – to understand the consequences of their decisions. But this is not enough.

We have a responsibility to educate leaders to create transparent environments where managers at all levels have the confidence and ability to speak out without retaliation.

These managers need to be confident, critical, brave and resilient.

As business schools we need to give our students not only the knowledge and skills to create the right organisational structures and processes, but also the aptitudes and attributes to make the right decisions.

It takes brave individuals to act as whistleblowers and we should thank them for helping to create an environment that values an ethical, sustainable and profitable approach to management.

The continued existence of impediments to good behaviour, for example employment contracts that prohibit these actions, shows that our need for them will continue.

PwC (2011) *Striking a Balance: Whistleblowing arrangements as part of a speak up strategy*, London. www.pwc.co.uk/eng/publications/whistleblowing-reporting

Six schools are better than one

Profile Euro*MBA

The course is run by a consortium from several countries, writes **Wai Kwen Chan**

Fresh from celebrating its 15th anniversary in January this year, the Euro*MBA distance-learning programme is still going strong.

Students, alumni and staff celebrated for two days in Maastricht with various events and activities. This included a bike ride in the caves of Valkenburg and prizes awarded to the top students from each course.

Alumni and students also took part in a workshop on how to use a specialised software system to create discussion groups. There was plenty of socialising, and a graduation ceremony followed by a disco.

Stuart Dixon, director of the Euro*MBA, points out that if participants are not enjoying themselves then they will not survive the programme, as it is "heavy going".

The average study time is 15 hours a week, and some students have full-time jobs and families. "This can be a considerable commitment, when you take into account the average time to finish the programme is two-and-a-half years.

Euro*MBA is formed by a consortium of six business schools: Audencia Nantes Ecole de Management (France); Eada (Spain); HHL - Leipzig Graduate School of Management (Germany); IAE Aix Graduate School of Management (France); Kozminsky University (Poland) and Maastricht University School of Business and Economics (the Netherlands).

The MBA is a blended learning programme mixing 10 online courses and face-to-face sessions. Participants are required to attend an introductory seminar and six residential weeks, each one taking place at one of the partner schools in turn.

Students come from countries including Angola, Kazakhstan, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador – providing a good chance to learn about different cultures.

The aim of Euro*MBA is to bring together a global and diverse group and to

educate international managers. During a course, students work in groups and – to ensure diversity – there are at least three nationalities in each team.

Diversity is behind Euro*MBA's success, says Mr Dixon. With people from different cultures and professions "it is a unique and lasting experience that participants will never forget," he adds.

He also mentions that the face-to-face element is important for sharing ideas and networking. For example, an alumnus who set up his own business looked to the Euro*MBA alumni association, hoping to raise funding.

There was also the possibility that someone from the network could provide skills to help with his project.

Students work in groups and – to ensure diversity – there are at least three nationalities in each team

"Being an international consortium, this exploits the competencies of the six partners," says Mr Dixon.

The residential weeks are themed, giving students an opportunity to engage in contemporary business issues.

For instance, the theme at the Audencia residential was corporate social responsibility (CSR), as the school has an international research centre focusing on this subject so it can teach CSR at a higher level.

Company visits help students gain an idea of how different businesses work.

At the HHL - Leipzig residential, the theme was "green innovation", covering environmental issues. This involved a tour at the Leipzig Porsche plant to gain an insight into the automotive sector and a chance to discuss manage

ment issues with company directors. Students even had the opportunity to be driven around the test track in one of the cars.

Other MBA programmes will have difficulty competing with the exposure participants receive to the six specialisms of the schools, says Mr Dixon. "With the power of the six, their specialisms are readily available themes. There is no need to recruit faculty externally, as Euro*MBA does everything in-house," he says.

The MBA is a general degree, meaning there is no opportunity to specialise. Students have to study every course in the syllabus, including management accounting and human resource management.

The courses offered are essential elements of management education.

As students tend to specialise in their first degree, it is good to expose them to a general business and management education, explains Mr Dixon.

For those interested in applying, Mr Dixon emphasises that the admissions process is becoming more selective and the toughest question applicants will face is "What do you offer?"

The amount of work experience they have matters, as students learn from each other by sharing their experiences during discussions.

Through this process, they can get an idea of how other companies operate.

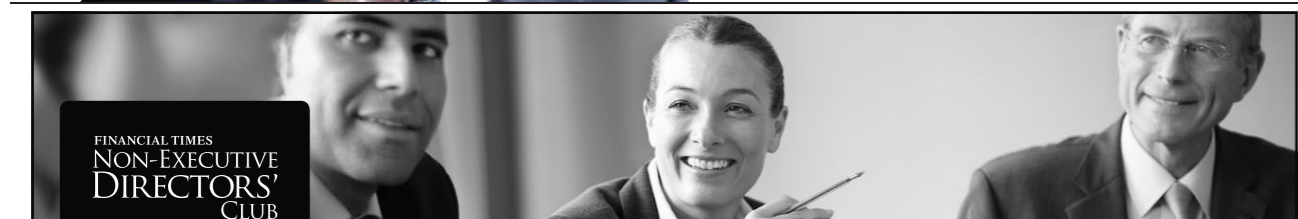
The minimum work experience required is five years, with the average being 11 years.

Mr Dixon adds: "We would like to build a reputation of being the number-one blended learning MBA in the world. We want to develop professionals and make them successful."

"If we can achieve that, we will have succeeded in our goals."



Stuart Dixon, director of the Euro*MBA



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Technology helps facilitate the face-to-face experience

Blended learning

Executive education is adapting to an era of austerity, writes Wai Kwen Chan

There is more to designing blended learning programmes than just mixing online teaching materials and face-to-face interaction.

In an era of austerity, developing these courses in the executive education sector can prove challenging. Companies may resort to e-learning tutorials to provide a cost- and time-efficient way of training staff that avoids the travel and accommodation costs of off-site courses.

So how will blended learning progress in the executive education sector? Is the trend moving towards learning virtually rather than in person? Or is there something else in the mix?

Andrew Atzert, chief operating officer at the Aresty Institute of Executive Education at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, says people tend to prefer the blend.

When the financial crisis hit, some businesses asked the institute to convert some programmes wholly online, but companies usually ask for the combined format.

Despite the austerity, face-to-face learning still has a role. Mr Atzert says there is a need to meet in person, as people tend to do business this way. He emphasises that certain skills, such as negotiation, are hard to teach online, as you want to observe participants' non-verbal behaviour in a classroom.

He says that online teaching is an important and increasingly necessary addition for senior leadership programmes. However, such courses are always going to have a strong face-to-face element, as many leadership skills have to be developed in a physical setting.

Tony Sheehan, director of learning services at Ashridge, says the school offers substantial face-to-face contact for those doing a short executive course.

Another advantage is that the school "is surrounded by acres of forest and wildlife, which provides a rich reflective learning experience", he says, contrasting life in a crowded city or doing a busy job where it can be

hard to get some time to reflect and learn.

Mr Sheehan says the biggest challenge with learning today is coping with the fast pace of work. People are increasingly reliant on information being readily available, rather than learning it in advance just in case. He says it has become a world of "just-in-time" learning.

This change means there will be a focus on supporting mobile devices, such as tablets, to enable people to access information easily, so as to learn "just in time" in any place, he says.

The future of blended learning is about choice and personalisation. Ashridge's online learning platform, called Virtual Ashridge, lets students home in on certain interests and choose a style of learning that fits their personality without information overload.

Some may want to listen to an audio file or read text, while others may want to take part in an online discussion.

Blended learning is also evolving to combine online and in person teaching, leading to simulated face-to-face solutions. For example, Duke Corporate Education (Duke CE), has developed an online induction game with



'Certain skills, such as negotiation, are hard to teach online, as you want to observe participants' non-verbal behaviour'

Andrew Atzert, Aresty Institute

one of its clients. New employees have to deal with an unhappy customer played by an experienced person in the organisation. The game is overseen by an instructor and peers can watch and listen to the session.

It takes place in a 3D virtual meeting room via avatars. They can talk to each other using the internet about how to deal with the customer.

Steve Mahaley, global practice lead of the learning innovations team at Duke CE, believes the future of blended learning will move from 2D to 3D. "If we look at what technologies provide today for blended learning, typically we see e-learning content, podcasts on mobile devices and live events in webinars.

"We will see the addition of 3D online environments that provide a more sensory-rich, interactive and shared experience. These technologies offer learning designers a new way to provide immersive, hands-on experiences that go far beyond the more passive attendance at webinars," he says.

Kris Downing, director of business strategy and partnerships at the Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL) says as immersive simulation and gam-

ing have become more sophisticated, they can replicate role-plays and scenarios that were previously reserved for the classroom. However, CCL does not see such tools replacing the classroom as it sees great value in peer discussion, live coaching and videotaping.

When developing virtual solutions, external factors can provide additional challenges for learning designers. Mr Sheehan notes that standards and expectations for virtual learning tend to be set by popular websites and applications.

Examples are search engines such as Google and social networking sites such as Facebook. Providers of virtual learning have to ensure that standards are the same as such sites to match user expectations. Business and workplace trends are also affecting education. Wharton's Aresty Institute mirrors developments in standard technology used at work when designing executive education courses.

This makes it easier for people to get started, if they are familiar with the technology used on the programmes. Common technologies include Adobe Connect, the web conferencing software

for conducting online meetings. The trends and changes in blended learning not only relate to teaching and learning methods, but to content as well. Mr Mahaley of Duke CE says that Twitter can be used to share insights and data.

"Mobile devices can be used with a Flickr account to upload photos from local sites that help all learners understand more about the business context from different geographies," he adds.

Mr Atzert emphasises that "participants bring a lot of knowledge into the learning environment, and social networking provides a means of exploiting that, so participants can learn from one another as well as from faculty. It also provides a means for participants to stay connected and use one another as a resource after a programme ends."

The future of blended learning in executive education is about combining the best of online and face-to-face teaching.

Ms Downing says: "Virtual solutions can bring people together to solve problems collectively. The ultimate aim is to use technology as an enabler: to preserve and extend impact of the face-to-face experience."



The iPad has not eliminated paper altogether, as some case-study libraries are not yet available in digital formats

Iain Masterton/Alamy

iPad takes over as the lecture hall aid of choice

Tablet devices

Laptops are being edged out for a variety of reasons, says Tim Bradshaw

At the start of 2010, Apple's iPad had not even been announced, let alone released. But within months of the tablet computer's April debut it was being adopted in boardrooms around the world as the favourite toy of executives as diverse as WPP's Sir Martin Sorrell and News Corp's James Murdoch.

So it was little surprise that by the start of the new academic year in the autumn, iPads were showing up in many business school classrooms too.

The speed with which Apple's touchscreen device has been adopted by MBA students is in marked contrast to the Amazon Kindle, an e-reader that lacks the iPad's colour, graphics and easy typing.

A Kindle trial at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business found that while students liked the device for reading books, only one in 10 used it for studying. Michael Koenig, director of MBA operations at Darden, sees much greater potential for touchscreen tablets such as the iPad, RIM's Playbook or Samsung's Galaxy Tab.

"I was surprised by how many of my faculty members walked in

with an iPad as soon as they were launched," he says.

Proponents of the technology deny that it gives them a sneaky way to play Angry Birds in classrooms.

Christine Geocaniga, a full-time MBA student at Ashridge Business School in the UK, says: "The good thing about having an iPad is that I don't have to print out so much and it keeps my backpack quite light. It makes studying more mobile because I don't need to carry two binders with me."

But the iPad has not eliminated paper altogether, as some case study libraries are not yet available in digital formats. "It has not really replaced my handwritten notes in class," Ms Geocaniga adds.

Nonetheless, some argue that tablets have an advantage over laptops for use in class, where a wall of raised screens can create a psychological barrier between student and teacher.

"For a case-study-based platform, in the Socratic method, one of the nice things about the iPad and similar devices is you can lay them down. There is no break between the students and the front of the room," Mr Koenig says. "We get the sense there is a little more focus [than with laptops]."

Some schools, including Ashridge, Georgia State University's Robinson College of Business and Hult International Business School, are giving students on high-end courses an iPad preloaded with all the case studies and textbooks they will need in their studies.

computer equipment saves the schools money, because e-books are cheaper than hardbacks, as well as being more convenient for students.

The University of Notre Dame Mendoza College of Business handed out 40 iPads to two sets of students on undergraduate and MBA management courses last autumn, to assess the new technology.

Corey Angst, assistant professor at Mendoza, published the results of the trial in January, in one of the most detailed studies yet of iPad use in business schools.

'The good thing about having an iPad is that I don't have to print out so much and it keeps my backpack quite light'

The results were overwhelmingly positive - although not always for the reasons Prof Angst originally expected.

Where excitement about most new technology typically wanes after a while, "no such lulls in acceptance or value were detected in the iPad study", Prof Angst wrote. "Expectations were high, but performance appeared to live up to the hype."

Most students found the iPad easy to operate, with a majority using it to read course materials beyond the scope of the trial.

Asked whether they would want to buy tablets and e-books after the

trial had ended, a large majority of the students said they would be keen to borrow an iPad from the school and rent an e-book that would "expire" after six months.

Most also said that they felt the iPad helped make the classes more interesting and projects easier to manage.

Two-thirds said it was "very difficult" to give up the iPad after the trial. Among the top reasons for this were its "instant on" facility, portability, ease of use in any situation and the "social perception" of using a trendy device.

However, the chief complaint was that it still lacked "important functions", such as highlighting and note taking, although some downloadable "apps" such as PDF-Notes and iAnnotate PDF - are now emerging to remedy that.

"The ancillary benefits of the iPad outweigh the device's drawbacks as an academic tool," Prof Angst wrote in his report. "While not statistically significant, the majority of students said they are learning more by using the iPad."

Apple would not help Notre Dame fund an iPad programme, but the school is now talking to Sprint, the US telecoms operator, about sponsoring new Android-based tablets for students arriving later this year.

"We are truly device-agnostic," Prof Angst told the FT. "It's unlikely that Notre Dame would ever mandate the purchase of a specific device. We are really trying to prove that it doesn't matter what students decide to use, we can support them."

Students appreciate polyglot approach

Communication

From MBAs to social networking, foreign languages open doors, writes Stephen Hoare

Frederic Leoni, a student at Grenoble Graduate School of Business in the French Alps, occupies his spare time topping up on his German language lessons. Grenoble's MBA is taught in English, but the business school offers tuition in several European languages.

"I describe myself as a French Italian but I decided to learn German to give me more career options. I'd like to work for the United Nations in Switzerland or in Germany and if you can speak, you can work," says Mr Leoni, 31.

Language teaching at GGSB is a mix of face-to-face teaching supported by online distance learning, which allows individuals to practise at their own pace. "I'm using an online language course called Tell Me More. I've loaded it on to my laptop," says Mr Leoni.

Lessons on Tell Me More are graded by European Community language proficiency levels. Leoni is at level B1 which is higher than beginners graded at A1 or A2. "My aim is to get to level C," he says.

Grenoble pays for a licence for Tell Me More, which is available to all students on the university's virtual learning environment, Moodle.

The majority of non-French-speaking international students at Grenoble learn French face-to-face and online. Language study allows them to get the most out of life in the city, as well as helping them secure internships with French companies.

Students can also study Spanish, German or Chinese. "If you are here for a semester, you will be offered the chance to learn a language," says Carole Gally, GGSB's language coordinator.

Language tuition is a popular add-on for MBA programmes and is what gives European business schools such as Grenoble, IE or Iese a competitive edge against UK or North American schools. At Isead for example, fluency in a second language is a condition of entry and by the time you graduate, you will be speaking a third.

"We see language classes as a cultural tool - how you behave when

you are meeting with a French manager," says Ms Gally.

Distance learning MBAs are picking up on the huge market for business qualifications among non-native speakers of English. Over the past decade, Edinburgh Business School has begun translating its online MBA into the main world languages.

Starting with Mandarin Chinese in 2002, the EBS online MBA has been translated into Spanish, Arabic and Russian.

The adaptation is no mere matter of word for word translation. The entire business landscape has to be reflected as well as its technical language and cultural idioms.

Alick Kitchin, EBS business director, says: "It's a tough call to get 600 pages of economics into Spanish or Russian. You need language experts, business experts and reviewers to

developing world, where tuition is often traded and where business people and professionals can learn a language through conversing online with someone with similar career interests.

In such cases both the teacher and the student learn each other's language and culture through conversation.

In four years, the Seattle-based social networking site Livemocha has established 9m users and 300,000 teachers worldwide. Brazil, the Middle East and Asia are the biggest markets.

Michael Schutzler, chief executive of Livemocha, says: "There are 300m people in China learning English. They are already fluent in Mandarin. In China, language social networking is as addictive as computer gaming. It's a completely different attitude to language learning from what we see in the west."

Business schools are a target market for Livemocha and the website has set up licences with a number of smaller US business schools. One of its biggest corporate clients is Google, which has hired Livemocha as a way of encouraging all staff to learn another language.

Business schools have spotted an opportunity for developing social enterprise. MBA students from Iese, a Spanish business school, are helping run a start-up languages website Glovico on a rotating internship and are marketing it in the US and Europe, using personal contacts and word of mouth.

Glovico fosters business links with developing countries and puts teachers from Latin America and Africa in touch with students wanting to improve their conversation skills.

The no-frills website is run with a small back office, a money transfer facility and a booking diary. Conversations in French, Spanish or English are delivered over Skype at little more than the cost of a phone call.

'I'd like to work for the UN in Germany or Switzerland and if you can speak, you can work'

Frederic Leoni, student



Glovico's no-frills website uses Skype



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Steps on road to developing a global mindset

Hopes and Fears

MAURICIO SCHWARTZMANN

Once you know what motivates you, you can steer your career towards things you enjoy. Towards the end of 2008, after working for Citi Peru for about six years, ever since I was an intern, I felt it was time to take the next step: an MBA.

I had a great start to my professional career, as I held various positions and moved rapidly within the company in a relatively short time. These jobs included roles in quality and innovation, operations and technology, client and product management.

Having the opportunity to do different jobs, and not become a specialist in just one, gave me a more holistic view of business and at the same time helped me discover what I enjoy doing.

However, the timing of my MBA could not have been worse. Economies around the world were shaken by the financial crisis, student loans were reduced to a minimum, job prospects looked terrible, and uncertainty was the name of the game.

But in Peru, the economy was booming, and local growth prospects could not have looked better.

I needed to make a tough decision: give up a great job with excellent opportunities in one of the only economies still growing and do a full-time MBA programme; or sacrifice the experience of living and potentially working in a bigger, more developed country and do a local part-time programme while working.

I decided to stay in my job and look for a part-time programme that would allow me to develop the skills needed to live and work in a different market or region, and look for such an opportunity in the future.

In that search, I was introduced to Thunderbird Global School of Management by many colleagues who had studied in the school, were satisfied with the programme, and now worked outside the country.



Mauricio Schwartzmann: my decision to study at home in Peru and look for opportunities abroad later was the right one *Zuma*

The trip opened a new vision of the world for me. The fact that the way of life considered as "normal" for a large part of the world population differs so much from the western way of life was hard to grasp.

Nevertheless, it highlighted the fact that embracing diversity is probably one of the most important variables needed in a global manager.

But studying at the same time as working is not all fun and games. Balancing your work and family life with the demands of a top-notch programme requires a lot of sacrifice and focus to reach your goals, especially when you get promoted and assume more responsibilities in the middle of the race.

But the experience has been enlightening, not only because the learning process is much richer once you have work experience, but also because having peers with different backgrounds provides points of view that do not always match your way of thinking.

I guess my decision to stay put and look for cross-border opportunities later was the right one. Two months ago I was selected in an international associate programme within Citi that will take me on a four-year journey to different countries, regions and job experiences.

The main goal of the programme: to try to develop a global mindset for a generation of potential future leaders within my business unit.

I'm two months away from finishing the programme and strongly believe it was ideal preparation for this experience, and also to put me one step ahead of the rest and hit the ground running.

I feel ready to take the next step I was looking for, and thus continue developing the skills needed to become a global professional.

The writer is an MBA student at Thunderbird Global School of Management

The programme was a 21-month global MBA, designed for Latin American managers.

Although I had given up on the opportunity to live and work outside Peru, once the decision was made I felt that I was embarking on a journey that would eventually help me steer my career towards gaining experience outside my country.

On my first week of classes, I heard a term that at the time

did not mean as much as it does today, which is the need to develop a "global mindset".

At first I did not pay much attention to the term, but as the programme continued, it resonated throughout the learning experience.

From the very foundation of most courses that have a strong focus on global business – including marketing, economics, strategy, political economy or finance – to

developing a network of people from across the world, to experiencing other countries or regions in an international business interim trip, I believe the programme has been designed to allow you to develop a global mindset.

This helps you to become aware of the many variables that change from market to market and, as a result, have the resources needed to adapt to it.

The business interim trip was probably the most interesting experience I had in this regard.

It is aimed at providing the hands-on experience of analysing a potential country to do business with, visiting it and interacting with other businesses and organisations operating in it, and also experiencing the cultural differences and evaluating adaptations needed.

Having many options to

choose from and having travelled in the Americas, Asia and Europe, my natural choice was the Middle East.

We travelled for a week to Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

The visit included sessions to get to know and understand the culture, meetings with businesses, both local and western, operating in the region and, of course, a little bit of leisure.

Geographical boundaries are redrawn by web technology

Flexible study

International aspect is the main bonus, says Jane Bird

During the three-and-a-half years it took Agnes Oon to get her MBA she worked full-time, travelled regularly for her job, changed employer and gave birth to her second child. Because the entire degree course was online, she could study in the evenings and at weekends.

The opportunity to form an international network of contacts was another big bonus. "I felt part of a community of students spanning Australia, America, India, China, Vietnam and Europe," Ms Oon says.

"It was enormously stimulating sharing ideas and discussions with people from so many different cultures and viewpoints."

Ms Oon's MBA was with U21Global, a Singapore-based business school set up in 2001 to deliver education online. It is being joined by an increasing number of bricks-and-mortar business schools adopting web technology as a way to enhance and expand their curriculum.

The international dimension is one of the main benefits of online technology, says John Gallagher, associate dean for executive MBA programmes at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business in the US. It has introduced a blended "cross-continent" course.

Students attend residential two-week modules in six locations worldwide over 18 months, with distance-working in between.

"This approach enables us to breach geographic boundaries and create extraordinarily diverse classes, because we are not constrained by place," says Prof Gallagher.

Courses emphasise international topics such as cultures, civilisations and leadership, global markets and institutions.

This structure and content are much more consistent with the career ambi-



Nick Hutton: demand is exceeding supply in some areas

tions of young people, says Prof Gallagher. "They are interested in experiences that help them cross borders and pursue opportunities in other parts of the world."

In the past, distance learning has often been viewed as a second-class experience, but the latest online technology is putting it out in front, says Prof Gallagher. "Students are getting an outstanding experience that could never be available to people who are on campus every day."

This view is shared by Bert Valencia, executive director of the global MBA programme at Arizona-based Thunderbird.

There is a perception among the alumni that online students are missing out on the campus experience and interacting with other students, says Mr Valencia. "But now the world is different and people in business spend much less time face-to-face."

Global companies do not sit around the table to make decisions: they go online with video and audio conferencing, Skype instant messaging, and social networks, he says.

Students who study online have to learn to multi-task as they balance work, study and family.

"This is a better preparation for real life than the focused and rarefied atmosphere of the campus," Mr Valencia says. He expects Thunderbird's global MBA student numbers to double from 200 to 400 in the next five years.

The UK's Warwick Business School (WBS) is using web technology to enhance campus experience. When the Iceland volcanic ash cloud prevented a lecturer attending a five-day module on service management for students in Dubai, it decided that, rather than abandon the lectures, it would stream video of them from Warwick.

In addition to saving time and money, this was an environmentally friendly option, says Ray Irving, head of learning resources at WBS. "It is also ideal for our senior guest speakers, who typically have busy schedules and may find it hard to get away."

It is the reverse of the usual concept of online learning, because you are putting the tutor online rather than the student.

WBS has moved on from thinking about online technology as a way to improve distance-learning, to thinking about it as enhancing campus education, Mr Irving says.

Students can attend a lecture in person, or view it on a PC from elsewhere. This provides the flexibility and choice frequently expected in today's business-education market.

People do not want to be told they have to travel to a specific place at a certain time, Mr Irving says. "They want to be able to watch a lecture when and where they can concentrate on it."

Developments in online technology will enable business schools to offer more web-based options in future. U21Global chose Singapore for its headquarters partly because of the country's high-speed communications network. But some of its students are in remote locations without access to broadband.

Someone in rural Africa or India might have only a 128K dial-up modem, says Nick Hutton, U21Global's chief executive. This makes video streaming and conferencing impractical, he says. Within the next three years, however, he expects that high-quality low-bandwidth video will become more widespread, making many more multimedia options possible for online students.

U21Global is helping other institutions move online as a means of expanding student numbers. With the e-learning market expected to grow to \$50bn by 2014, this should be a huge opportunity, says Mr Hutton. He expects it to be particularly popular in Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Europe, where demand is exceeding supply.

The 6,000 people taking U21Global's degree courses may never meet their fellow students or tutors face-to-face. A class may contain 30 students in 30 countries, with a tutor in a 31st.

Although Ms Oon did meet some of her fellow students face-to-face over the duration of her courses, she liked the "anonymity" of first getting to know people online.

"You only judge people on their ideas, not on their background or how they looked." Eventually, quite strong bonds formed, she says, including with tutors.




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