



How to Shape Executive Education in 2020: Being Effective, Unique and Creative

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Abstract

Executive Education is today a very competitive market. In order to stand out and to be successful there are three pillars that should be developed in a parallel way, because conceiving Executive Education just as a "lifelong learning" activity would not lead to shaping an effective and successful executive education offer. In fact, 'lifelong learning', even if is a key factor, since professionals in different sectors first of all proactively decide to engage in executive education - their aim is to hone their skills, while widening their thinking and strengthening their skills, in an experiential and creative learning environment - is the first pillar of three. The second one is 'networking' intended in a two-folded way: even if the access to key speakers should not be overlooked as a factor of motivation to engage in Executive Education, the classical exchange of business cards is not enough, networking in fact spans also the opportunity to peer networking and to gain guidance from the other mid-career/senior participants, opening your mind to solve similar issues that others' are facing and receiving feedback on the challenges that you are encountering. This practice creates trust, which is fundamental to turn pure networking, which often remains at the surface, into relationships building. Last but not the list 'Advocacy' which plays an enormous role first of all for the outreach, and secondly in the mid-long run is fundamental to build a solid reputation.

Keywords: Executive Training, Lifelong Learning, Peer learning, Strategic Partnership;

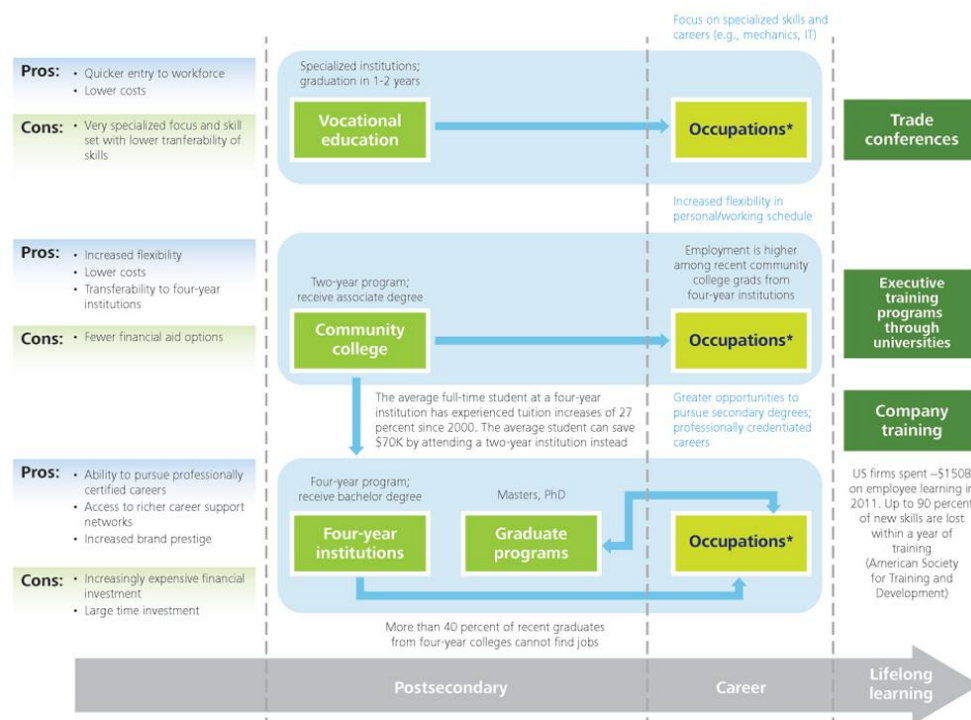
A high risk-high gain market

The competitive landscape of executive education is feeling a tectonic shift even as demand grows for managerial skills. The current offerings of many executive education program-providers fall short of creating new skills in executives and developing fresh capabilities for organizations. Executive education comes in many forms and guises. It is delivered by an increasing number of organizations ranging from external providers - such as online certifiers and aggregators, consultancies, business schools, and universities - to internal suppliers such as organizations' human resource (HR) and talent-management functions and corporate universities. Most providers offer several kinds of products, such as executive Master of Business Administration (MBA) or Master of Public Administration (MPA) programmes, custom programmes, executive trainings. Each of them has a different cost structure and value proposition, so they enjoy different positions, and compete differently, in the executive education market.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, executive education consisted mostly of university-based programmes. Participants learned the latest theories of management and the techniques with which to apply them, largely by studying cases and listening to lectures by academics. The faculty tended to decide what courses would be offered based on their research interests. "For the attending executive, the experience itself was seen as both a reward and as preparation for their promotion to senior levels," points out a paper by Jay Conger and Katherine Xin [1]. Companies relied on university-delivered programmes to develop executives in functional areas, such as marketing or finance, as well as in broader policy-related issues, such as environmental regulation [2]. A shift began to take place in the early 1990s, when companies started using executive education programmes to bring about organizational changes, not just to cater to for managers' developmental needs. As a result, the popularity of custom programmes soared. More than half the members of the University Consortium for Executive Education (UNICON) reported that over 50% of their revenues between 2005 and 2010 came from custom programmes [3]. This shift took place partly because of the gap that had emerged between academic teachings on business and the skills that organisations needed. It also enabled many new kinds of organizations, such as consultancies and learning development organizations, to enter the field.

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Figure 2. Traditional pathways to learning



*Occupation type will vary by level of education received.

Sources: "Vocational education in the United States: The early 1990s," Institute of Education Sciences, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubswb/95024-2.asp>, accessed June 2014; "What's the difference between vocational college and community college?," USDegreeSearch, <http://www.usdegree.com/whats-the-difference-between-vocational-college-and-community-college/>, accessed June 2014; Rachel Silverman, "So much training, so little to show for it," *Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970204425904578072950518558328>.

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Figure 1.1 Deloitte: the drivers of change in the choice of Executive Education.

The key role that "Personalisation" in education plays

The personal learning platform can be used for cultivating a broad set of managerial abilities and competencies, largely grounded in algorithmic-functional-technical skills. Personal learning platforms impart competencies whose acquisition can be measured using standard remote testing processes. These online developmental processes compete in scale, scope, and certification value with the open enrollment courses offered by the universities and constitute complements to the offerings of corporate universities and consultancies. They can be deployed in either curated or un-curated form, and be interlaced with interactive developmental activities, such as field-based projects, to create a baseline of conversational and intellectual capital. The learning platforms often embody content jointly owned by instructors and course heads, host organizations, and platform providers, so they are subject to complex incentive structures. Being distributed and ubiquitous, they can be exploited to support learning adhocracies.

Learning in groups, communities, collectives, or networks?

Which social infrastructures support learning? This question has been discussed from several perspectives. Use of technology in support of groups and communities of practice has often focused on collaboration. This stresses the emphasis within e-learning and also more broadly within technology supported learning on supporting or developing tightly knitted social structures. The concept of network has challenged these concepts of tightly knitted social constructs. Networks are loosely organized structures in which people do not necessarily collaborate – or communicate directly. However, the question is what role networks play in relation to learning. A conclusion of this debate is that there exists a form of social interaction - social networking - that learning theories have difficulties explaining. The question is: What kind of relations support learning? And more specifically, how do networks support learning? Jones (2004) uses the concept of 'networked learning' and draws a direct line between networking and learning. He stresses the importance of facilitating "connections between learners, learners and tutors, and between learners and the resources they make use of in their



learning” [4] writes: “Networked learning does not privilege any particular types of relationships between people or between people and resources.” The problem with this definition is that it does not answer what kind of relations should be supported. However, because studies within networked learning according to Jones (2004) have primarily focused on strong links, he wants to draw attention to the so-called weak ties. This is an interesting focus, because it is the support of weak ties that makes social networking sites unique. However, as Ryberg & Larsen (2008) argue, it is important to clarify what defines weak ties, and how they differ from strong ties. Further, it is necessary to clarify, how these kinds of social relations support learning. Thus, it is necessary to make a connection between learning, and in the specific Executive Education, and types of social relations.

Transparency as a special kind of social interaction

This brings us back to the question: which kinds of social relations support learning? Social relations that support awareness can first of all be defined negatively as relations that do not entail collaboration or discussion (two-way communication). Awareness entails a kind of relation that supports transparency. Different kinds of relations are possible within a learning environment. I will make a distinction between relations between 1) people working together collaboratively, and 2) people engaged in similar or related activities. For instance, the distinction could be between 1) relations between students in a study group working on a joint assignment and 2) relations between individuals or study groups within the same course. Thus, the relations do not exclude one another, but are supplementary. At universities it can be difficult for students to follow the work of other students; often, they are engaged in their own assignments. In Executive education this is different: professionals as lifelong learning students can make use of each other’s resources. Often, this kind of students is unaware of what other students are doing, and they do not necessarily make use of each other, although their work is relevant to each other. The socio-cultural approach combined with the character of a university setting form a strong motive for support of transparency between students. It is important to note that this motive differs from motives for community-building and support of collaboration. Focus on support of transparency provides a different focus for technology.

Personalisation and socialisation

An interesting aspect of social interaction on Executive education platforms is that the starting point is the individual, the personal. This is in opposition to discussion forums and other forms of website communities, in which communication takes place in a shared forum. The basis for social interaction in social networking sites is a personal profile, which often consists of a personal webpage on the networking site. A personal profile/webpage provides an opportunity for the user to create his/her own page with content such as pictures, videos, links, texts, etc. The personal profile can be seen as a space for individual creation and expression. A profile page is not personal in the sense that it is private; it can be made public – at least to other people in the individual’s network. The personal page provides opportunities for personalization; the individual can choose the look and content of the page. An important function of the personal page is that it serves as the individual’s personal representation on the web. This makes social networking sites radically different than discussion groups and other community-based tools. In a discussion forum you are represented by your posts only. If you do not post, you are not visible. In a social network, you are always “present” through your personal page. The personal page provides a basis and a starting point for social networking; in other words, the starting point is the individual, the personal. On the other hand, the starting point for social interaction in discussion forums is the forum itself.

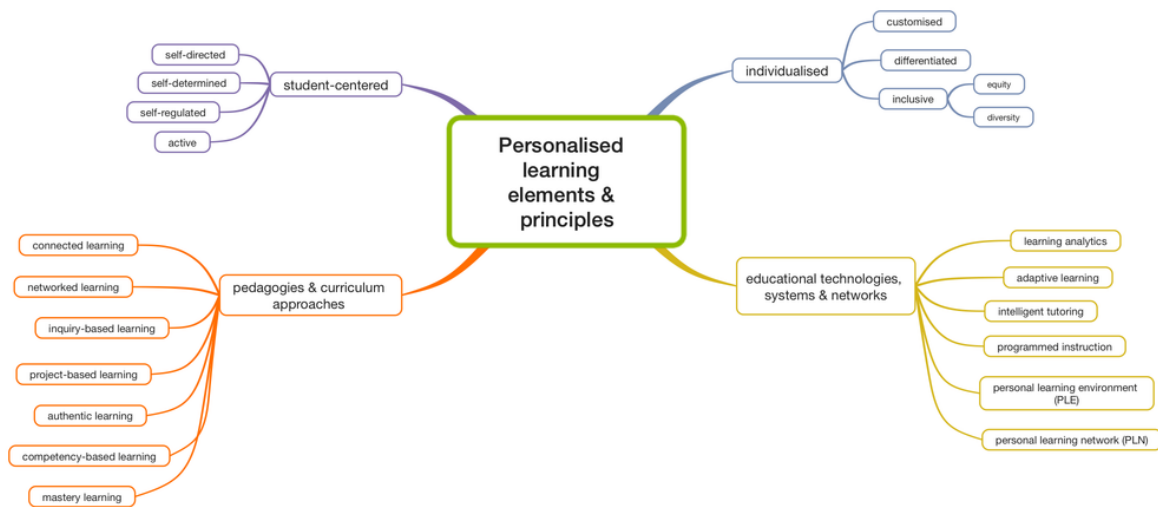


Figure 2.2 Personalisation of learning by Olsen (2011)

New frontiers at the horizon

Executive Education is the answer to the willing of learning throughout life with the aim to hone existing skills and competences, in a way that can be profitable career-wise. Networking, Personalisation, Online education are all key components of this kind of avant-garde education. The work market is changing so fast that new forms of Education could be arise, in the near future, however they will be all evolutions of the Executive Education that we are shaping now, therefore in order to deliver the best models of education in the future, we should deeply understand what it is happening now and how we can anticipate change, also in Executive education.

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