

Lifelong Learning and University-based Business Schools

CURATION
PORTABILITY

Job mobility
Credentialing

Investment

Accessibility

TRUST

embrace risk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

In 2022 IEDP conducted qualitative interviews with a range of voices from the supply and demand sides of executive education—from deans and presidents of business schools, to directors and heads of executive education, and CLOs and heads of talent at large organizations.

These were in-depth interviews with field experts in their relevant roles at: Goldman Sachs, Volkswagen Group, New York Life, Hyatt Hotels, TBWA, Pitney Bowes, and Cargill, on the demand side; Leeds Illuminate and the Financial Times as key cross-sector observers; and IMD, INSEAD, Tsinghua University, UVA Darden Executive Education & Lifelong Learning, Michigan Ross, Columbia Business School, Illinois Tech, and IE University, on the supply side.

In addition to this qualitative data the report leverages a wide research sweep, with supporting quantitative data and insights gathered from a wide range of trusted sources, from WEF, to Deloitte, McKinsey, PwC, Carrington Crisp, and others—along with AACSB’s and UNICON’s own research.

INTRODUCTION

A cross-sector, qualitative and quantitative intelligence gathering report from AACSB, IEDP and UNICON—to guide and inform university-based business schools on the transformative potential of lifelong learning as a driver and shaper of future business strategy.

IN BRIEF

We are at a time when the status quo across business education is being challenged.

Traditional, front-loaded educational models—with funding and time investment skewed towards the 18-24 age bracket, and with skills updated all-too-rarely subsequent to that—were even five years ago a product no longer meeting the needs of the customer, nor the wider needs of employers and industries.

A variety of disruptive market forces now pose long-term, strategic questions for higher-ed leaders, executive education teams, and corporate talent leaders to evaluate and explore.

For university-based business schools a potential pivot towards lifelong learning is a strategic question many are grappling with. Such a move will require new products, new services, new business models, and new technologies, which in turn require time, effort, and financial investment to get right—therefore key decisions lie ahead.

To guide and support the strategizing required at this important juncture, AACSB, IEDP, and UNICON have partnered together to produce this research report and make it available to decision-makers across executive education.

The full report comprises a deep-dive SWOT analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats presented by lifelong learning as a driver and shaper of future business strategy for the sector.

The aim for this initiative is to provide substantive research for stakeholders in executive education to feed into their own decision-making processes, and ultimately to play a role in improving the impact of executive education in the round—which is a shared goal of AACSB, IEDP, and UNICON.

In this executive summary you will find a distilled, concise version of the SWOT analysis, as well as key takeaways for readers to take forward in their own work and thinking in this area.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Within the four main SWOT categories, individual strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are ranked in terms of importance, based on salience and frequency within the data. They are also subcategorized for ease of reference, and tagged/displayed as **'supply'**, **'demand'**, or **'both supply and demand'** – according to the side of the market they most closely relate to. The aim is to make this research as easy to digest, visualize, share, and make use of as we can.

Using the JUMP TO links below you can navigate across the four SWOT summary pages.

You can also navigate to the following takeaway sections:

- **TAKEAWAYS FOR CORPORATES**
- **TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS**
- **TAKEAWAYS FOR EXECUTIVE EDUCATION**

JUMP TO...



STRENGTHS



WEAKNESSES



OPPORTUNITIES



THREATS



STRENGTHS

MARKET STRENGTHS

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

LEARNER OUTCOMES



STRENGTHS

KEY ■ SUPPLY ■ DEMAND ■ BOTH SUPPLY AND DEMAND

MARKET STRENGTHS

Selling points, positional strengths, and competitive advantage.

Trust

University-based executive education providers are trusted subject authorities, trusted sources of evidence-based content, and trusted for quality of provision.

Research

Research is the USP and differentiator for university-based business schools versus non-traditional providers—as well as the means by which they can push boundaries.

Market clarity

Non-traditional providers often offer multiple services (e.g. professional services). University-based executive education has clarity of a single purpose: learning.

Outdated status quo

Consensus on all sides that the old model of degree learning with minimal updating afterward is no longer fit for purpose.

Credentiailling power

University-based business schools are recognized authorities in quality assessment—with trust, prestige, status, and brand value attached.

Demographics

Shifting demographics include aging workforces in many international economies, with many/most staying engaged in work longer.

Skills landscape

Macro trends: climate change, net zero, social justice, cyber security, remote work, DEI, 4IR technologies like AI, big data and robotics—all herald massive new demand for upskilling and reskilling.

Hiring costs

Hiring for specialist skillsets such as data analysis is expensive. In-house, on-the-job skills development is a cost-effective alternative.

Talent today

Investing in people to increase motivation, retention, and employability, has never been more expected, nor in higher demand.

Talent tomorrow

New trends in talent management align with lifelong learning: potential-based hiring, learning as a key competency, DEI, and a shift in focus from elite 'executives' to the wider talent pool.

Remote tipping point

New foundation of online learning capabilities in organizations, plus positive attitudinal shifts towards flexible working patterns.

Combats critique: 'too theoretical'

Combats critique of universities as 'too theoretical'—with more vocational, hard skill credentials available.

Combats critique: 'elitist'

Combats critique of universities as restrictive of access.

Flexibility

On-demand is no longer a trend, but a thriving economy in its own right—with flexibility for the end user the driving force.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Existing strategic alignment with lifelong learning – in people, skills, and operations.

Curation power

Power, trust and authority to filter, curate, and verify an over-abundance of available content.

Instructional design

Expertise to structure content in coherent pathways and frameworks, correctly sequenced by instructional designers.

Deep learning skills

Expert advice not just on what to read, but how to read—learning (and unlearning and relearning) as a skillset.

Purpose and values

University-based business schools have an ironclad belief in the importance of learning and the positive impact education can have on society.

Longevity

History and experience in creating compelling learning experiences for demanding audiences, with a wide variety of pedagogies, ensuring impact and proving ROI.

Convening power

There is an enduring need for in-person provision (including blended and hybrid)—with the time and space for reflection and interaction.

Faculty

The straight sight line from research to classroom—with those who create knowledge, teaching it directly.

Applied learning

Long-term trend in action oriented learning in executive education—aligns well with applied learning opportunities.

Future of work

Universities play a central role in developing 4IR technologies—with business schools positioned well to teach associated skills.

Variety

Universities sit across vast varieties of content and expertise—aligning well with the varied skills and knowledge demands of lifelong learning.

Innovation

Executive education has a history of innovation within the business school structure—e.g. in program design, experiential learning, partnerships.

Shorter programs

Existing trend in executive education towards shorter, more focused programs.

ALUMNI NETWORKS

University-based business schools have an existing audience for lifelong learning in their alumni networks.

LEARNER OUTCOMES

Positive outcomes for employees, employers, wider business, and wider society.

Lower costs

Scaled new revenue models can bring lower price points for learners.

Knowledge acceleration

Accelerated transfer of thought leadership to the frontline of work where it can be usefully applied.

Time efficiencies

Less time away from the office and family for learners.

Record of learning

Learning pathways of stackable / portable credentials offer a detailed record of learning for employers.

Skills signalling

For employees, a record of learning allows easy signalling of marketable skillsets to enhance employability.

Less overlap

Recording of granular skills acquisition helps avoid duplication of learning across one's lifetime.

Laser skills targeting

Focused learning for specific short-term needs e.g. 'Social Media Marketing Tactics' vs. 'Digital Marketing.'



WEAKNESSES

INTERNAL-STRUCTURAL

EXTERNAL-MARKET

OPERATIONAL/DEPLOYMENT

FINANCIAL



INTERNAL-STRUCTURAL

Existing internal/structural weaknesses (and challenges/barriers).

Teaching capacity

There is a limit to faculty capacity to deliver and teach more, whilst maintaining current research levels.

Lack of agility

A desire to innovate in academia can contrast with a slowness in adapting and adopting new ideas.

Resistance

Transformative change is difficult for any organization, with university-based providers no exception.

Scale of change

Large-scale change needed—with adaptation required to content, modalities, revenue models, and culture.

Faculty training

Skills within academia need updating around: new mindsets, new technologies, new audiences, new formats.

Structural impediments

Existing degree-focused governance structures can inhibit the freedom to innovate.

Practitioners

New practical topics may require more practitioner faculty members and researchers.

Research agenda

Wider and deeper skills offerings require broader research agendas.

EXTERNAL-MARKET

Challenges/barriers within the current market.

Language gap

Definitions of 'lifelong learning' vary widely, with marked differences in meaning—notably between the supply and demand sides.

Name recognition

Demand for 'lifelong learning' by name is not yet high—while demand for the drivers behind lifelong learning are high: skills updates, flexibility etc.

Evidence

Despite the term 'lifelong learning' being coined long ago, there is a lack of existing models to point that show continuous skills acquisition across evolving careers.

Future skills

Uncertainty persists around the skills needed 5-10 years from now, with the best available analysis still unclear.

Online fatigue

Widely reported fatigue with self-directed learning, time online, and screen time.

Perception

There is a view of university-based executive education as sometimes 'heavy' i.e. intricate, time-consuming, expensive—at odds with lifelong learning's appeal.

Technology barriers

Technology can be a barrier for some older learners. Quality of user experience in general a key concern.

OPERATIONAL/DEPLOYMENT

Operational weaknesses and challenges/barriers to successful deployment.

Self-directed

Onus on learners to motivate themselves can bias those already highly engaged.

Softer skills

Online learning is currently better suited to technical and hard skills than to soft and social skills. Lifelong learning cannot focus solely on hard skills.

Fragmented delivery

Flexibility is convenient for the learner, but challenging for faculty and administrators.

Calibration

Increased diversity in learning groups (cross-industry, cross-seniority, mixed experience) makes it hard to calibrate and cater to individual needs.

Personal vs. organizational

Increased demand for personalization brings new challenges around connecting individualized pathways to organizational goals.

Personalization vs. scale

Inherent tension between personalization and scaled learning solutions.

Genuine micro learning

Some attempts at micro learning amount to slicing long-format programs into smaller pieces, rather than intentional micro learning design.

FINANCIAL

Strategic weaknesses (and challenges/barriers) based on finances.

Investment

Many associated challenges require significant investment to address—and/or new business models.

Spending power

University-based providers command smaller budgets than some competitors in the field e.g. marketing spend.

Research expense

Research creation is an on-going expense for business schools which their competitors do not have.

Cost vs. scale

How does university-based executive education scale what is traditionally a premium product to mid- and junior- level management, without a drop-off in quality?



OPPORTUNITIES

MARKET CONDITIONS

IMPACT

GROWTH

INNOVATION



MARKET CONDITIONS

Opportunities presented by micro and macro market trends.

Just-in-time

The demand for skills and knowledge today has a time horizon of months rather than years.

Job mobility

Faster turnover rates, 'the great resignation,' and a rise in non-linear career trajectories are greatly increasing demand for upskilling and reskilling.

Pace of change

Complexification, rapid change, disruption and instability all greatly increase the need for continually updating skillsets and support for people.

Popular trend

The view that professionals should keep learning and updating their skills throughout a career and lifetime, is now widely held and popular.

Scale of demand

The OECD estimates that 1.1 billion jobs are liable to be radically transformed by technology in the next decade.

IMPACT

Opportunities for greater impact – for employees, employers, wider business and wider society.

Accessibility

Scope to enable many more people to reach their potential—with remote learning and lower costs promising 'democratization' of learning.

Inclusion

Greater inclusion for under-represented populations—from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, to introverted personality types, to gender, race, and age groups—broadening the definition of who belongs at business school.

In-career support

Opportunity to map learning onto career trajectories—with skills/advice/training delivered at the point of need, and at specific career steps.

Portability

Transferable credentials, recognized widely across industries, geographies, and between providers.

Stackability

A framework for accumulating knowledge, with micro credentials acquired and presented in a portfolio of skills.

Pathways

Opportunity to tackle the disjointedness of education and training, bringing them together in coherent pathways for learners and employers alike.

Learning as core

Opportunity to promote learning agility as a core competency—with critical skills of learning made central to the curriculum.

ROI

Opportunity to address a long-standing challenge for executive education—the proving of ROI—with lower costs, practical learning outcomes, and quicker results.

GROWTH

Opportunities for growth – audience growth, revenue growth, and market growth.

New market layers

Opportunity to reach under-catered mid- and junior-level management layers, and support and advance careers.

Cascading

Cascading or large-scale deployment of learning, with thousands rather than hundreds of employees engaged—with implications for culture change and other transformation projects.

Long-term partnerships

Stronger partnerships between organizations and business schools—with capability-building, deeper understanding of needs based on data, and long-term value creation.

New revenues

Diversified revenues through new streams and augmenting existing streams.

Market segmentation

Opportunity to identify and target new market segments.

Entrepreneurship

Opportunity for business schools to operate as 'academic entrepreneurs.'

INNOVATION

Opportunities to innovate and build new value.

Collaboration

Cross-school, cross-discipline—many of the toughest problems facing business today require interdisciplinary solutions e.g. between 'supply chain' and 'robotics' experts.

Partnerships

Universities are positioned well to orchestrate a wide variety of potential partnerships; cross-industry, EdTech, ecosystems, consortia.

Market driven

University-based executive education content is traditionally supply-led. Opportunity to develop for market needs, with data-gathering, experimentation, and iteration.

Business model innovation

New models such as (but not limited to) memberships and subscriptions to one or multiple institutions.

Embrace risk

Opportunity for smaller schools in particular to be agile, embrace risk, and innovate quicker than larger competitors.

Coaching

Recent growth and development in coaching capabilities provides tools and mechanisms for continual development.

Technology

Leveraging of new technologies e.g. simulations in AR and VR environments.

Networked communities

Opportunity to develop 'communities of learners'—with lifelong learners networked together, providing valuable data and feedback to providers.

Applied learning

Ability for learners to immediately apply learning to their daily work—where practice in the field has a proven multiplier effect.

Academic-corporate partnerships

Opportunity to support internal corporate learning initiatives and corporate universities e.g. to add cutting-edge research, teaching or credentialing.



THREATS

MARKET COMPETITION

SECONDARY THREATS/FAIL POINTS



MARKET COMPETITION

Threats posed by traditional/non-traditional competition and external market conditions.

Behind EdTech

Less advanced digital capabilities and market visibility in this space than some competitors e.g. in EdTech.

Faculty losses

Non-traditional competitors may outbid schools for teaching contracts.

Inexperience

University-based executive education has not traditionally offered just-in-time learning, nor highly specific hard skills e.g. cyber-security testing, or product management.

Generational appeal

Doubts as to whether younger generations coming into management roles will turn to university brands for quick upskilling.

Market heat-up

Risk of a sudden and unexpected heating up of the market—e.g. the smart phone boom—leaving providers under-prepared.

Corporate competition

Threat of large organizations filling the gap in the market—bypassing business schools to offer qualifications to learners freshly out of school e.g. a certificate at Google leading to full-time employment.

Aggregation

Partnering with platform companies may dilute individual providers' ability to differentiate and attract new audiences.

Competitor credentialling

Threat that non-traditional competitors develop credentialling power.

Machine learning

Machine learning and AI promises greater personalization and curation of content—and the threat that university-based providers' curation expertise is bypassed.

Self-sustainment

Corporate in-house learning provision is increasingly sophisticated, with access to faculty, technology, and content.

Devaluation

As learning opportunities become more ubiquitous and low cost, threat that the perceived value of university-based executive education decreases.

C-suite buy-in

Successful scaling of lifelong learning in organizations will require senior leadership buy-in and a focus on the question of ROI.

SECONDARY THREATS/FAIL POINTS

Foreseeable knock-on negative effects and potential fail points.

Research slowdown

Slowing effect on research generation with professors disengaged from thought leadership while concentrated on an increased teaching load.

Sloganeering

The threat that lifelong learning could be used as a slogan—with a lack of real change behind it, operating as an aspirational goal only.

Over-extension

Threat that providers over-extend—with too many products, and too broad an audience segment.

Scale vs. social good

Balancing the opportunity of scale and new revenues with the opportunity to achieve a social good.

Workday structure

Lifelong learning requires that people are given time and space to learn, self-direct, and reflect—what does this mean for the traditional workday?

Fragmentation

With a broad range of new opportunities comes the risk that learning becomes fragmented. Compatibility and portability of credentials will be key.

Time and well-being

Implications of increased time/effort demands and additional screen time on already busy learners.

Quality control

Quality control will be key to retaining the premium quality assurances closely associated with top business school brands.

Deep learning USP

The USP of university-based executive education has long centred on deep reflection and 'life-changing moments'—elements not easily scaled.

TAKEAWAYS

- This SWOT analysis study reinforces some pre-existing views around lifelong learning already widely held within business school circles—namely that there is an outdated status quo in executive education; that it is ripe for disruption; and that the ideas and principles of lifelong learning offer a compelling framework around which new solutions and strategies may be built, to better serve both the supply and demand sides of the industry.
- More valuably, by asking eminent voices from all sides of the sector to focus on the potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats posed by this approach, the research has collected a deep set of new insights, reflections, and provocations for decision-makers to feed into their own strategizing and support the formulation of new solutions.
- From this research we can generate takeaways from the perspectives of each of the three main stakeholder groups addressed here; corporate learning and talent leaders, business school and university leaders, and executive education leaders.

- ✓ **TAKEAWAYS FOR CORPORATES**

- ✓ **TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS**

- ✓ **TAKEAWAYS FOR EXECUTIVE EDUCATION**

1 TAKEAWAYS FOR CORPORATES

- The work and skills landscape has drastically changed what executives require from their learning. The demand now is for flexible, lower-cost access to knowledge and skills, updated regularly on a career-long continuum. Individuals and organizations desire learning that is supplied just-in-time, to deploy across projects and other short-term time horizons.
- Higher turnover rates, fluid career trajectories, and the 'war to retain talent', now make reskilling, rebooting, and reinventing careers—multiple times over during one's lifetime—increasingly the norm. The scale of demand is therefore massive, with talent functions increasingly widening focus to include hitherto less-represented segments of the organization.
- Currently the term itself 'lifelong learning' has little to no cut-through in the corporate world and is not a recognized solution to these new challenges and requirements. Where lifelong learning solutions are emerging, tensions are at play—such as balancing rising demand for personalized learning with a drive to deliver learning at scale; and the challenge of aligning personal goals with organizational goals.
- This research indicates that corporate talent leaders such as CLOs are quick to adopt the best new technologies available to them and happy to give new providers and players a chance to deliver results and excellence. They are typically confident in their ability to build internal solutions, integrating new technologies, and innovating to meet changing needs.
- With increased choice of providers, suppliers, and practitioners to partner with, and the increased availability of high-quality content—talent leaders are, more so than ever, designers and curators of their own corporate learning agendas, rather than simply 'buyers' in the marketplace.
- These developments make the demand side of the market more exacting and results-driven than ever. By the same token, talent leaders are also better informed than ever, making them highly intelligent and responsive partners for providers to work closely with to achieve results.
- Business schools are viewed as being an astute, logical, and trustworthy choice for the provision of lifelong learning—though with some caveats applied: namely around an existing market impression of business school education as sometimes 'heavy' i.e. intricate, time-consuming, and expensive—which was seen to be at odds with lifelong learning's appeal.



“People are changing functions, industries, or careers, much more frequently. They need to reboot, but they’re rebooting for the coming weeks and months and for the next couple of years.”

—MARK ROBERTS,
SENIOR ASSOCIATE
DEAN, COLUMBIA
BUSINESS SCHOOL

“A lifelong learning strategy should start with the interaction between people who are organizing competence sets—the supervisors responsible for business units [...] to anchor lifelong learning in strategy...”

—DR. MARTIN
HOFMANN, HEAD OF
HR DIGITALIZATION, HR
SERVICES & RECRUITING
VOLKSWAGEN GROUP

“Being able to tap into the expertise of business schools is an attractive proposition. The costs, however, can be a barrier and with turnover at an all-time high, it’s difficult to demonstrate the ROI.”

—RHONDA GEORGE-
DENNISTON CHIEF
LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT
OFFICER, TBWA|WORLDWIDE

2 TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS

- Business school and university leaders play a critical role as custodians of the wider institution’s brand values, and insurers of the institutions continuing market trust, excellence, and credentialing power. As business school leaders they are also the decision-makers best placed to address the structural and cultural questions posed by the potential adoption of lifelong learning as a strategy—which may require a large-scale, top-down change effort in many cases. Many of the areas of such a change, are typically controlled at the wider business school level—research agenda, faculty training, teaching capacity, spending power, investment, and much more.
- A key tension at play for business school leaders is around research. Faculty research is both a unique selling point for the business school (with non-traditional providers unlikely to compete at a comparable level)—but it may also serve as a source of impediment and resistance—from the costliness of research production, to a lack of speed and agility to meet new trends.
- Another tension is around lifelong learning viewed as being in opposition to traditional degree-learning. Many flexible learning solutions such as micro-credentials do seek to deconstruct longer form degree learning—however, are these products necessarily tied to the future existence of degree learning? We might conclude that by virtue of the differing audiences, and the scale and demographic of demand—that they could instead be seen as complimentary.
- University-based business schools possess high degrees of convening power, offering a learning ‘destination’ that non-traditional providers tend not to. They also sit across a wide variety of knowledge and research, positioning them to offer cross-discipline and career-long learning solutions, as well as give up-to-the-minute expertise on technologies and themes pertinent to the future of work.



“Lifelong learning is going to become the fastest growing segment of higher education in the future, given the need of transforming managers by updating their knowledge and skills.”

—SANTIAGO IÑIGUEZ DE ONZOÑO,
PRESIDENT, IE UNIVERSITY

“Evidence-based content is an undeniable differentiator that a non-university based competitor in the space can’t easily replicate.”

—ASHLEY WILLIAMS, CEO AND CLO,
UVA DARDEN EXECUTIVE EDUCATION
AND LIFELONG LEARNING

“The bulk of what universities do is degreed learning. The non-degree, lifelong learning, or the revenue generating activity—however big it might be, is not as big as all the university degrees we grant. Therefore all of our structures will be focused on that.”

—MIKE MALEFAKIS, SENIOR ADVISOR,
LEEDS ILLUMINATE

3 TAKEAWAYS FOR EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

- The executive education unit within a business school has long been viewed as the entrepreneurial arm to the academic institution—most likely to innovate and deliver new revenues through their strong connections to the corporate market and typically commercially-minded teams and leaders.
- This research confirms these units as well-placed to take a lead in the area of lifelong learning. Executive education teams possess deep expertise around the science of learning; they partner closely with their corporate clients to focus on impact and value creation; many have, in recent years, demonstrated a willingness to pivot and adopt online learning as a core capability; and they are purpose-driven in their belief that learning can improve societal as well as business outcomes.
- The primary challenges for executive education lie around the scale of change and investment required, and the structural impediments in their relationship with the wider business school and university, which may hinder agility and/or appetite to challenge the status quo. At a more granular level, this research highlights a key challenge around connecting the personal goals inherent in lifelong learning, with wider, strategic organizational goals for employers.
- Other concerns include the potential reliance on self-directed learning, which has been shown to favour only the most engaged learners, as well as the risk that some providers will use the term lifelong learning as a slogan only, as opposed to a meaningful, action-based strategy.
- The greatest opportunities for executive education lie around the scale of demand, and the ability to be market-driven to tap into it—finding new market segments and cascading out to new learner profiles, and generating new revenue streams as a result.



“Think of the overall market as a bell curve—if you develop offerings aligned with, and for, the right kind of market, there are going to be incredible opportunities for schools to be successful.”

—RAJ ECHAMBADI, PRESIDENT, ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

“How do you serve the corporate agenda and the personal agenda in the same program?”

—MARK ROBERTS, SENIOR ASSOCIATE DEAN, COLUMBIA BUSINESS SCHOOL

“The challenge of self-paced is—how does it tie to the broader picture of what’s needed, timing of when it becomes skill and impact, and how is it viewed within the organization? I don’t think many companies have fully connect these pieces yet.”

—JIN IVACIC, GLOBAL HEAD OF TALENT ACQUISITION, HYATT HOTELS CORPORATION

WHAT NEXT?

Many leaders and practitioners on all sides of the executive learning sector are already trialling, piloting, and working on solutions that better meet the modern skills and employability needs of organizations and individual learners. Some providers are further along in this process and may be viewed as positive case studies in the field:

- The University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business is an example of putting lifelong learning front and centre—renaming and rebranding their executive education offering ‘Darden Executive Education & Lifelong Learning’; restructuring leadership around the rebrand; and committing to build a new Sands Institute of Lifelong Learning to continue to innovate in the non-degree space.
- The University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business’ ‘Alumni Advantage’ program is an example of a business school leveraging their considerable, international alumni network to offer learning and networking benefits to their alumni, offering continued value above and beyond the original degree-focused relationship.
- The Haas School of Business is an example of an executive education unit developing a stellar brand reputation of its own, able to operate independently, whilst still enjoying the wider associations of its parent institution, UC Berkeley. Under the leadership of Rich Lyons, Dean of the Haas School from 2008 to 2018, the Haas school quadrupled the size of its executive education unit in ten years, and more than quadrupled the contribution of executive education to the school’s bottom-line.
- BI Norwegian Business School is an example of demand-led program development. The school launched a range of short, stackable online learning modules during the pandemic, in response to the changing requirements and knowledge upskilling needs of their audience. The new portfolio of short digital courses attracted more than 5000 participants in the first 19 months, with the platform enabling innovation around new business concepts and new pedagogy for the “new normal” in work and education life.
- The reskilling drive in China provides intriguing examples of partnerships and collaboration between industry and academia that seek to address the gaps between needed and available skills. From a recent McKinsey report, “Alibaba Group and Hangzhou Normal University co-founded the Alibaba Business School, which offers four bachelor’s degrees. DJI, a commercial drone maker, launched a joint innovation laboratory with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology to drive further advances in unmanned aerial vehicle technology.” [Source: McKinsey Global Institute Report, ‘Reskilling China: Transforming the world’s largest workforce into lifelong learners’, January, 2021]

FOUR KEY TAKEAWAYS

As executive education teams and leaders around the world seek their own solutions there are four key takeaways we may draw from the SWOT analysis research that we suggest all solutions-finding efforts should consider:

1. CONNECTIONS

The vital importance of connections—which resonates across all areas of the SWOT analysis—to successfully devise and implement a strategy of lifelong learning, is striking. Collaboration within business schools, between providers and corporate clients, and via partnerships with external providers such as technology partners, will be pivotal in meeting the range of new needs and the scale of change required.

2. STRATEGIC

A central emphasis from this research is that in order for a meaningful shift towards lifelong learning to take place, it should be considered a key strategic agenda point for leadership teams within universities, business schools, and executive education—with a clear line of communication running between the three. The scale and complexity of the change required necessitates this.

3. DEMAND-LED

The future of executive education, as characterized in this research, can neatly and accurately be described as a shift away from the supply-led content of yesteryear, to the demand-led, flexible solutions of tomorrow. This future state will require new levels of responsiveness and new mechanisms and forums by which business schools and executive education providers can engage with, interact with, and listen closely to their market and understand the changing requirements of their clients and ‘end users’.

4. VARIETY

There is no one-size-fits-all lifelong learning strategy. Every school and every provider’s strategy will be different. A strategy will be devised according to a provider’s market segmentation, their geography and demographic orientation, and how these align with their existing brand strengths, operational capabilities and areas of content expertise. As such, diversity and variation should be an emphasis area in solutions-finding efforts.



“There are structural impediments to being agile, and the only way to work around those impediments is to find partners you can build a trusting relationship with [...] Shifting from supply driven, faculty driven choices for what we offer and finding more innovative ways of working with outside companies, and combining forces to do something more future looking.

—MIKE MALEFAKIS, SENIOR ADVISOR, LEEDS ILLUMINATE

“You don’t want to be all things to all people. Look at the whole market, see the slice of the market you care about, and create product offerings that fit that particular market and go from there.”

—RAJ ECHAMBADI, PRESIDENT, ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

This report has been produced by IEDP in association with AACSB and UNICON.

IEDP has been reporting on the global provision of executive education and development for the past 20 years.

By promoting the latest research, thought-leadership, and executive programs delivered by the world's leading business schools, IEDP seeks to improve performance and expand learning horizons for our international corporate audience—while furthering the reach and impact of the executive development sector as a whole.

Bridging the academic and corporate worlds, IEDP aims to support progress, facilitate dialogue, and drive innovation using our market research and intelligence gathering.

IEDP also specializes in thought-leadership development, content marketing, and marketing strategy for university-based business schools.

PRODUCED BY

