

BRIEFING PAPER

<title>

</title>

<subtitle>

Effective
Business
Change
for
Online
Distance
Learning

</subtitle>

Introduction

Educational technologies are still rapidly changing. There has been no 'let up' over the last decade in new technology arrivals with the resulting need to explore and adapt them to make the processes of teaching and learning more efficient and effective. As each new cycle of education technology progresses, a minority of useful ones stand the test of time, stay with us, and retain core funding.

The first generation of virtual learning environments (VLE or LMS) have been replaced either by: established user-derived initiatives like Moodle; or by the next generation of commercial products such as Canvas, re-architected to form service-oriented solutions platforms that are better targeted at specific learning industries including schools, colleges, universities, professional associations, corporations and government.

These second-generation platforms are in turn being challenged by the new MOOC technologies and providers, currently hoping to leverage their new mass-market course delivery platforms and channels, to deliver academically accredited courses to profitable audiences.

Technology aside, a more difficult change for Institutions to manage however, is business change which addresses the need to get somewhere different from where the education 'business' is today. This is a challenge for established education providers indeed, and even more of a challenge for their suppliers who need to get somewhere first before the education providers actually need to be there.

This briefing paper is aimed at business managers – the people charged with keeping the education business alive, achieving and increasingly now, profitable. It offers two specific way to go about effecting change in an established education business, to transform it permanently into an modern on-line one.

Where are you today?

What stage are you at in the process of introducing eLearning into your organisation:

No eLearning; sporadic use of e-learning; regularly replicated e-learning; established eLearning or "mission critical"?

If you want to delve a bit more into the different meaning of each of these categories of uptake, have a go at doing our online exercise here:

<http://www.capdm.com/barriers/>

Its getting on a bit now (2003), but the thoughts it provokes are just as relevant today with adopting eLearning as they were when fifteen years ago the same debate was being had about adopting distance learning. If you think about the answers you provide to the 50 questions contained in the exercise, you should end up with a useful indicator of where you need to address the key issues for

your institution.

Then there is the issue of what everyone else is doing. Market research organisations such as [Ambient Insight](#) are currently very negative towards self-paced eLearning, projecting negative 6.4% growth rates up to 2020. This pessimism is driven by many factors including the inefficiencies of legacy education products and processes being challenged by new technology-enhanced advances in digital publishing and pedagogy.

So where do you feel your eLearning adoption efforts lie; stuck in Geoffrey Moore's 'chasm' awaiting the Early Majority of adopters, or mired in Everett Rogers' "[Diffusion of Innovations](#)" (2003).

Technology Adoption Life Cycle

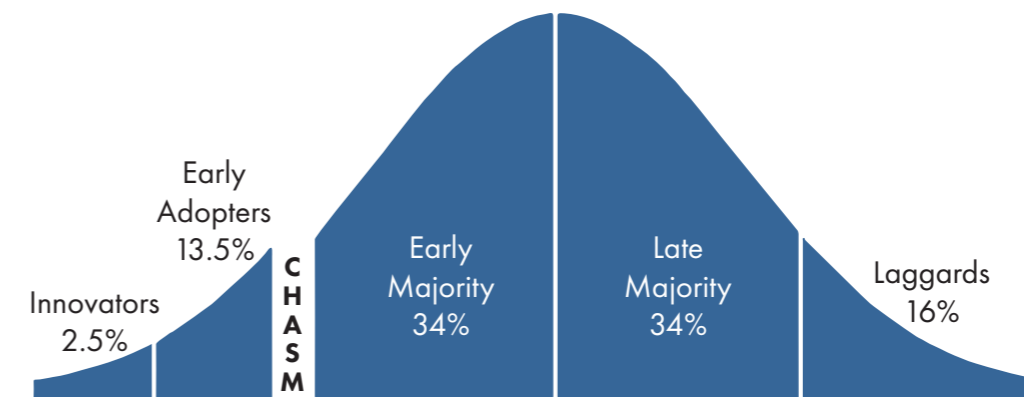


Figure 1: Your technology uptake curve - Moore (2014) or perhaps Rogers (2003)

One thing that should be clearer today is the proven need to establish greater flexibility in the delivery of programmes and courses. Going online means giving greater choice to students, but doing it in a way that can **scale** cost-effectively requires an **investment in content** that is fit for carrying some (if not all) of the tutoring workload.

Choosing where to place your online course designs on the flexible learning spectrum is a significant decision that has to come early on in the course design process. It influences the architecture of your emerging repository of content, and it becomes your 'product definition', helping you standardise your authoring, production and support efforts around a commonly understood domain of product components.

Where do you want to go?

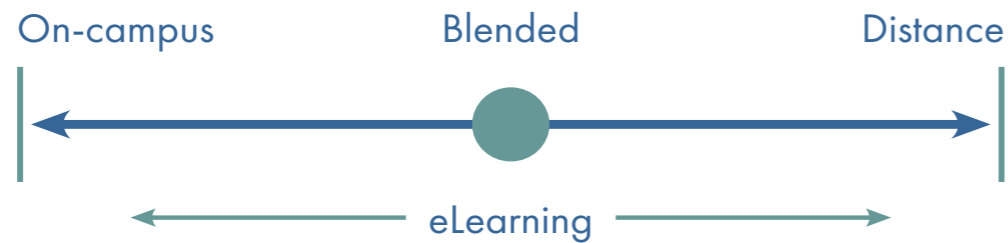


Figure 2: eLearning and the flexible learning spectrum

eLearning technologies are a bit of a 'red-herring' in that they can span the whole spectrum, and can be used equally well to provide course components that enhance classroom delivery (e.g. group simulations) as to enhance online study sessions (e.g. multimedia case studies). They tend to be expensive to develop though, so the number and type of eLearning components you choose to have in your product will be directly moderated by the budget you have available to either develop in-house, license or adapt them in from 3rd party sources. Open Educational Resource repositories can help, but it's a bit hit-and-miss depending on your subject, and even then it's often expensive to integrate them.

Agreeing your online product design is critical, as is defining your target market and how you will reach it, as covered in our whitepaper entitled [Market strategies for distance learning programmes](#). Your market strategy will end up significantly influencing the business model you choose establish, to deliver your products successfully to market and can sustain them there.

What to change in the business

There are two main changes to effect organisationally for online learning – changing your strategic/business plan, and changing the key business processes related to product (course) development and delivery.

Changing the strategic/business plan

Many education providers enshrine ambitious goals in their strategic plans that aim to double student numbers or develop new revenues from foreign sources. Many are failing to achieve them, and many more are failing to achieve sustainable gains. Why? Usually because there are no pragmatic plans to orchestrate the resources needed to achieve them.

One business model that has been proven to work is [DGBIE](#) – CAPDM's own business model template which stands for 'Developing Global Business in Education'. Based on more than a decade of proven success with the Edinburgh Business School eMBA programme, the World's largest online non-tutored MBA programme, this model is a recipe for building successful businesses in distance and online education, and should be studied in great detail.

If you want to build your own business model and plan from scratch, a good place to start is the [Recommendations for robust and sustainable large-scale e-learning](#) paper written by Morten Flate Paulsen et.al., which provides sound advice on what to include in it.

In short, the plan needs to assemble and motivate all the stakeholders needed; design the course; source the content; develop the product; get it 'on-the-shelf'; market, sell and support it over many years within an efficient administration environment.

Changing the course development processes

If you are setting out to create a domain of flexible learning course products, that must be deliverable in print and online in a variety of learning management systems, you will probably have to re-engineer how you author; produce; test; and deliver them.

Alternatively, and if your business model supports it, you can choose not to try to do it all in-house, and either outsource chunks of the development to third party specialists; in-source people temporarily with the skills and technologies you need; or partner and perhaps share some of the potential rewards and risks.

Small innovative education service suppliers trying to win big institutional contracts on their own need to demonstrate they have either an exemplary specialist knowledge in an area that adds real value, or a genuine 'killer' application. But what exemplary specialist knowledge helps to really add value to an embryonic online education business, and what 'killer' applications are there of relevance to education provision today?

Distance learning is one area of exemplary specialist knowledge that can really add value to online education provision today. The research work done in 2001 by [Cho, Berge and Muilenberg](#) on barriers to uptake of distance learning in US institutions, used for the basis of the exercise you tried above, is certainly of value in considering how to change your teaching and learning delivery. Indeed, evidence from the literature is that as student needs shift more and more towards a flexible learning experience, distance learning, blended learning and eLearning are finding increasingly common ground.

One killer application of immediate relevance to education provision is [single source publishing](#) or single sourcing. This standards-based content development approach has been around since 1986 and has already revolutionised the News and Journal Publishing industries. It enables better **content reuse** and **device independence**, and involves a move away from traditional publishing processes towards more efficient and better quality automated ones.

Outsourcing,
in-sourcing,
partnering -
who to work
with

Producing learning materials is often seen as an extra cost and often an unwelcome one. This perspective is wrong because good quality content makes life easier for Tutors and allows programmes to scale to become highly profitable. Single-sourcing is poised to revolutionise education, and well worth the technical stamina needed to understand its strategic value. If your business plan includes the need to translate significant volumes of learning materials, or support multiple online learning environments and electronic delivery devices, it is key to doing this well and doing it cost effectively.

Conclusion

Effecting business change for online distance learning is a major undertaking. With the right business model, and a pragmatic plan that motivates the right stakeholders, it can be achieved. Learning past lessons from distance learning and single-sourcing is a wise first move. Finding and retaining the skilled commercial and technical people you need to make it happen, either by recruiting them (expensive), outsourcing, in-sourcing or partnering to get them, will directly affect your time to market. If you want to move quickly, look for experienced partners with proven success and the drive to create success with you.

Visit <http://www.capdm.com/resources> for more CAPDM briefing papers.



CAPDM Ltd.

22 Forth Street
Edinburgh
EH1 3LH
United Kingdom

capdm.com
enquiries@capdm.com
+44 (0)131 477 8630
@capdmltd

Copyright © CAPDM Ltd. All Rights Reserved