

6 B-Schools Join Pact To Go Digital



EDHEC Business School, based in Lille, France, but with campuses around the world, is one of six global business schools to join The Future of Management Education Alliance. EDHEC photo

Cutting-edge technology. Peerless faculty expertise. Student demand for a more flexible learning experience. These three factors have conspired to spark a new digital learning platform whose goal is nothing less than the transformation of management education.

The Future of Management Education Alliance is a collaboration between six international business schools: Imperial College Business School of the UK, ESMT Berlin of Germany, BI Norwegian Business School, the Lee Kong Chian School of Business in Singapore, France's EDHEC Business School, and Ivey Business School in Canada. Its aim is to enhance the student experience through face-to-face, experiential, and online learning methods — “to deliver new knowledge and pedagogical models, as well as a range of innovative, high-quality online courses and degree programs,” according to a news announcement.

In short, these six schools — and any that wish to join them — want to make digital business education the equal of traditional classroom learning. And they are so committed to the mission, they plan to digitize their entire portfolio of existing programs.

“Demand is rapidly growing, from business school applicants and employers alike, for programs which provide the greater flexibilities and access that today's modern technologies can afford,” says Francisco Veloso, dean of Imperial College Business School. “New pedagogical models and greater governance are needed to ensure business schools can step up to the challenge. The Future of Management Education Alliance brings together a network of forward-thinking business schools who share this vision.”

SCHOOLS WILL REDEFINE, DIGITIZE EXISTING PROGRAMS

The first programs were launched on the platform in mid-October. ESMT Berlin, for example, has started with two custom executive education programs and is working on a further 10 program proposals with blended content. The school will launch its first custom blended MBA program on the platform in April 2019. “Developing a platform that is built upon real executive education client needs with experienced partners will give us a great advantage as we continue to digitize our programs,” says Nick Barniville, associate dean at ESMT. “This new alliance will allow us to retain full control of our intellectual property on the back of a long-term, sustainable business model, based on a shared technology platform. It helps us avoid the path taken by many others to outsource their entire digital delivery to online program providers.” Other schools are also moving quickly: BI Norway also launched full degree programs on the platform as soon as it was completed for multi-school use.

A key aim of the alliance, Barniville tells Poets&Quants, is to challenge the perception of digital education as a sub-standard alternative to classroom-based programs. Its custom-built online

platform has been designed by Insendi, an edtech enterprise founded at Imperial. The new platform enables each member school to redefine and digitize their existing programs to suit their students' needs — everything “from flagship degrees such as the MBA to executive-level short programs and MOOCs.”

The move has benefits for faculty, too. They will get access to expert digital training, as well as consultancy and program development support that gives them greater ownership over their own online offerings. Most importantly, the alliance announcement says, faculty will get the necessary skills to develop new courses individually or in collaboration with colleagues at other member institutions. The announcement contained no information about program rollouts or investment funding for each school; nor could any be found at the alliance's website. “The alliance website is definitely a bare-bones affair, agreed,” Barniville says. “We have been concentrating on developing platform functionality and developing brilliant learning journeys and have left the PR side until later. But as we develop more and more content, we will be happy to show the world what we are up to.

“Each school is investing in its own capacity development, both in terms of a platform license fee as well as building and training ed tech teams to deliver courses on the platform,” Barniville says. “ESMT has committed an initial seven-figure sum for its own capacity development.”

MUTUAL INVESTMENT IN BETTERING THE 'BLENDED' EXPERIENCE

Membership of the FOME Alliance “will allow us to retain full control of our intellectual property on the back of a business model based on a shared technology platform,” Barniville continues. “It helps us avoid the path taken by many other schools to outsource their entire digital delivery to online program providers such as those mentioned above, giving away tons of money. With our model, we pay an annual license fee to Insendi, the platform provider. As both a FOME Alliance member and a shareholder in Insendi, ESMT also has some influence on the development agenda.

“We and our alliance partners are prepared to invest jointly in our delivery and marketing capabilities so that we can keep the revenues to reinvest in the platform and in our research agenda. For ESMT, our intellectual property and the teaching of our content is not something we wanted to outsource, especially if this means we would have pay others — read: ‘online program managers’ — more than we would get ourselves. It might sound attractive in the short term, but it didn't make sense for us long-term.”

Adds Inge Jan Henjesand, president of BI Norwegian Business School: “The need for more flexible learning models to face new demands from individuals and from businesses, and to be attractive in a more competitive global executive market, requires business schools to think differently. Our collaboration brings digital experience, perspectives and skill-sets from six institutions together to shape and design cutting-edge flexible online programmes.”

A 'COMMITMENT TO BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF INNOVATION'

In the announcement of the formation of the new alliance, a representative from each of the other member schools offered comment:

- Gerard George, dean of SMU's Lee Kong Chian School of Business: “This innovative model turns the traditional format around by providing students with greater choice of what to learn, how to learn and where to learn. Through this collaboration we aspire to set new standards for online business education, positioning SMU as an educational technology leader in Asia.”
- Emmanuel Métais, dean of EDHEC Business School: “This initiative reflects our commitment to be at the forefront of innovation, not only to provide students with a better learning experience but to make them succeed in a fast-changing world. At EDHEC, we believe that excellence and innovation

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are the two pillars on which our people build their own personalities and careers to make an impact on the world.”

- Mark Vandembosch, acting dean, Ivey Business School: “We are pleased to join this alliance of progressive business educators. Ivey has always had a focus on providing an outstanding participant experience in business education. This partnership will accelerate our ability to build learning experiences that blend the best of technology with face-to-face learning.”