Research Yields Data and Recommendations for UNICON Members to Help Executive Education Professors Succeed

OUR RESEARCH CONSULTANT

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Successful executive education professors need sophisticated skills, tools and salient insights into executive development and the business of executive education. Identifying and determining the correct mix of these skills, tools and insights was the crux of three recent research projects undertaken by Elizabeth Weldon, Ph.D., an independent research consultant engaged by UNICON. Our goal? To provide practical, actionable responses to the question, "How can UNICON member schools build even stronger executive education faculty members?"

These research projects included (1) an analysis of executive education literature spanning a ten-year period (2001-2011); (2) interviews with 11 executive education professors who were deemed highly effective; and (3) a survey of 57 executive education professors from UNICON-member schools.

Here we provide a brief overview of these projects, with a particular emphasis on the faculty survey and related recommendations. Members also are encouraged to review the comprehensive findings on the UNICON website, including:

"Developing Successful Executive Education Faculty: A review of the literature from 2001-2011"

"What makes you successful? Interviews with 11 Highly Effective Executive Education Professors"

"Helping Higher Education Faculty Succeed: A Survey of Faculty Needs"

We hope this information is helpful to all UNICON member schools as they plan how to provide faculty support and future training opportunities. Please watch for upcoming notices from UNICON regarding webinars and other opportunities to delve deeper into these research findings. Go to www.uniconexed.org and log in to member's area to see the full report.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review included 30 articles spanning a wide swath of executive education topics including: client needs, the participant experience, effective classroom techniques, and the characteristics of successful executive education teachers. A comprehensive listing of the literature reviewed is available in Dr. Weldon's report on the UNICON website. See below for summarized lists of the insights, tools and techniques, and skills.

What Faculty Need to Know About Executive Development and the Business of Executive Education

These key points about executive development and executive education provide the conceptual understanding that faculty need in order to design and deliver successful executive education learning experiences. Full descriptions of these tools and techniques can be found on the UNICON website (research tab). This report is titled, "Developing Successful Executive Education Faculty: A Review of the Literature from 2001-2011."

Figure 1. Literature review: Summary of insights, tools and skills for designing and delivering successful executive education experiences.

INSIGHTS

23 insights in five categories

» A good faculty is at the heart of the business school executive education value proposition.

» Faculty are increasingly expected to have broad multidisciplinary knowledge.

» Faculty are increasingly expected to understand organization dynamics and business strategy.

» Clients who work with business schools want programs grounded in research.

» Faculty research, whether theory- or problem-driven, must provide practical insights, models, frameworks and ideas that managers can use to address the challenges they face.

» Custom program clients want faculty to understand their business strategy and the challenges they face.

» Some custom clients want the faculty to be involved from the beginning to the end of the design and delivery process.

» Clients want their programs to have a tangible impact on business results.

» Participants want practical ideas, models and frameworks that they can use to solve their immediate business challenges.

» Clients want their programs to increase engagement by re-energizing participants and building confidence in their abilities to meet the challenges they face.

» Clients want their programs to build lasting relationships among participants.

» Some clients want support before and after the formal learning experience.

» Some clients want comprehensive and integrated solutions.

» As practiced today, executive education programs come in 5 forms which are variations on two basic types: 1) performance enhancers and 2) transformational experiences.

» As noted above, some clients want their executive education programs to drive change in individuals, company strategy and/or organizational processes.

» Faculty are key motivators in the learning process.

» How executive education is delivered is as important as what is being taught.

» Reflection is essential to executive learning.

» Executive learners should be active participants in the learning process.

» Executive learners can and should learn from each other.

» Participants like for faculty to use a variety of learning methods.

» Executive education is different from MBA teaching.

» Faculty must establish credibility while demonstrating humility and mutual respect.

This is a list of tools and techniques that faculty can use to deliver successful executive education experiences. Full descriptions of these tools and techniques can be found on the UNICON website (research tab). This report is titled, "Developing Successful Executive Education Faculty: A Review of the Literature from 2001-2011."

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

45 teaching tools and techniques:

- analogically situated experience (ASE)
- service learning
- arts-based learning
- case analysis
- learning journals
- reflection papers
- reflection session
- managerial exchange
- organization assessment questionnaires
- individual assessment tools
- personal coaching
- team coaching
- action learning projects
- study trips
- simulations and role plays
- peer consulting on a personal case
- stories
- guided visualization
- imagining the future leadership self
- 50-50 rule
- five tricks card game
- SEWA Beats drumming
- round robin
- DeepDive
- participant led sessions
- participant experts
- volunteer intervention
- how to be a curious learner
- social networking tools
- program website
- need to know groups
- goal setting
- alumni presentations
- reflection session
- reports to coworkers
- impact diaries
- provocation
- team teaching
- buzz groups
- buzz boards
- breakout/learning groups
- build all possible connections among participants
- move people around
- be animated
- move around the room

This is a list of eleven skills that faculty need to design and deliver successful executive education learning experiences.

SKILLS

11 skills for design and delivery:

- perspective taking
- session scripting
- facilitation
- closing a session
- identifying provocative questions and interesting dilemmas
- managing study groups
- facilitating an action learning project
- debriefing an analogically situated experience (ASE)
- designing an ASE
- coaching
- facilitating study trips

Figure 2. Summary of interviews with 11 highly effective executive education faculty.

INTERVIEWS WITH SUCCESSFUL EE PROFESSORS

Eleven successful executive education professors were interviewed, representing UNICON-member schools in South America, Mexico, Europe and North America. They were asked what made them successful, how they developed their executive education skills and what can be done to help other faculty members build their executive teaching skills. The overall learnings from this research are summarized in Figure 2. Their actual responses are listed in Figures 3-5.

ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL FACULTY

Successful faculty are:
» enthusiastic about the topics they teach
» interested in the practical challenges that managers face
» comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty
» flexible
» good listeners
» genuinely interested in their areas of expertise.
» interested in the practical challenges of getting things done in companies.
» early in their academic careers.
» respect for executive knowledge and experience.
» often have experience outside academic (not critical for success).

DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Faculty can learn by:
» watching experts
» finding a mentor
» co-teaching
» looking at evaluations
» getting feedback from peers
» working with a coach
» getting involved in program design
» starting small
» practicing
» gaining experience with executives
» shadowing a mentor

Figure 3.

INTERVIEW QUESTION #1

"Looking back over your career, can you identify events that had a significant impact on the way you design and deliver executive education? What were those events, and what did you learn?"

» work experience outside academia
» learning from others
» starting small and starting early
» getting involved in program design
» working with a coach
» working in an environment that values executive education

Figure 4.

INTERVIEW QUESTION #2

"In your own view, what makes you successful as an executive education professor?"

Three themes emerged in the answers to this question: (1) Focusing on the participants; (2) Respect for executives' knowledge and experience; and (3) specific tips and guidelines for effective teaching (see figure 4 below).

» Giving real and practical examples; linking ideas, principles, concepts and theories to practical problems.

» Taking five minutes to present a model and rest of hour to discuss how it can be applied.

» Using co-teaching to pair faculty members fluent with theoretical models with faculty members focused on more practical aspects.

» Grounding the session in research (use research-based frameworks to structure the issues and the discussion).

» Having a genuine interest in areas of expertise; showing enthusiasm about the topics and enjoying talking about them.

» Knowing how to facilitate a group discussion.

» Designing programs differently (appropriately) for different audiences.

» Focusing on a few main points.

» Using a variety of learning methods.

» Providing evidence from your own country.

» Designing sessions that are problem driven.

» Adding a "bit of salt" by being provocative and encouraging people to discuss conflicting views.

» Using humor and making the classroom fun.

» Preparing by researching the company and the industry.

» Being flexible, embracing uncertainty, and adjusting to the situation as it unfolds.

» Telling interesting stories well.

» Co-teaching for better feedback and new perspectives.

» Teaching cases.

» Having a clear sense of your professional mission.

» Focusing on process.

» Willingness to deal with ambiguity yet stay in control.

» Listening. Listening. Listening.

Figure 5.

"In your view, what can be done to help other professors develop the skills they need to be successful in executive education. What advice would you give them?"

The respondents' advice was based on their own developmental experiences and their beliefs about how successful executive education is delivered. It is listed in figure 5 below.

- » Get some experience with executives.
- » Respect the participants' experience.
- » Focus on the participants and their learning needs.
- » Understand that being a good MBA teacher doesn't make you a good executive education teacher.
- » Learn from others.
- » Find a mentor, but still be yourself (use your own style).
- » Teach practical topics, but ground your sessions in research.
- » Start small (e.g. a one-hour session on your research).
- » Prepare: know your client, industry and competitors.
- » Don't spout theory, but help participants use theory and frameworks to analyze a problem.
- » Don't assume you're right, only that you have another point of view.
- » Use simulations to reduce resistance to change.
- » Don't let people say "I can't", or "They won't let me". Instead ask them to focus on "How could I?"
- » Some percentage of people don't want to be there. Don't compromise the experience for others to make those people happy.
- » Be willing to adjust and adapt.
- » Practice.
- » Recognize that academic expertise is not enough. . . Recognize that knowledge delivery is as important as knowledge creation.
- » Be willing to be something of a performer.
- » Use practical examples.
- » Avoid falling into a routine.
- » Keep your knowledge fresh and up-to-date.
- » Know your gig: figure out what you want to accomplish with your own professional expertise.
- » Look at evaluations from previous modules and/or previous years.
- » Recognize that different types of programs require different skills.
- » Let more of the learning come from the participants.
- » Be provocative to energize discussions.
- » Invite people to watch you teach, ask for feedback.
- » For open-enrollment, polish your presentation skills.
- » Learn to manage a program, not just deliver silver bullets.

SURVEY OF FACULTY NEEDS

Fifty-seven executive education faculty members from UNICON-member schools participated in this survey, which probed what type of support would be most helpful.

Most (63%) are tenured or tenure-tracked faculty and three-quarters have at least four years' teaching experience in executive education.

And most teach in both open enrollment and custom programs.

Among the key findings:

How helpful would it be to have…?	VERY OR EXTREMELY HELPFUL
A quick way to find experiential exercises and simulations to illustrate models, concepts and theories.	77.2 %
A better understanding of what executives want from an executive education program.	73.6 %
A list of classroom tools and techniques used by successful executive education teachers.	68.5 %
Easy access to information about the participants, their companies and the industries they work in.	68.4 %
A quick way to find relevant teaching cases.	66.7 %
Help with finding videos to illustrate models, concepts and theories.	66.6 %
Help with finding practical examples to illustrate models, concepts and theories.	59.6 %
Help with building discussion and facilitation skills.	50.9 %
A set of guidelines for designing successful executive education teaching sessions.	49.1 %
Help with finding articles about the practical problems managers face.	43.9 %

Table 1. Percent of respondents indicating that this type of support would be very or extremely helpful.

As Table 1 shows, all ten types of support were thought to be "very" or "extremely helpful" by a substantial proportion of the respondents.

There was especially strong consensus on the two most valued types of support, with three-quarters of respondents indicating that it would be very or extremely helpful to:
> "Have a quick way to find experiential exercises and simulations to illustrate models, concepts and theories."
> "Have a better understanding of what executives want from an Executive Education program."

Approximately two-thirds replied that the following would be very or extremely helpful:
> "Easy access to information about the participants, their companies and the industries they work in."
> "A quick way to find relevant teaching cases."
> "Help with finding videos to illustrate models, concepts and theories."

Half of the respondents said that the following would be very or extremely helpful:
> "Help with building discussion and facilitation skills."
> "A set of guidelines for designing successful executive education teaching sessions."

Fewer than half (43.9 percent) of respondents said the following would be very or extremely helpful:

"Help with finding articles about the practical problems managers face."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive education departments may wish to consider whether and how to provide to their faculty some of the design, delivery and development tools mentioned below. Much of the necessary content for these tools can be gleaned from these and other UNICON research projects.

DESIGN, DELIVERY AND DEVELOPMENT TOOLS TO HELP YOUR FACULTY SUCCEED

WHAT	HOW
Short briefing papers	Describe key insights that the research revealed regarding what professors need to design and deliver successful EE learning experiences. These insights include: what clients want from an executive education program, what participants want, how executives learn, the role of faculty in EE, and the role of research.
Teaching tips	Compile from the interviews with successful Executive Education professors
List of classroom tools and techniques	This could be organized into five categories: tools and techniques for non-traditional learning; building relationships among participants; helping participants learn from each other; transferring learning to the workplace; teaching activities and exercises.
Observation guide	A tool to encourage professors to watch others teach, with tips on to help them learn from this experience.
Feedback guide	Faculty members should be encouraged to ask others to watch them teach, with a feedback form for use by observers.
Mentoring guide	Mentors can help others build their executive education skills. A guide could provide coaching tips for mentors.
Coach list	Identify a pool of coaches who can help design and deliver Executive Education teaching sessions.
Skills handbook	Include descriptions of key skills, a list of readings and a set of activities to build each skill.
Session checklists	A set of guidelines and checklists to help professors design a successful executive education session.
Reviews	Compilation and reviews of recommended videos, experiential activities and simulations.