ABS Learning and Teaching Conference
Innovation and the Student Experience
23rd – 24th April 2013

The importance of interactivity in making international, online executive education effective: an exploration

Ayiesha Russell and Martin Lockett

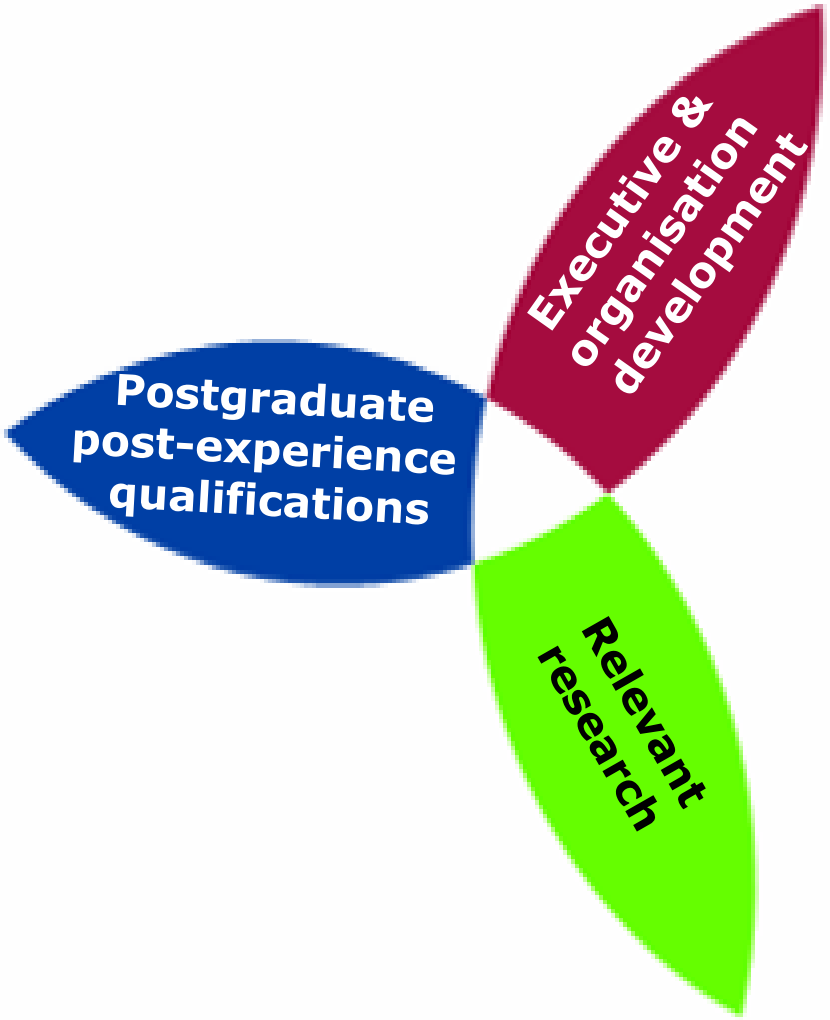
ASHRIDGE

Objectives

1. Analyse the importance of interactivity in 'online' postgraduate management education
2. Explore how interactivity can be enhanced

ASHRIDGE

Ashridge: a distinctive approach



Ashridge is a non-profit educational charity that focuses on practising managers and professionals

An ABS member, Ashridge obtained degree awarding powers in 2008

Ashridge gets no HEFCE funding and does not take part in the REF

Ashridge students:

- 100% post-graduate
- 95% part-time
- average age 38
- no support from public funds

ASHRIDGE

Ashridge programme portfolio

General management

- Full-time MBA
- Executive MBA
- Executive Masters in Management (eMiM)

Specialist

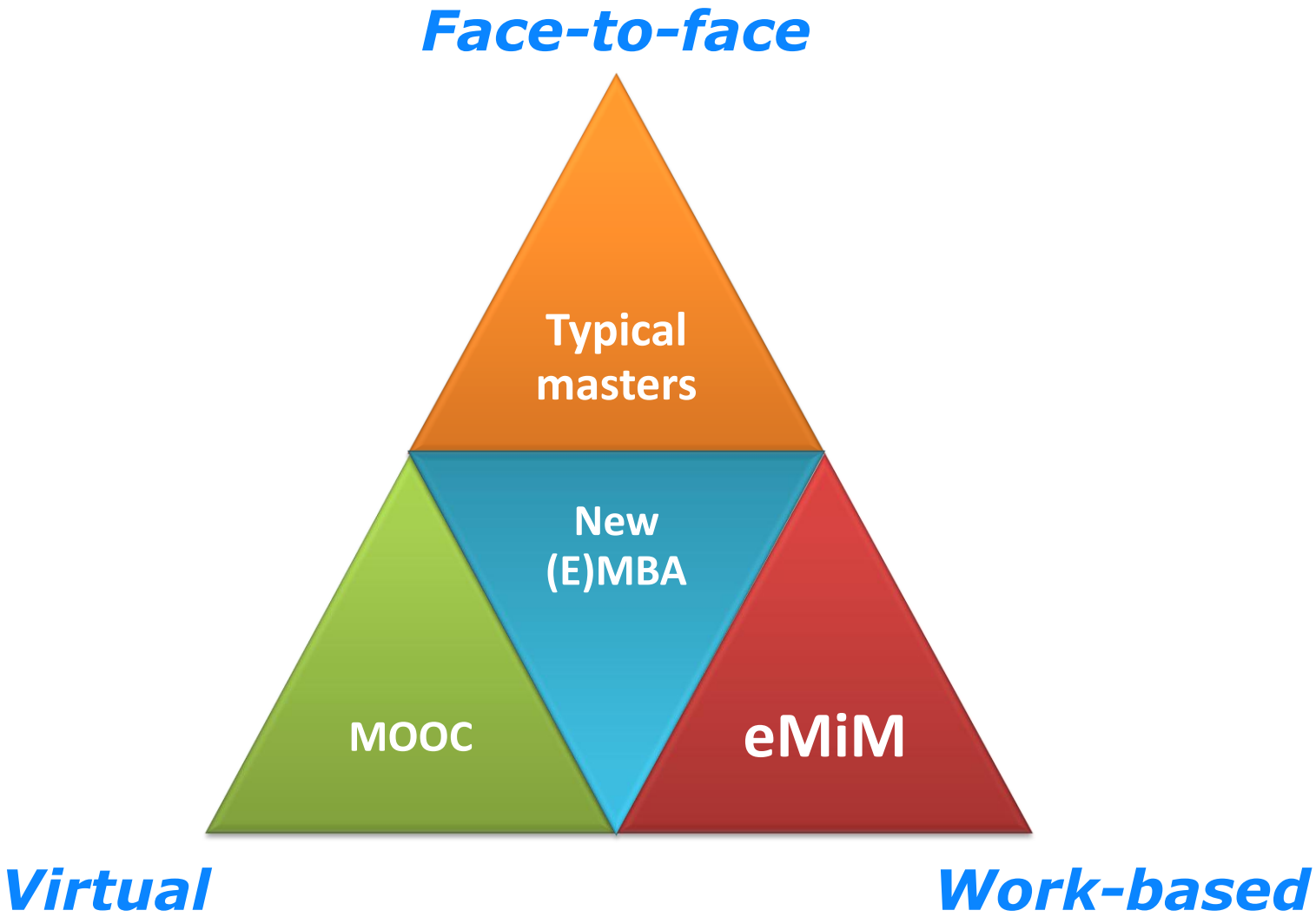
- Organisational change
- Executive coaching
- Sustainability & responsibility

Organisational

- Organisation development
- Leadership and quality improvement in health
- Key account management

ASHRIDGE

Interactivity: a downside of virtual?



ASHRIDGE

Interactivity: key questions

Recognised within the literature as contributing heavily to perception of virtual learning effectiveness:

- How important is interactivity within a virtual Masters?
- What contributes to effective interactions?
- Can virtual programmes lead to effective learning?

ASHRIDGE

Interactivity and the literature (1)

Three types of interaction in distance education (Moore, 1989):

Learner – Content

Continuous contact with content, clarity of course design, time, participation in online discussions.

Learner – Learner

Participation, response, provision of affective feedback and short, focused messaging. Stimulate critical thinking, lessen isolation and promote a sense of a learning community. Linked to a greater perception of learning.

Learner – Tutor

Reinforce student understanding, highlight meanings. Timely feedback and instructor presence in learning environment. Facilitating learners.

ASHRIDGE

Interactivity and the literature (2)

Hillman, Willis and Gunawardena (1994) propose an extension of traditional models:

Learner – Interface

Continuous contact with content, clarity of course design, time, participation in online discussions.

We propose further extension in the context of work-based learning and application to include:

Learner – Colleague

Interaction with colleagues in the workplace or elsewhere as part of an active learning process.

Learner – Self

Reflective learning following application of concepts and frameworks in real-life.

ASHRIDGE

Research Methodology

Mixed methodology, two phase design:

Quantitative phase

- Pilot given to 20 online faculty and students
- Live survey sent to 83 international participants, 40 responses
- 69% male, 31% female; age range 25–59
- Questions on previous experience of online learning, expectations, effectiveness, support received, application of learning and demographic information.

Qualitative phase

- 13 semi-structured in-depth interviews: perceived usefulness of the online programme, which elements and why
- Response profile-based.

ASHRIDGE

ASHRIDGE

What students value

Most valued elements

1. *Online visual resources*
2. *Webinar - content-based*
3. *Online text*

Least valued elements

1. *Learning support group*
2. *Project supervision*
3. *Online discussions*

ASHRIDGE

Learner–Content interaction

- Variety of resources
- Module sequence
- Module size
- Content via discussion
- Pragmatic learning transfer

"You have the flexibility to choose what you read, having vast amounts is thought provoking."

"The first year was hard. Not just modules, but study support modules also compounded intense pressure."

"I like how user friendly it is. Don't have to go to Amazon."

ASHRIDGE

Learner–Learner interaction

- Social interaction
- Being part of a learning community
- Sector diversity
- International networks

"Good to get a collection of information from different industries."

"When I logged in live it was great – a virtual classroom, I felt connected.
Felt good to know there are others, to know who they are."

ASHRIDGE

Learner–Tutor interaction

- Prompt feedback
- Regular feedback from facilitator key to students perception of effective learning
- Tutor accessibility

"The supervisor was key."

"If you are really going for it, I think the contact needs to be once a fortnight."

"The interactivity is key for me feeling supported on the programme."

ASHRIDGE

Learner–Interface interaction

- Varying computer literacy
- Ease of use
- Instruction
- Access via smartphones and across computer operating systems
- Intuitive interface

"I tried but it didn't work (learning support group). I didn't understand how to use it, so I didn't."

" I did not know anything about the whole online component. I have no online experience."

ASHRIDGE

Conclusions from our research

- Interactivity is vital to students' perceived effectiveness of learning
- Students miss learner–learner and learner–tutor interaction if not created
- Learner–colleague and learner–self interactivity overlooked in literature
- Desire to be part of an international virtual learning community
- However students want their community delivered 'off the shelf'

ASHRIDGE

Implications for innovation

- ‘Open system’ rather than ‘closed system’ thinking in virtual programmes, eg learner-colleague interactivity
- Create accessible and attractive learning communities in programme design, both ‘off the shelf’ and student-driven
- Develop wide range of opportunities for synchronous learning with international participation, eg for different time zones

ASHRIDGE

References

- Cheng, C.H., Wei, L.Y., Chen, Y.H. (2011). A new e-learning achievement evaluation model based on rough set and similarity filter. *Computational Intelligence*. 27(2), 260-279.
- Franceschi, K., Lee, R.M., Zanakis, S.H., David, H. (2009). Engaging group e-learning in virtual worlds. *Journal of Management Information Systems*. 26(1), 73-100.
- Gunes, A., Altintas, T. (2012). Evaluation of distance education components: a case study of associate degree programs. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*. 16(3), 23-34.
- Hillman, D., Willis, D., Gunawardena, C. (1994). Learner–interface interaction in distance education: an extension of contemporary models and strategies for practitioners. *American Journal of Distance Educatio*I, 8(2), 30–42.
- Moore, M. (1989). Three types of interaction. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 3(2), 1-6.
- Oye, N. D., Salleh, M., Iahad, N.A. (2011). E-learning barriers and solutions to knowledge management and transfer. *Information Management & Business Review*. 3(6), 366-372.
- Salas, E., Kosarzycki, M.P., Burke, C., Shawn, F., Stephen M., Stone, D.L. (2002). Emerging themes in distance learning research and practice: some food for thought. *International Journal of Management Reviews*. 4(2), 135. 19p.
- Songtao, M., Zhao, L. (2012). A reflective note on evaluation methods in management distance learning courses. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*. 16, 19-26.
- Wenchieh W., Lan-Yin., H. (2010). The effectiveness of e-learning for blended courses in colleges: a multi-level empirical study. *International Journal of Electronic Business Management*, 8(4), 312-322.

ASHRIDGE