Niche Programs in Executive Education: Opportunities for Innovation and Integration

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Although much has been written about cross-disciplinary executive education, there is limited evidence from non-top tier business schools surrounding the processes used to create those offerings. This paper reports on a program that pairs the expertise of the School of Business and the College of Education and Human Development at a large public university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States to create an alternative model of executive education that prepares executives in a specialized decision-making role – the role of Chief Learning Officer (CLO) - to deal with strategic issues and drive innovation.

INTRODUCTION

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) has long advocated collaboration between business schools and other academic units to support efforts to drive innovation in society. AACSB subscribes to the *Oslo Manual* definition of innovation as "the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations" (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), 2005, p. 46). Further, AACSB has identified executive level, open enrollment non-degree programs as particularly well suited to supporting innovation due to (a) the diverse pool of industry participants from which those programs draw, (b) the flexibility of the programs in terms of content and objectives, and (c) the role that executive education plays as a channel for disseminating current research and its focus on immediately impacting management practice (AACSB International, 2008).

Given the centrality of executives to organizational performance, we would expect changes to the structure of an organization's executive team to affect innovation, especially changes to the number of seats at the C-suite table. There is some research focusing on the effects of new executive roles on organizational performance. For example, Hambrick and Burton (2004) examined the impact of the introduction of the Chief Operating Officer (COO) role on organizational performance, while Zorn (2004) traced the environmental factors that contributed to the introduction and institutionalization of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) role. Further, as new organizational structures and forms emerge, organizational demography scholars expect to see the emergence of new executive roles (Beckman & Burton, 2011). This article describes the design, development and implementation of a competency-based executive education program that targets a relatively new executive role, namely the Chief Learning Officer (CLO), at a university in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S . Although there is a fairly robust body of knowledge on executive competencies in a variety of fields such as healthcare (Stefl & Bontempo, 2008), leadership

studies (Sosik, Gentry, & Chun, 2012), the hospitality industry (Brownell & Chung, 2001) and management education (Boyatzis & Saatcioglu, 2008), the literature is sparse in terms of competency-based education for the CLO.

The Chief Learning Officer (CLO) emerged in tandem with the recognition that innovation is tied to organizational learning. Organizational learning includes learning at both the individual and collective levels of analysis, with mechanisms in place to capture and share the learning across the organization (Anderson & Lewis, 2014; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). Although the title "Chief Learning Officer" can be traced back to the 1990s when Jack Welch, then head of GE, made Steve Kerr his CLO, the role of the CLO has evolved from one of organizational training leadership to one of making organizational learning a key business strategy for competitive growth, advantage and innovation, reflecting the increase in companies' explicit investment in learning (Buchel & Antunes, 2007).

This article offers an alternative model of executive education that capitalizes on the synergy between non-degree programs and degree programs crucial to creative, innovative programming (Margulies & Gregg, 2002). Further, it illustrates how educators from two distinct academic units – the School of Business and the College of Education and Human Development – have cultivated innovation in management education through curriculum integration while creating meaningful, enduring learning experiences (AACSB International, 2010). In the next sections, the methodology used for constructing the competency-based CLO executive education program is described, followed by an examination of the results of a pilot offering of the program model to assess its effectiveness in creating rich learning experiences for executives that are applicable to the workplace. The article concludes with some interpretive reflections about how the lessons learned from this curriculum development project can serve as a guide for action for other higher education institutions seeing to enter or create new niches, particularly if those institutions are regional rather than (inter)national brands.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Triggers

In 2014, faculty and administrators in the university's School of Business and in the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) began sharing anecdotal feedback from their respective advisory and alumni groups about the lack of formal programs to prepare candidates for emerging C-suite roles, particularly the role of CLO. What was particularly challenging about the CLO role was the lack of clarity about the specific skills and competencies required of the successful CLO. Although the university's School of Business has a firm regional presence in executive education and CEHD is recognized as a strong regional brand in preparing learning and development practitioners in government, industry, and the non-profit sector, neither had experience with competency-based, role-specific executive education. Consequently, the two entities assembled a project team to develop a business case to assess the benefits, costs, and risks of offering a program for the CLO niche market. The project team consisted of faculty and staff from the School of Business and CEHD, with one co-lead from each school.

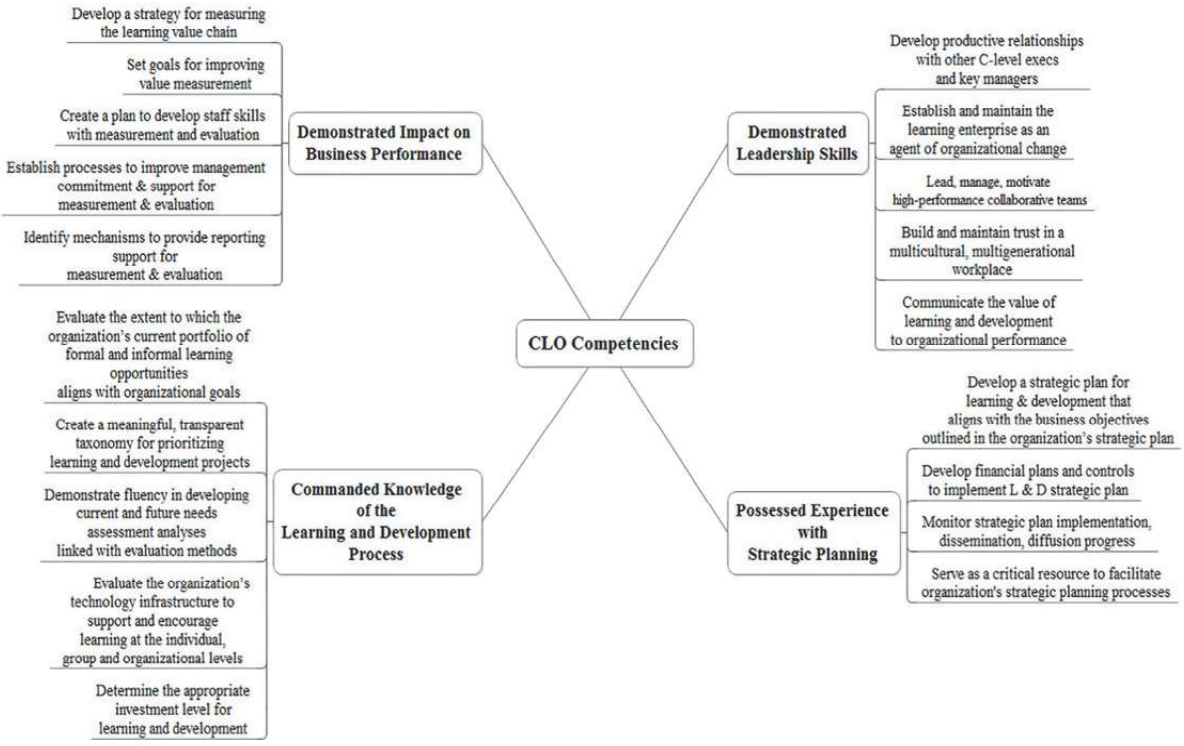
Phase 1: Identification of CLO Competencies

The project began with a search of the scholarly literature for competency models – valid, observable, and measurable lists of the knowledge, skills, and characteristics demonstrated through workplace behavior that result in excellent performance in a given role (Bral and Cunningham 2016; Chouhan and Srivastava 2014) – to serve as the program's foundation. However, an industry-standard list of skills and competencies for the CLO function was still emerging. For example, the results of a survey of 100 deans of leading corporate universities (Meister, 1999) identified four areas in which the CLO must excel in order to lead a corporate university: (a) business partner who understands the organization's strategic direction, products, services, customers, competition, etc; (b) systems thinker who creates a vision of how the learning and development function fits together as a system bound by interrelated actions; (c) education specialist who shapes the vision of continuous learning and communicates that vision throughout the organization, and; (d) alliance builder who forms partnerships with internal senior business

managers, external customers, union leaders, and deans of institutions of higher education. Rothwell, Lindholm and Wallick (2003) explored CEO expectations of their learning executives and outlined seven CEO-identified competency areas that included business knowledge, communication skills, assessment skills, and innovation in applying new learning interventions to business needs, among other competencies.

Surveys of learning executives conducted in 2005 and 2006 respectively focused on leadership, articulating the value of learning in business terms, strategic planning, and knowledge of the learning and development process (L'Allier, 2005; Sugrue & Lynch, 2006), while scholar-practitioners began to offer concrete strategies to CLO's for linking learning to strategy, setting the investment level for learning and development, shifting the mindset from learning to performance improvement, and developing productive relationships with management in other areas of the organization (Elkeles & Phillips, 2007). As shown in Figure 1, the extant research indicates that the CLO must possess a dual competency in learning and business, and these competencies served as the basis for developing the present program's curriculum.

FIGURE 1
OVERVIEW OF CLO COMPETENCIES



Phase 2: Integration of Curricula from Different Disciplines

Approaching curriculum integration across the disciplines raises the spectre of the definitional dilemma around terms such as interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, and cross-disciplinarity. In a historical review of the various definitions, Klein (1990, p. 55) observed that "interdisciplinarity is usually defined in one of four ways: by example, to designate what form it assumes; by motivation, to explain why it takes place; by principles of interaction, to demonstrate the process of how disciplines interact, and; by terminological hierarchy, to distinguish levels of integration by specific labels." Klein stated that terminological hierarchy has dominated the literature in recent decades, with a general consensus that what differentiates interdisciplinarity is integration, while multidisciplinarity is primarily additive. Transdisciplinarity seeks to understand the world through a unity of knowledge

beyond disciplinary boundaries to create a new meaningful whole (Nicolescu, 2002), while cross-disciplinarity focuses on problems or issues for which no single discipline has the cognitive tools to address, moving scholars to borrow constructs from other related disciplines, with no integration of the borrowed constructs into the existing discpline (Kockelmans 1979; Repko, Szostak, & Buchberger 2014).

Other definitions of interdisciplinarity have also identified integration as a key characteristic but the concept of integration itself has no single definitions (see, for example, Armstrong, 1980; Bammer, 2013; Nissani, 1997; O'Rourke, Crowley & Gonnerman, 2016). Currie, Davies and Ferlie (20016) cited some examples of successful relationships between business schools and other academic departments, but emphasized that internal and external stimuli (e.g., rankings, accreditation issues) continue to keep the "wall" between business schools and other academic units fairly high. These barriers echoed previous observations about the disconnection between faculty groups from different disciplines approaching the same topic from different perspectives and the resulting difficulty for students in reconciling the two perspectives (Carrithers & Peterson, 2006).

The project team in the present study deemed Holley's (2009) framework for an interdisciplinary curriculum to offer a solid framework for an executive education program grounded in role-based competencies drawn from two or more disciplines:

> The design of an interdisciplinary curriculum must consider what facts students should know to be able to apply one disciplinary construct in another context. The pedagogy best suited to facilitate interdisciplinary learning is grounded in a range of so-called integrative learning approaches: learning communities, experiential learning, collaborative learning, and so on. These approaches recognize that students learn both inside and outside the classroom, that their learning is enhanced through hands-on application, that learning the skill of interdisciplinary integration requires practice with the act of integration, and that students learn by recognizing and reconciling conflicting epistemological perspectives (Holley, 2009, pp.55-56).

To that end, the team mapped the research-based CLO competencies to existing courses and their respective pedagogical approaches. Three graduate-level courses in the School of Business addressed the competencies associated with leadership skills and strategic planning. To address the competencies associated with learning and development at the C-suite level, CEHD faculty developed two new courses focused on learning technologies as part of a strategy of innovation, and on learning analytics respectively. CEHD faculty also re-designed an existing course on the business aspects of learning and development to focus on demonstrating learning's value from a C-suite perspective.

Phase 3: Development of an Alternative Model of Executive Education

The third phase of the process focused on logistical issues and delivery models. In contrast with the paucity of literature on CLO competencies, the literature on executive education models is robust. Bricker's international directory of executive education programs (Billy, 1988) defined executive education as having the following characteristics: (a) at least one week in length and offered on a regular, recurring basis, (b) presents subject matter at a high level of management sophistication to participants to show potential for promotion to higher levels of management, (c) attended by a public audience and not limited to specific companies or industries, (d) sponsored by a major university, and (e) residential, at least five days in length, conducted for at least one session, and taught in the English language. This remained the model for campus-based executive education for business schools and management institutes worldwide for decades. However, Vicere (1988) observed that there was a lack of rigorous, empirical evidence (other than participant reactions) substantiating the impact of the university-based programs as well as a gap in the literature pertaining to the development of theories, concepts and models for utilizing those programs.

The number of models of university-based executive education began to increase in the 1990s, partly as a result of changes in the higher education environment. Margulies and Gregg (2002) defined executive education as non-degree programs for working professionals. They described executive education as being one of two types. The first type is open enrollment, including certificate programs that focus on a particular sector (Public Management) or a functional area (Certificate in Information Management) and

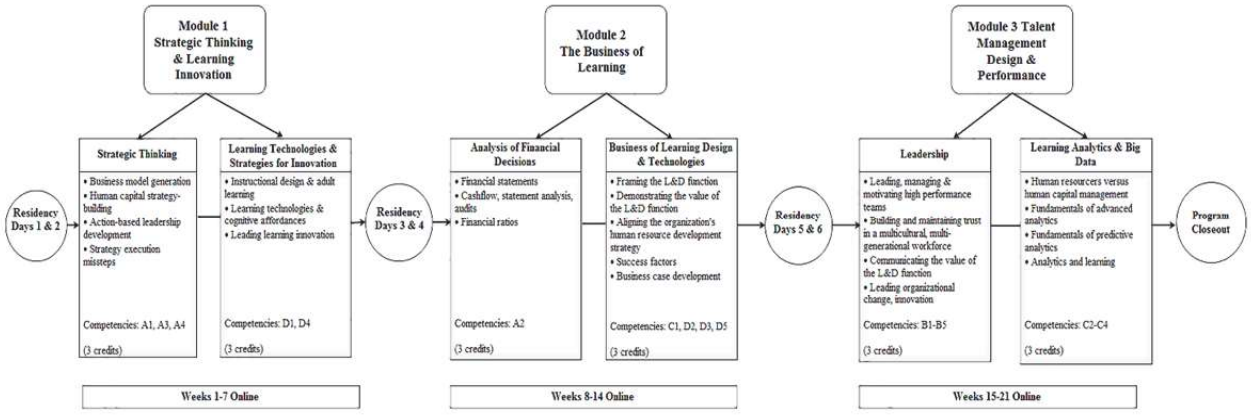
include a minimum of instructional hours that should be compatible with university requirements. The second type is the custom program driven by a full company needs assessment process. The authors further identified a need for strategic synergy between degree and non-degree programs, and concluded by attributing the following characteristics to successful university-based executive education programs: (a) quality faculty familiar with best practices and real-world problems, (b) practical application, (c) balance of theory and practice, (d) 35,000 foot level big-picture orientation, (e) convenience, (e) cost/price/value (i.e.,the experience is helpful, useful, addd to personal and professional development), (f) program orientation (i.e., large corporations, small-mid size enterprises, public sector), (g) class size (no magic number but 20-30 offers a rich interactive setting), (h) networking opportunites, (i) amenities and materials (coffee, catering, printed materials, give-aways,etc.) and (j) cross-marketing or repeat business for future programs.

Other models have focused on maximizing shared costs through a partnership process between universities and area businesses (Hura, 2003), while Jahera (2006) noted that to be successful, university-based executive education programs must pursue four key strategies: flexibility to break down the typical three-semester hour course and move to modules that may be as short as 3-weeks for a course, appropriate compensation if faculty members are compensated out-of-load, strong marketing and promotion, and willingness to take risks. In a special issue of the Academy of Management *Learning & Education journal*, the editors (Buchel & Antunes, 2007) concluded that the number of players in the executive education space has proliferated and that the boundaries of what constitutes executive education are ill-defined and expected outcomes are not agreed upon.

In encouraging new programs that adapt to the changing needs of the professional job market, The Education Advisory Board examined non-credit executive education programs at several high-profile, research intensive institutions (Education Advisory Board Academic Affairs Forum, 2015) and explored the various program models and structures. The findings focused on the different business models for custom vs. open enrollment programs, the way in which revenue from executive education is classified in the institutions' financials, and the lack of additional compensation for tenured or tenure-track faculty who teach in executive education programs. Ermler (2015) called for offerings with (a) stackable credentials (i.e., specialized certifications within a discipline), (b) micro-credentials similar to those offered by organizations operating informal learning environments for K-12 students, (c) flexible online or hybrid degrees, and (d) accelerated degree options and reduction of the traditional 15-week semester to 8 weeks. Ermler also noted that some of the fastest growth can be found in niche graduate programs that cross disciplinary fields. Like Emler, Okahana, Feaster and Allum (2016) saw the best opportunities for growth in specialty/niche programs to attract new populations of students needing assistance with career development while making use of resources already in place for traditional graduate programs (e.g., equipment, facilities, faculty).

Seeking to draw on the best of each model and taking particular note of Okahana, Feaster and Allum's (2016) points about specialty niche/programs, the project team in the present study constructed a hybrid model of executive education that blends elements of open enrollment for-credit programs on the one hand, and the short, modular, non-semester-bound duration of traditional executive education models on the other (see Figure 2). Moreover, the program uses both face-to-face and online delivery formats. The program consists of a total of six online courses of three credits each, with course content mapped to the CLO competencies. Residency days are devoted to team building activities, sharing of real-world experiences, challenges and issues, and small group activities. The online components, offered on the university's Learning Management System (LMS), consist of guest speaker presentations in webinar format, and virtual work spaces for ongoing group collaboration, as well as for sharing individual and group products generated throughout the duration of the program.

FIGURE 2
CLO GRADUATE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM STRUCTURE



CLO COMPETENCIES			
A. Possessed Experience with Strategic Planning	**B. Demonstrated Leadership Skills**	**C. Demonstrated Impact on Business Performance**	**D. Commanded Knowledge of the Learning & Development Process**
1. Develop a strategic plan for L&D that aligns with business objectives outlined in the organization's strategic plan	1. Develop productive relationships with other C-level execs and key managers	1. Develop a strategy for measuring the learning value chain	1. Evaluate the extent to which the organization's current portfolio of formal & informal learning opportunities aligns with organizational goals
2. Develop financial plans to implement L&D strategic plan	2. Establish & maintain the learning enterprise as an agent of organizational change	2. Set goals for improving value measurement	2. Create a meaningful, transparent taxonomy for prioritizing L&D projects
3. Monitor strategic plan implementation, dissemination, diffusion progression	3. Lead, manage, motivate high-performance collaborative teams	3. Create a plan to develop staff skills with measurement & evaluation	3. Demonstrate fluency in developing current & future needs assessment analyses linked with evaluation methods
4. Serve as a critical resource to facilitate organization's strategic planning process	4. Build and maintain trust in a multicultural, multigenerational workforce	4. Establish processes to improve management commitment & support for measurement & evaluation	4. Evaluate the organization's technology infrastructure to support & encourage learning at the individual, group & organizational levels
	5. Communicate the value of L&D to organizational performance	5. Identify mechanisms to provide reporting support for measurement & evaluation	5. Determine the appropriate investment level for L&D

Pilot Testing and Validation

With little empirical research on competency-based executive education, the project team designed the first CLO offering as a pilot that would serve as single-case study that would contribute to theory-building through particularization (Stake, 1995) and where the descriptive nature of the results alone would prove revelatory (Yin, 2012). The questions guiding pilot testing were:

RQ 1: How can role-based competencies be integrated into executive education programs for niche market segments like the CLO?

RQ2: How effective are the various pedagogical approaches deriving from curriculum integration in creating rich learning experiences for executives?

RQ 3: What are the alternative models of executive education afforded by niche market segments like the CLO?

Participants

A total of 10 participants were recruited for the pilot program using the university's standard digital marketing tools. Consistent with the university's location and the demographics of participants in its other programs targeting working professionals, the majority (7 of 10) of pilot participants were drawn from the Federal sector, while one was employed in the non-profit sector and two were independent consultants. Four participants had a background in learning and development, three had a business background, and the remaining participants had backgrounds in engineering, law, and military science respectively. All participants possessed advanced degrees. Seven participants were male and three were female, with participants averaging 9.7 years of management experience.

Procedures

The program opened with a Friday morning orientation session that introduced the participants to the goals, intended outcomes, pedagogical principles, and CLO competencies grounding the program. Participants also shared their expectations about what specific gaps in their knowledge they hoped the program would fill, including (a) trends/directions in adult learning, (b) measuring the business impact of learning, (c) immediately applying program learning in own organization, (c) showing value in a non-profit or government context, (d) saving money and measuring the impact of those savings, (e) garnering support of other executives for building a competency-based training plan for the entire organization, and (f) effectively communicating the intersection of learning and business. The afternoon and all-day Saturday session introduced Module 1 Strategic Thinking and Learning Innovation, consisting of a School of Business course on strategic thinking and a CEHD course on learning technologies and innovation. For the following seven weeks, participants worked totally online in two teams of five members per team to complete a work-based project focused on assessing the current state of the strategic planning process in their organizations and the role of the technology infrastructure in that process. Modules 2 and 3 followed the same structure, culminating in consolidated work-based project presentations at the program's conclusion.

Distinctive Pedagogical Approaches

Project-based Learning

Participants came to the program with a real workplace problem or issue related to the program goals. Discussions on the first two residency days as well as online enabled the participants to select two of the real-world workplace problems, then split into two groups that reflected their current workplaces. The skills and competencies covered in each of the program's courses would contribute to constructing a solid, feasible plan for a solution, which the participants could take back to their respective workplaces for full implementation.

Topic Blog Reflections

Throughout the duration of the program, participants posted their reflections on the topics covered in the program, allowing them to engage more deeply with the topics and with their fellow program participants than often occurs with traditional electronic discussion boards. The blogs also fostered identification of the ways in which the program themes and ideas could be put into practice as part of the role of the CLO.

Team-based Online Case Study Debates

The debates were devoted to the discussion of issues surrounding the development of an organization's learning and development capability. A case study served as the situation for the debate that was structured in a point (Team A)-counterpoint (Team B)-rebuttal (Team A) format. The case study also allowed participants to evaluate what did (not) work in the case and what they as CLOs would have done differently to achieve the goals outlined in the case. The desired outcome was to extract key lessons learned that could be used in other contexts, specifically as they relate to the projects being developed in the program.

"Shark Tank" Team Project Presentations

To demonstrate the hard and soft skills covered in the program and simulate a real-world boardroom experience, participant teams presented their final projects in a format similar to the popular television show "Shark Tank". The presenting team presented its plan for the solution to the chosen problem, while the other team played the role of potential investors in the proposed solution. This format enabled participants to step into the shoes of other members of the C-suite as they offered constructive comments on the solution and the rationale for a go/no go decision.

Data Sources and Treatment

Consistent with commonly used validity procedures for qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000), three sources of data were collected for triangulation purposes: (a) responses to the university's standard anonymous online Course Evaluation survey, (b) end-of-module de-briefing discussions of what worked (did not work) in each module, and (c) end of program debriefing session. The university's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment provided a report of the aggregated survey results and list of voluntary comments. The de-briefing sessions were facilitated by the School of Business project co-lead and all CLO program faculty members took notes during the de-briefing sessions, and compared and consolidated those notes after the sessions to extract key themes around module and program strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Pilot Results

As shown in Table 1, responses to the university's Course Evaluation survey indicated that three of the courses – Business of Learning Design & Technologies, Leadership, and Learning Analytics & Big Data – were well received, receiving mean ratings of 4.00 or higher on all items measured. The course Analysis of Financial Decisions earned mean ratings of 4.00 on all but two of the items, while the other two courses (Module 1) showed mixed results, with ratings ranging from a low of 3.38 to a high of 4.75. Further, both of the Module 1 courses underperformed on "overall rating of this course".

TABLE 1
UNIVERSITY ONLINE COURSE EVALUATION SURVEY MEAN RATINGS (N=10)

	Module 1: Strategic Thinking & Learning Innovation		Module 2: The Business of Learning		Module 3: Talent Management Design & Performance	
Item	Strategic Thinking	Learning Technologies & Strategies for Innovation	Analysis of Financial Decisions	Business of Learning Design & Technologies	Leadership	Learning Analytics & Big Data
Course requirements & expectations were clear	3.50	3.88	4.40	4.80	4.50	4.00
Course was well organized	3.38	3.88	4.30	4.60	4.00	4.17
Instructor helped me to better understand the material	3.88	4.25	3.90	4.20	4.33	4.50
Feedback was helpful	3.50	4.13	4.00	4.20	4.17	4.83
Instructor was accessible either in person or electronically	3.88	4.75	4.60	4.90	5.00	5.00
Assignments helped me learn the material	4.13	3.63	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.33

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

	Module 1: Strategic Thinking & Learning Innovation		Module 2: The Business of Learning		Module 3: Talent Management Design & Performance	
Item	Strategic Thinking	Learning Technologies & Strategies for Innovation	Analysis of Financial Decisions	Business of Learning Design & Technologies	Leadership	Learning Analytics & Big Data
Textbook and/or assigned readings helped me learn the material	4.25	4.13	4.20	4.40	4.67	4.67
Instructor encouraged the students to be actively involved in the material through discussion, assignments, & other activities	4.00	4.50	4.20	4.20	4.83	4.83
Overall rating of the teaching	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.20	4.40	4.50
Overall rating of this course	3.75	3.75	3.70	4.00	4.40	4.50

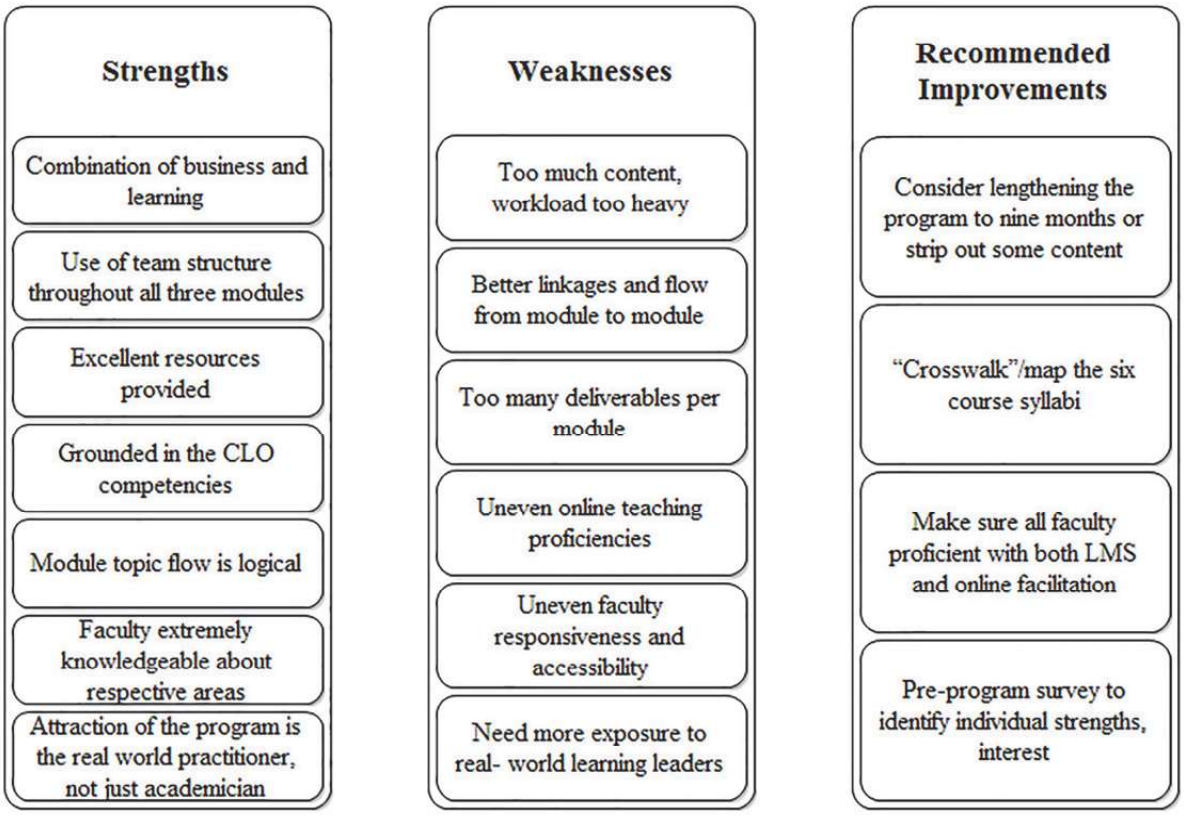
Note: Ratings on a 5-point scale where "5" means "Strongly Agree" and "1" means "Strongly Disagree".

These results were not unexpected. First, the Module 1 instructors met only once prior to program start and then, only remotely because one of the instructors was engaged in a consulting project and was unable to focus on the program until a few days before the start date. Further, although a thought leader in strategic planning, that same instructor had never taught a full, 3-credit course nor did that person have experience teaching online or using learning management systems. The other Module 1 instructor was well versed in teaching online but had no practical experience outside of the academy. Conversely, the instructors for Modules 2 and 3 all had real world experience plus experience teaching online. They had liaised in advance of the program, were using a uniform template for their online course sites and had the same level of detail in their course syllabi.

Participant feedback from the module and course de-briefing sessions provided insights into the strengths and weaknesses suggested by the Course Evaluation surveys (see Figure 3). The participants believed that the program does what it set out to do in terms of providing the dual business-learning skillset required of today's CLO as well as providing the opportunity to learn, practice and apply the CLO competencies throughout the program. They deemed the use of the team structure throughout all three modules to be particularly valuable to practice the concepts and knowledge areas covered in the program, enabling them to develop significant bonds with each other and with the faculty, often sharing the ways in which the module topics played out in their respective workplaces. Further, the participants thought that the order in which the modules were presented flowed logically, with each module building upon learning from the previous module. They also mentioned the reading materials and other resources that were provided as strengths of the program, noting that because the resources were in a digital format, they

could save and retrieve them as needed long after program completion. Participants were very appreciative of the faculty-facilitators in terms of their respective areas of expertise and the fact that nearly all had recent experience or were still working as learning leaders in non-academic settings.

FIGURE 3
SYNTHESIS OF PARTICIPANT COMMENTS ON THE PROGRAM



However, participants were very candid about what did not work for them during the program. The primary area of concern was the amount of work associated with the requirements of each course within the modules. As one participant noted, "you can't take the full content of a 3-credit course, make it times two courses, and stuff it into a few weeks. This doesn't leave any time to absorb and reflect on the readings." The participants recommended either lengthening the program to a total of nine months instead of six or stripping out some of the content. However, there was no consensus about what content they would be willing to give up to keep the program at its current length. Related to the workload challenge, participants thought that having six different syllabi (one for each course) was burdensome and recommended "cross walking" or mapping the six syllabi to one another so that participants can easily "connect the dots" from one course to another. Some participants suggested having one consolidated syllabus for each module, so that the module-to-module linkages would be clearer.

The faculty expertise mentioned as a program strength also had its downsides. Although participants liked the opportunity to work online, they noted that not all faculty-facilitators were equally proficient in an online environment. Further, the participants challenged some faculty-facilitators for not being responsive online or accessible via alternative means of communication (email, phone, etc.). As one participant noted, "tell us in advance how long it takes for you to respond to emails or phone calls; don't just leave us hanging." Participants unanimously agreed that this could be remedied if all faculty-

facilitators undergo some type of training or orientation to online facilitation and to the learning management system environment before the program begins. Participants also thought that including more guest speakers who are current learning leaders would enrich the learning experience. Lastly, the participants recommended a pre-program survey so that participant expectations could be collected in greater detail than was done in the opening residency day, and the survey results could be used to help participants better negotiate which of the many workplace problems issues brought to the program would actually be used for the team projects.

DISCUSSION

The research questions guiding this project focused on the extent to which (a) role-based competencies can be integrated into executive education programs for niche market segments like the CLO, (b) various pedagogical approaches deriving from curriculum integration can provide rich learning experiences for executives, and (c) alternative models of executive education are afforded by niche market segments like the CLO. Participant feedback confirmed that the CLO competencies were well integrated into program content. Further, the use of integrative learning approaches and feedback pedagogies with multiple team-based experiences on each topic, faculty-facilitators with specialized knowledge and real-world experience, and a blend of theoretical and applied knowledge driven by the need for immediate and practical application were also viewed favorably by pilot participants. However, the hybrid model itself brought to light three challenges.

First, the course-based structure with faculty hand-offs from course-to-course and from module-to-module were not as smooth as the team had hoped. Participant feedback about the excessive workload and multiple syllabi, coupled with the somewhat uneven levels of collaboration among the faculty appears to be consistent with known faculty challenges in interdisciplinary teaching described in the literature (see, for example, Bryant et al, 2014; Lattuca, 2001). The implication is that when integrating curriculum for executive education programs, faculty charged with designing, organizing, and teaching need to step back from current conceptions of a 3-credit course in terms of 15 weeks-worth of content. This, however, conflicts with institutional (and university accrediting body) requirements that all for-credit courses have a written syllabus. Although our project team was able to offer convincing arguments to the university Registrar that a 3-credit course need not take up 15 weeks, it is unclear whether one or more accrediting bodies would challenge the notion of assigning three credit hours to seven weeks-worth of content. Moreover, each academic unit has its own curriculum approval process that for-credit courses must complete, making a single syllabus per module a challenge. One could argue that the academic unit awarding the certificate – in this case, the School of Business – take responsibility for approving a consolidated module syllabus. That would require a mindset re-set in that the individual faculty members would have to step away from focusing exclusively on their areas of expertise and thinking holistically in terms of module (versus course) outcomes.

Second, the difference between what one faculty member perceived as "collaboration" and what the other five faculty members considered to be collaborative behavior proved challenging. Both the results of the Course Evaluation survey and pilot participant comments in the de-briefing sessions cited the lack of a shared understanding of collaboration among the faculty as an opportunity for improvement. What participants had experienced was what Neumann et al. (2006) called viewing interdisciplinary collaborative teaching as a "division of labor", which may be inherent in the course-based structure of each module on the one hand, and the relatively lower level of interaction of one faculty member with the other five members of the faculty team on the other hand. Further, that same faculty member was the least proficient with technologies and did not attend the training sessions on the university's learning management system. Essential to the role of CLO – and to most executives – is knowledge of current and emerging technologies (Elkeles & Phillips, 2007). Both participants and faculty-facilitators need to possess a level of digital proficiency that enables maximum learner experience in the online learning environment so central to this program but also to be able to evaluate technology strategies in their own organizations.

The third challenge concerned long-term impact measurement. The program's impact on participants' organizations and careers takes time to develop and may not be clearly visible until long after program completion. As such, a mechanism for maintaining a connection with each other and with the program faculty would need to be developed, to track the long-term impact of program participation. For example, how many have moved into a CLO role at their current organizations or at a new organization? Do those who started with CLO responsibilities but did not have the title now have a seat at the C-suite table? Were the projects produced at program's end actually implemented and with what rate of success? A dedicated program alumni group on LinkedIn is one way of engaging after program's end. Selecting program alumni as mentors to subsequent program cohorts could also provide that connection between program learning and practical application of what was learned.

NEXT STEPS

A second offering of the program is in progress. Like the pilot, the program (a) is competency-based, (b) employs the same integrative learning approaches and feedback pedagogies with multiple team-based experiences on each topic, and (c) is offered in a modular format that blends residency days with online components. However, the program structure is closer to that of the more traditional executive education models in that it is a semi-closed cohort (Federal employees only), not-for-credit, and contains content that is specific to the Federal Government (e.g., financial and regulatory processes/procedures, agency mission).

The content sessions, workshop and project components are delivered over four modules instead of three, with each module being three consecutive days of classroom delivery. The module design is deliberately content-diverse in order to reinforce an executive's perspective of the organization. For example, instead of all leadership topics being delivered in a single course/module, leadership topics are distributed throughout the program. In addition to content diversity, at least 50% of the time allocated to each module includes exercises, projects, individual and team coaching, assessments, simulations and discussions. Further, the program has one syllabus that shows the modules, their associated topics and competencies. Lastly, faculty are teaching in pairs, with one serving as the Federal topic content expert and the other as the pedagogical expert. Two mandatory faculty prep sessions and one pre-program competency assessment for participants were also included. Using the data collected during the pilot as a baseline, module and program evaluation data (quantitative and qualitative) will be collected in three stages, namely immediately, 6 months, and one year after program conclusion.

These modifications incorporate the strengths and weaknesses identified in the pilot offering and allow comparisons to the original hybrid model to determine which model is a better fit for this niche market segment.

CONCLUSION

The creation of a niche program that links leadership and innovation by capitalizing on the emergence of executive roles that demand technical/functional as well as business skill sets sends a clear message that goes beyond the top tier business schools covered in the extant literature. Further, the plusses and deltas associated with a hybrid model of executive education encourage institutions to explore various ways of integrating curricula that can be applied in other forms of management education. Equally important, the pedagogical approaches used in the CLO program can provide engaging learning experiences for a host of programs when program participants are informed of the rationale for those approaches and are given the opportunity to practice.

The bottom line is that higher education institutions need to consider multiple ways of preparing leaders to meet the changing roles and responsibilities of current and future executives by capitalizing on what **all** academic units (not just the Business school) have to offer. The impact on both program participants and on the perceived relevance of higher education to solving real-world problems will be a win-win all round.

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