# Partnering Effectively with Intermediaries in the Executive Education Market

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UNICON Research Report

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UNICON is a global consortium of business-school-based executive education organizations. Its primary activities include conferences, research, benchmarking, sharing of best practices, staff development, recruitment/job postings, information-sharing, and extensive networking among members, all centered on the business and practice of business-school-based executive education.

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**UNICON Research Report: *Partnering Effectively with Intermediaries in the Executive Education Market***

UNICON sponsored this research initiative that was conducted by Tom Ryan, as part of a series addressing the topic of business model innovation in non-degree executive education. We aim to investigate ways in which university-based executive education can continue to operate in an ever-changing and evolving field, including understanding how to collaborate effectively with new types of organizations for the benefit of customers.

The interpretations and perspectives expressed in this report are those of the researcher, who is deeply familiar with the executive education field. This paper may be viewed as a complement to Ryan's 2021 and 2022 papers for UNICON, ***What Are the Jobs to Be Done in The Future Of Executive Education*** and ***Intermediation and Disintermediation in the Executive Education Market: Competing and Collaborating as a Response***. Together these three papers can provide a useful basis for a school wishing to review its business model and evaluate its options for development and delivery of executive education.

# Partnering Effectively with Intermediaries in the Executive Education Market

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## Executive Summary

Well-funded commercial ventures are building expertise in designing, marketing and delivering online executive education programmes (mainly asynchronous) to insert themselves as intermediaries between university-based providers and potential clients / participants. Just a few years ago online programmes delivered through intermediaries might have been considered a useful but minor add-on to a school's core executive education activities. The evolution of the market now requires schools to adopt a more strategic perspective. Schools that have the opportunity to partner with these intermediaries and choose to do so can reap considerable benefits from cooperation but can also encounter real problems. This paper aims to help schools partner effectively by presenting a structured approach and new perspectives, informed by the experience of others that are already doing so. The paper is intended to be useful to schools exploring the option of entering into a relationship with one or more intermediaries by helping them to think through the issues before starting discussions with potential partners. Schools that are already working with intermediaries should also find the paper useful in getting more from doing so.

The paper starts with a review of the current context where a small number of intermediaries have built partnerships with key global and regional business schools to offer hundreds of online programmes. This includes an overview of the demand for such programmes and their appeal to business schools. It then considers the challenges of establishing such programmes and the importance of velocity and optimisation in doing so in the dynamic and uncertain market for such programmes. This suggests an updated view of how schools can benefit from partnering with intermediaries and some of the challenges in doing so.

Based on the review of current context, the paper then identifies several perspectives that schools might consider for partnering with intermediaries: taking a holistic view; an explorer perspective; a venture capitalist mindset; automating to facilitate and benefit from scale; trusting commercial partners. These new perspectives support a set of questions for schools to consider internally to discuss with potential intermediary partners.

## Introduction

The UNICON Research Paper 'Intermediation And Disintermediation In The Executive Education Market: Competing And Collaborating As A Response' concluded that well-established intermediaries such as Emeritus and ExecOnline are likely to become a significant feature of the executive education market and that business schools may need to collaborate with one or more of such intermediaries.

Reviewers of that paper expressed an appetite for a deeper dive into working with these intermediaries. In response, this paper seeks to identify and explore issues on which schools need to frame and make choices in deciding whether and how to work with intermediaries, mindful that, for many reasons, individual schools will need to make their own unique choices. The paper presents these issues using the principles that underlie win-win relationships (as taught by many schools) and some perspectives relevant to the rapidly changing market that many schools may teach but not all apply. These are complemented and informed by insights from interviews with representatives of schools and intermediaries. UNICON policies to ensure compliance with US anti-trust laws place significant limitations on what can be discussed in this paper, so certain issues are not addressed.

Much of what is presented here can be regarded as common sense, but my interviews suggest that, under pressure to create programmes, enhance presence and generate revenue, some schools do not adopt. Schools may also be failing to fully understand that the dynamics of the market for online programmes can be very different from those of the more established face-to-face (F2F) market, and this has implications for how best to compete.

In this paper I have used the term 'intermediary' rather than OPM (outside programme manager) as I feel it better captures an essential feature of these organisations: they become the first point of contact, interposing themselves between schools and clients /participants on programmes. Because the Intermediaries offer a package of benefits including technology platforms and marketing and sales, business schools often engage these firms not for some specific technology but to go to the market on their behalf. Finally, while some schools do partner with intermediaries to deliver live or live online programmes, most partner programmes are primarily asynchronous online. In the interests of improving the flow of this paper I have shortened this to simply online programmes. I should also point out that the paper has been written in UK rather than US English, so spelling differs (e.g., the UK spelling of enrol has a single 'l' while the US version has two).

In this paper I have also used the expression partner. My interviews suggest this is a sensitive term for some schools that are cautious and specific on how it is used in their institution. In practice, the relationships between schools and intermediaries are on a spectrum as will be discussed later.

## Research Methodology

The core of this paper is a set of principles that underpin win-win relationships between schools and intermediaries, together with a list of questions that schools need to answer internally and with partners to apply them effectively. These principles and questions were drafted based on my professional experience, complemented by exploratory discussions with a number of people with relevant experience. These principles and questions were then validated and enriched by interviews with people at eight business schools already working in partnerships. To balance the schools' perspectives, I also interviewed people at four intermediaries.

The business schools interviewed were chosen to include a mix of global brand name schools and regional leaders, schools with established relationships with intermediaries and those with newer partnerships. The starting point for consideration was using the web sites of a several leading intermediaries to capture the number of programmes they were offering on behalf of each school or other institution. (This also provided the data for the charts shown later in this paper.) This allowed me to better identify those schools with larger partner programme portfolios and those that were working with more than one intermediary or different intermediaries. I sought to interview two people from each school: one with the associate dean or similar title and one with greater day-to-day operational involvement with the intermediaries to get both strategic and operational perspectives.

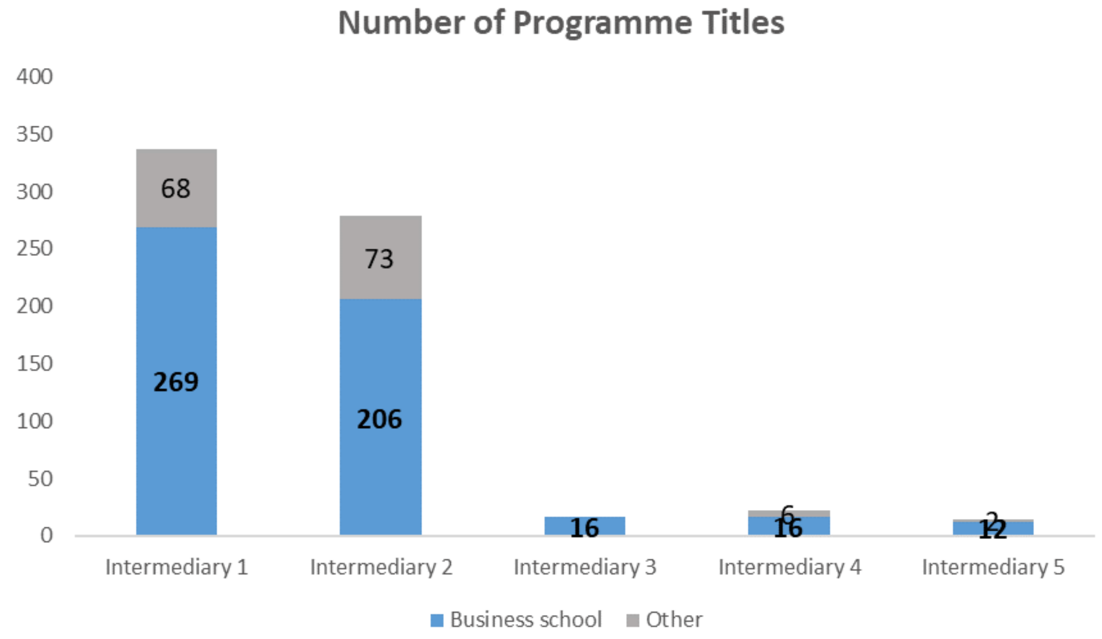
The interviews were conducted in recorded Zoom calls based around the draft list of principles and questions. I asked the interviewees for their views on the principles and questions, and for any related insights that they triggered. While there were some common themes, the different contexts, experiences and perspectives of the interviewees led them to highlight different issues. I captured the issues and insights by interviewee against the principles in a spreadsheet before aggregating and refining them in this document.

I am grateful to the organizations and people who generously gave their time to speak with me.

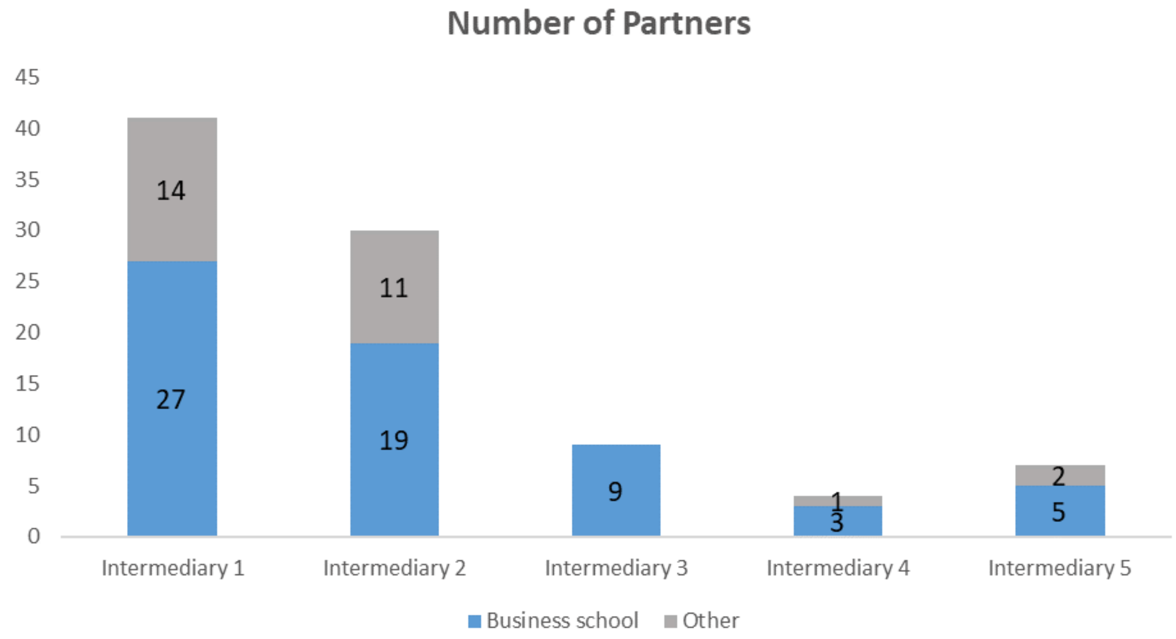
## The Scope Of Involvement By Intermediaries In The Online Executive Education Market

Two simple illustrative charts, based on published schedules on school and Intermediary websites at June 2022, demonstrate the significance of intermediaries in the online executive education market. The first chart shows the number of titles offered through some of the most significant intermediaries. It highlights that most are offering programmes not just from business schools but also from other schools such as medicine and engineering. At June 12, 2022, five intermediaries were offering 519 business school programmes and had 61 relationships with 46 business schools (some schools have relationships with more than one intermediary). Most of these programmes will be offered multiple times each year. The number of participants by programme and intake vary, but there are reports of some having 300+. Multiplying these numbers together suggest that the number of people choosing programmes via intermediaries is substantial. Of course, these numbers do not include programmes offered directly by schools without going through intermediaries

In reviewing these charts, it is important to understand that these intermediaries differ in age and claim different value propositions to schools and users, as can be seen on their websites.




A second chart showing the number of partners by intermediary demonstrates that many business schools (and other academic institutions) are choosing to work with intermediaries.




## The Case For Online Programmes And Working With Intermediaries

### The User Perspective And Its Implications

To understand the growth of these intermediaries, it is helpful to understand who attends their programmes and why.  In the B2C market, participants are typically middle and senior managers with a minimum of 10-15 years of work experience and the typical age range on programmes is 35

– 55. There are few participants under 25, which interviewees ascribed to younger people not needing to accelerate their careers. The sense from the market is that they are individuals who wish to upgrade their skills to survive and prosper in a challenging employment market where their current skills are becoming outdated. A great deal of business school content is freely available online, so it seems reasonable to ask why some people are prepared to pay for programmes (and why others are not!). The general consensus is that participants want to be able to signal their new skills to current and potential employers through credentialling on LinkedIn and elsewhere that demonstrates that they know how to do something and are employable for that. As a result, they value programmes that offer certificates and possibly accreditation for continuing professional education and development. Self-directed asynchronous programmes are more compatible with work and family responsibilities than block in-person programmes. Many B2C participants are paying for their own courses – so lower fee levels and avoiding travel / accommodation costs make them more appealing and feasible.

Having understood who attends online programmes and why, we might also ask how individuals choose programmes. Opinions vary on this. Some interviewees suggest that participants are loyal to a given school and will start by looking at the programmes offered by that school. Other interviewees believe that participants start by identifying their learning need and their preference on delivery mode (F2F, live online or asynchronous online) and then search for suitable programmes. In doing so they may limit their search to schools with an established reputation (global or regional) and perceived expertise in the topic of interest. One suggested reason for this is that such schools are seen as custodians of the brand promise of accelerated upward mobility, so participants believe they are learning the right things to achieve progress. Today, most of the B2C intermediaries offer 'white label' programmes from respected schools that reflect this.

It also is worth noting that several schools with global reputations are launching Chinese and Spanish language versions of some of their successful programmes. This has implications for the ability of schools to compete in this market if they do not already have a visible brand and reputation.

Users' reasons for using and selecting online courses have implications for the design of programmes. Schools need to be clear on the value proposition of their online programmes. A certificate that must be earned has a greater value in the market than one that can simply be bought. What is the value-add that distinguishes a worthwhile course from a 'survey' course where enrolment effectively guarantees a certificate of completion: Is it context? Application to the employee and employer situation? A requirement to demonstrate understanding? At the same time, participants can find even a 6-week course requiring 4 – 6 hours per week challenging to complete while juggling work and family commitments. Schools need to ensure that the programme design and experience is compatible with high completion rates and great participant outcomes for committed participants, while properly signalling in advance to potential participants the effort expected. Finally, the content must be aligned with and deliver on the course titles - despite the potential temptation to massage the title to capture the limited attention span of someone searching online for a programme.

Much of the recent growth in the online programmes market has been in the B2C market. There are suggestions that certain intermediaries are now also targeting small to medium-sized organisations that have not been a priority for business schools with their established business models. This is being described as the B2C-enterprise market. These enterprises may want different programmes outcomes than do individuals who are paying themselves or larger and more traditional users of business school programmes. It also raises questions about which B2B and B2C-enterprise clients schools want to deal with directly and for which enterprises they are happy for an intermediary to handle the relationship. It also has implications for how the school assesses the market demand for potential new programmes: Google and similar search data may be a good source of data for the B2C market but less so for the B2C-enterprise market. With larger enterprises there is a question of whether the growth of the online programmes market is supporting the democratisation of business education by moving spend down the organisation to middle management and away from the previous focus on executive leadership.

The insights in this section have implications for many aspects of online programmes including positioning, design and marketing channels. Schools might usefully challenge whatever assumptions they are making on these questions and the resulting implications for their choices.

### The Business School Perspective

The established business model for university-based executive education has been to deliver both open enrolment and company specific programmes face-to-face with school faculty and campus at the centre of the value proposition. Until recently, schools have typically engaged directly with their participants and clients both in relation to marketing / admissions and delivery, which might be described as vertical integration.

Early discussion of online programmes focused on their potential to reach new participants by reducing barriers associated with the traditional model such as incompatibility with work / home responsibilities, visa requirements or cost. Reaching new audiences would support the typical school mission to offer high-quality business education. This aim of providing greater and easier access has been described as the 'democratisation of management education'. It also offered the prospect of delivering a new income stream directly from online programmes and of increasing enrolment on existing face-to-face programmes as online programmes raised awareness.

Enthusiasm for online programmes has been dampened by experience with MOOCs. As noted in the 2020 Forbes article 'The "Depressing" And "Disheartening" News About MOOCs', they suffer from 'abysmal completion rates' that could be seen as reflecting poorly on the academic institutions.

Early discussions in the development of online programmes featured concerns about the extent to which such programmes would cannibalise the existing face-to-face programmes or alternatively might attract new users. Assessing the actual extent of cannibalisation is complicated by the restrictions on face-to-face programmes during the Covid-19 epidemic but few of the people with whom I discussed this question had seen much evidence of cannibalisation. Indeed, a number suggested the opposite – that online programmes provided a less expensive way to trial the business school executive education experience and led people to later enrol for face-to-face programmes.  A number of schools are offering certificates of competence to participants who complete a number of courses which typically can include both in-person and asynchronous programmes – so the two delivery modes are supporting each other.

Some schools have concluded that the requirement to make online programmes titles, themes and content appealing in a competitive market provides an impetus to add an innovative flavour to programmes in a way that might not otherwise have happened - taking the school and its faculty out of their comfort zone.

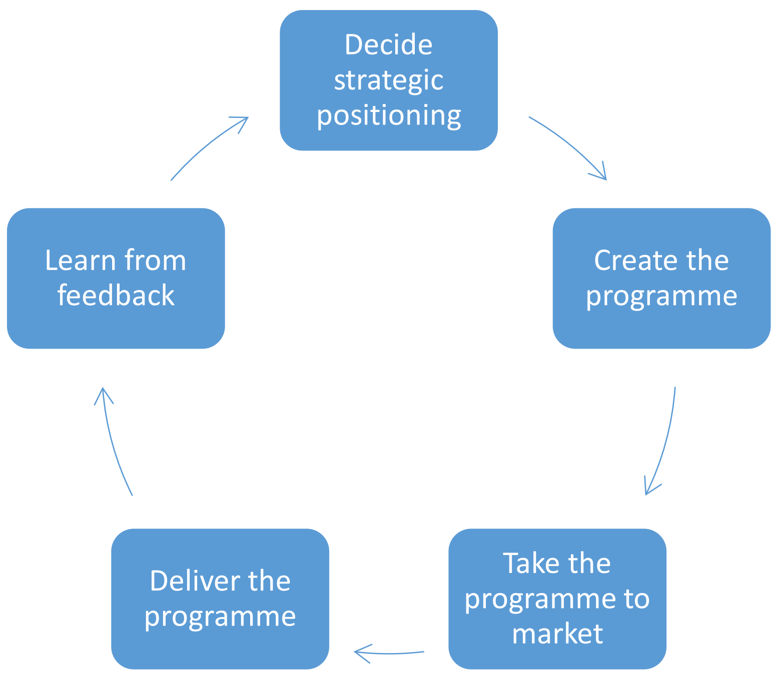
Thanks to Covid and what is happening in the industry, the institutional openness for getting into digital programmes has probably changed in many schools.  The improving feasibility and market appeal of online programmes means that they are becoming both a complement to and an alternative to face-to-face programmes.

Despite the potential appeals of offering online programmes, schools face a number of barriers to developing and marketing their own programmes.

### The Technical Challenges Of Establishing Online Programmes

Creating and delivering a sustainably successful online programme is both complex and challenging.  This can discourage schools and their various stakeholders from even exploring whether or not to enter this market.

Establishing a digital programme can usefully be considered as an iterative process with five steps as follows.



How well and how quickly this cycle operates can be a key driver of market success and enrolment: getting new programmes to market more quickly than rivals; ensuring alignment with evolving market demands; learning from feedback to improve impact, participant experience, and relevance. This can be described as velocity – a term that captures both speed and direction and necessarily includes optimisation. Remaining current and relevant is not optional in the dynamic online programmes market, but for some topics (e.g., technology) it is even more critical. Velocity also has implications for how quickly a school can build out its online open programme portfolio and reach critical mass, moving from experimentation to implementation. It offers benefits for a school's company-specific programmes business where the ability to offer digital learning is becoming an essential capability. A school that can design and deliver such online programmes more quickly than competitors may have an advantage in winning business by being better able to meet the demands of clients.

While this diagram is helpful, it may give the impression that these activities are distinct and sequential. In the market for digital programmes, it is more appropriate to adopt an agile approach as practiced in the world of technology, so that these activities happen in parallel and are interconnected e.g., market response informs the design of the programme before it is delivered. Exhibit 1 provides an illustrative list of the activities involved in each of these steps.

While many of the steps are similar to those used for traditional face-to-face open programmes, there are some key differences:

- The need for precision in advance: a professor can adapt on the fly in a face-to-face classroom – but recorded video does not
- The costs of developing new online content are significant (compared to face-to-face which may rely on existing faculty slides and notes which can be outlines rather then details), but the delivery cost for online programmes is lower than for F2F – particularly the marginal cost for each additional participant
- There may also be significant updating costs from time to time to keep the programme relevant e.g., recording new videos
- These greater fixed costs impose a minimum efficient scale for any individual programme to be economically viable
- Online programmes are being designed for class sizes that are potentially several times that of traditional classes – which has implications for design and for delivery
- The required greater number of participants also demands changes to the way the programme is taken to market – from marketing to enrolment
- People's expectations around a digital programme are comparable to expectations of apps on their phone such as Uber - not what they had at college
- Face-to-face programmes have traditionally relied on end-of-programme surveys of participants and qualitative data from the faculty and others involved in delivery, but online programmes can also use quantitative digital data on participants' behaviour and preferences

- creating a potential spectrum of data-gathering from human / manual to completely automated / AI

- Programme design and delivery increasingly looks like a digital product management exercise using iteration and agile management approaches - continuously aligning title, content and marketing in the run-up to launch - to ensure the programme is reaching the right audience over its life

The general guidance seems to be that creating a course from a standing start will take about 4 - 6 months although this can be reduced to 3 - 4 months if it has already been socialised within the school and faculty.

Given this level of complexity and how different the business model is from school's traditional one, it is not unreasonable that not all schools have chosen to launch their own online programmes.

### Challenges Of The Business Schools' Context

In addition to the technical challenges of establishing online programmes, schools need to overcome the challenges created by their own context to secure the internal support needed for success in this market.

The expectation at many schools is that executive education generates an economic surplus (rather than being a cost centre) presents a significant obstacle to seizing the opportunity. Not every school is willing or able to invest the risk capital required to establish a portfolio of online programmes.

The risk aversion that characterises many business schools together with the fact that decision making power can reside with people who have no domain expertise in online businesses can hinder exploration of the online programmes opportunity. For many stakeholders in many schools, there are reasonable concerns about whether the digital product will live up to the reputation of the school across the full participant experience from investigation and enrolment to certification and participant outcomes. In the words of one interviewee, there are 'so many variables that it is almost impossible to predict the commercial success of programmes before they are launched'. Demand can be highly cyclical: something is 'in vogue' generating high numbers and then drop, others start slow and build. The substantial fixed costs of developing (and later updating) programmes make their profitability very sensitive to enrolment numbers, both in the early stages and also when the programme has been established. This imposes a requirement to reach scale on each programme quickly, which is difficult if the school has little or no experience in this area. More broadly, an extensive portfolio of successful programmes is required to provide the minimum viable scale for digital programmes needed to justify infrastructure, marketing spend etc.

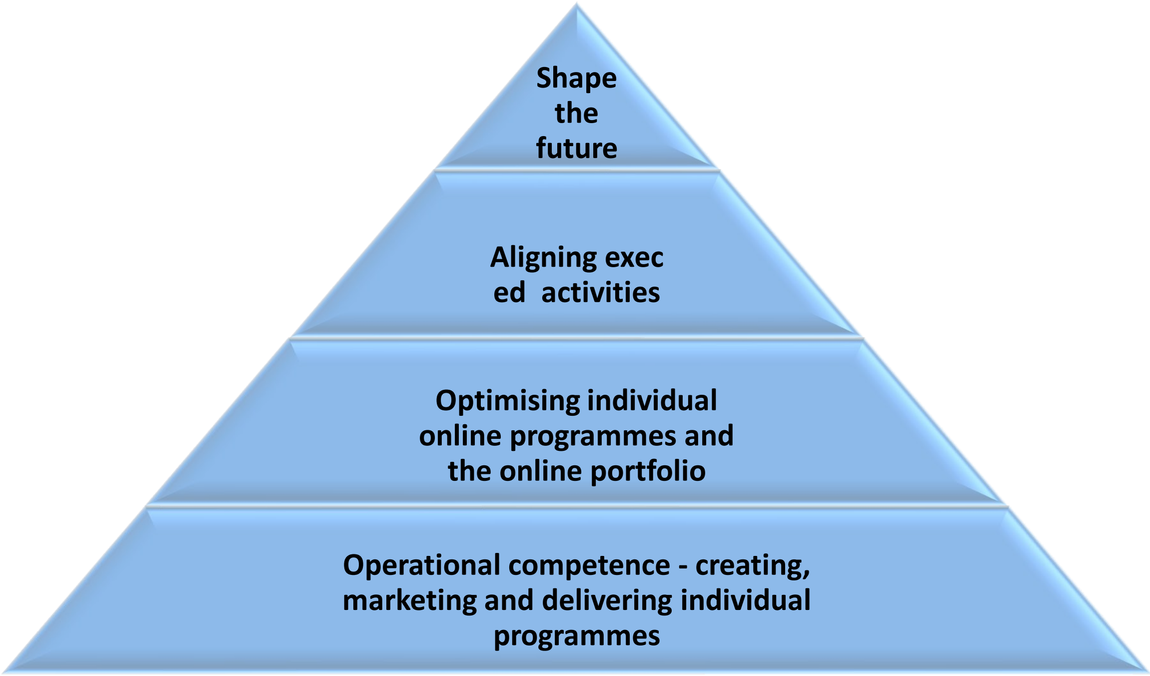
Another key challenge is securing the commitment of relevant faculty. The guidance seems to be that creating one hour of content takes about 7 hours of faculty time for discussion, preparation, recording and editing – although some have commented that this can expand substantially depending on the competence and confidence of the faculty member in front of the camera. If a typical online asynchronous programme contains say 2.5 hours of video content for each of 6 weeks, then 15 hours of video are required – which will take about 105 hours of faculty time over the 4 – 6 months required for development – equivalent to 4 – 6 hours every week. If the video content for a given course relies heavily on a single member of faculty this can become an onerous obligation for that person. It is also worth noting that the scheduling of this time requirement may be uncertain, depending on the progress of recording and on any changes required in the light of market feedback during the development phase. Are the faculty able and willing to commit this level of time over the required 4 – 6 months? Faculty concerns about the uncertain payoffs from the considerable time to be invested (and the potential impact on their reputation) have proven a barrier to securing faculty commitment at some schools. To overcome these reservations, schools need to develop a compelling business case for faculty including a compensation model. They then need to find individual members of faculty who are enthusiastic about creating new programmes while also addressing the concerns of the faculty as a whole who may have the power to block exploration of the opportunities created by the online programmes market.

Taken together, these factors can deter a school from launching its own online programmes and create an opportunity for intermediaries with complementary resources and capabilities.

### The Pyramid Of Competence In Online Programmes

It can be useful to consider a pyramid of competence in online programmes[1]:

- Operational competence – positioning, designing, marketing and delivering programmes
- Optimising individual programmes to enhance alignment between the above elements to maximise the outcomes and optimising the online portfolio to ensure programmes are aligned to be mutually supporting
- Optimising the complete current executive education programme portfolio and channels, recognising they are seen as alternatives and complements by the market
- Shaping the future by understanding the possibilities offered by emerging technology and market reality as a basis for driving the next generation of innovations and products




Schools might usefully rate themselves on each of these levels as a basis for deciding which capabilities they need to strengthen.

**The Case For Partnering: The Evolving Value Proposition Of Intermediaries**

The section above explored the many challenges in establishing online programmes. This section presents some of the key findings from my interviews in relation to the role of intermediaries.

In the early days, intermediaries provided a way for schools to experiment with online programmes without investing scarce financial resources in building capabilities and proving the market was viable. They complemented the reputation, faculty and content of established and well-respected academic institutions with the expertise required (1) to design and deliver such programmes and (2) to market programmes to new audiences to address what they saw as an unmet market need.

Today, attitudes and behaviours have changed substantially within schools that now understand that online learning is core to their business whether as complete programmes or parts of hybrid programme. At least some of the capabilities required to launch online programmes are well-understood and relatively easily acquired e.g., developing content. However, the market has evolved in recent years. The leading schools and intermediaries have moved up the pyramid of competence. In the increasingly competitive market, simply being able to develop and deliver a programme with operational competence is no longer enough. Certain schools have become much savvier and have very definite ideas about how they want to be positioned in the market, their financial expectations, and who should be involved from the business school.

The value proposition of intermediaries to business schools has changed in line with changes in the market, and most now operate a more interactive partnership with their school partners. Their services remain grounded in the view that schools can be great at creating content but that few are excel at marketing and delivering on-line courses at scale. My research suggests that most have a service tailored to individual schools to deliver superior velocity (speed and direction) in establishing and maintaining a portfolio of online programmes and better outcomes in reaching new markets while generating commercial results. They do this by leveraging their accumulated experience in programme positioning and design together with their expertise in delivering at scale (from marketing via enrolment to delivery) coupled with their ability to exploit data gathered on participant learning. They benefit from the capital they have raised from investors and the appetite for risk that promotes. Being a successful entrepreneurial venture can also enhance their ability to rapidly recruit staff.

To get the best from working with intermediaries and their menu of value propositions, schools need to:

- Clarify their strategic market objectives (e.g., entering specific geographic markets to achieve certain metrics by certain timelines) and learning objectives (e.g., how to deliver at scale)
- Understand what resources (people and money) and capabilities are required to achieve those objectives
- Understand their own resources, capabilities and constraints
- Identify the gaps between the resources and capabilities required and those available internally
- Negotiate with intermediaries that have those missing capabilities and resources

### The Challenges Of Partnering

Both business schools and intermediaries may be committed to making world class executive education more accessible around the world. The differences between them can provide the synergies that make partnering worthwhile, but they can also create different priorities that can lead to conflict. Their differing contexts and aims will not be automatically and completely aligned, so trade-offs and paradoxes are inevitable and need to be monitored and managed.

| Characteristic | Business school | Intermediary |
|---|---|---|
| Type of entity | • Not-for-profit / charitable | • For-profit organisations |
| View of online programmes | • Part of our overall programme portfolio – and to be managed as such | • Our core business<br>• Eager to expand portfolio |
| Commercial priority | • Generate a financial surplus / contribution | • Securing brands and programme titles helps intermediaries in raising capital |
| Financial resources | • Limited | • From venture capitalist or private equity investors<br>• May appear unlimited to schools – but is not |
| Appetite for risk – financial, operational and reputational | • Relatively low | • Relatively high |
| Culture | • Academic | • Entrepreneurial |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Rigorous and cautious processes<br>• Change is slow | • Work at edtech pace<br>• Change is rapid – in response to the market and software |
| Growth | • In recovery after pandemic | • Rapid |
| Headcount | • Restricted | • Large and growing |
| Role of faculty | • Overall control of business school<br>• Significant say in what programmes and courses are offered | • An input – providing content and – possibly – name recognition |

If the partnership is to deliver the expected benefits, both schools and intermediaries need to invest in the relationship, anticipate the potential implications of these differences and put in place processes to deal with them.

## Adopting New Perspectives

As noted above, there can be significant differences between business schools and intermediaries. Schools may find it easier to work with intermediaries if they adopt some new perspectives that may feel quite alien.

### A Holistic View

As noted earlier, a few years ago online programmes and intermediaries could be viewed as an interesting side-line to the core executive education activities at business schools. Now, the ability to deliver online learning either as stand-alone programmes or components of hybrid programmes is becoming a core capability that the schools need for both open and company-specific programmes. Those schools that do establish a portfolio of online programmes will find that they can no longer treat this stream of business independently. They need to integrate it into their broader strategic and operational management, taking a holistic view of the combined activities.

The most obvious implication is the need to look afresh at, and ensure alignment of, programmes, clients / users and marketing channels.

Schools will need to consider whether their online programmes should complement or mirror existing open programmes. In considering how to (re)structure and present its programme portfolio, schools need to ensure it is navigable to potential users so they can make sense of the school's total portfolio of executive education programmes in the different delivery modes. This may require overcoming an internal silo mentality that does not reflect the external reality. This review of the programme portfolio needs to be integrated with a review of how the school reaches its clients and users, particularly when it is working with one or more intermediaries. Channel management can be a complex issue and schools would do well to apply the insights that their faculty teach.

The second implication is to understand what new capabilities and sources of value are being created by engaging with online asynchronous programmes and partnering with intermediaries.

They can be a powerful step in the digital transformation on which many schools have already embarked. Creating such programmes both leverages / transforms existing assets and creates new ones, including:

- Intellectual property and learning assets – videos, case studies, assignments, learning journeys, slides
- Insights and capabilities for faculty as individuals and for the school as an institution in areas including instructional design, presentation skills, marketing skills, operations (e.g., enrolment)
- Data and insights on how people learn and what they value
- Participant and client relationships
- Marketing channels to reach new and existing users

Schools that take a holistic view of their executive education operations are more likely to understand the potential value being created and to apply it across the full range of their activities (including offering digital assets for sale outside the context of programmes). The most forward-looking schools are quantifying and valuing these benefits to inform their decisions on whether to launch online programmes and how engage with intermediaries. This is helping them to justify to stakeholders within the school community the risks and investment of money and other resources required.

One other implication is the demands on the resources and capacity of key assets. The most significant of these is possibly faculty time. Schools will need to think through the implications of developing new programmes in new delivery formats, including potentially working with outside partners.

### An Explorer's Perspective

Online programmes offer growth potential for some schools, most likely those with a strong global or regional brand. However, there remains considerable uncertainty around how the market for online executive education might develop and what role intermediaries will play. While the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns undoubtedly pushed both users and providers towards online delivery, it is unclear how much of this is temporary and how much is permanent.

If we cannot predict how the future will evolve, schools will need to explore their way to their future. This requires a different skill set from that appropriate to travelling on a defined route to a clear future. There are many decisions to make and many potential options around the choice and number of partners. Schools are undergoing their own digital transformations, so they need to experiment while simultaneously learning from others to accelerate this transformation across all areas of their executive education activities.

Given this level of uncertainty, schools may wish to apply the guidance many of our faculty give to clients:

- Avoid attempting to predict the future – instead, use scenarios to develop a shared understanding as a guide to decisions and action
- Commit to active learning - from what did and did not work – from both the school's own experiences and from that of others
- Be ready to make frequent course corrections
- Prefer flexible over non-flexible choices and options

However, the time for cautiously 'sitting on the fence' because of fears about reputation, intellectual property (IP) or competition may have passed. Schools may need to commit now or forego the possibility of participating in this current wave of innovation.

### A Venture Capitalist Perspective

The uncertainties involved in launching new programmes, the dynamic nature of the market and the volatility of participant numbers suggest schools can benefit from adopting a venture capitalist approach to their portfolio of programmes. Anticipating that there will be some programmes that are acceptably successful and a few big winners that offset failures can prepare the school for the inevitable reality.

This venture capitalist perspective might be applied as follows:

- Be clear about the school's position on the risk profile spectrum from cautious to reckless: in a volatile and uncertain market, how much risk do you want to assume regarding capital at stake, programme profitability and reputational risk
- Understand the risk profile of potential intermediary partners to ensure compatibility
- Focus on the success of the overall portfolio, rather than that of individual programmes
- Accept that running a pilot with one or two programmes can help a school to learn about process but does not provide valid data for making decisions on the overall viability of programmes or partners
- Be prepared for failure, recognising that the world is probabilistic not deterministic, so not everything will work out as anticipated (but still require accountability) and apply this to both programmes and partners
- Avoid the temptation to seek consensus before making decisions and taking action
- Write off failing programmes quickly, but be open to using content elsewhere
- Question the hype to ensure you are building a sustainable business

### Automating To Benefit From Scale

Running online programmes with 300+ participants promises an appealing revenue stream for a school, but it raises a key question: does scaling reduce value to participants because they have less interaction with faculty or learning managers? The counterargument is that scale in fact increases value to participants because it supports the use of more advanced technology that improves the learner experience and outcome.

Automating (including using big data / AI) can include:

- Assessment to confirm participants' understanding of content – which has been shown to improve learning
- Monitoring the communication and collaboration that is often intended to be a core part of programmes - by using technology to monitor signals of interaction in online groups (e.g., who speaks what proportion of time, energy levels, etc.) with feedback to each participant
- Scanning assignments for evidence of plagiarism to ensure integrity from participants before awarding certificates
- Capturing data on user behaviour and experience which, when combined with strong analytical capability, can inform improvements to the programme design and staffing

Before committing to automation and large scale, schools need to ensure that it is consistent with their DNA and the programme topics.

**Trusting Commercial Partners**

Many business schools, their faculty and other stakeholders are wary of commercial entities that have objectives and cultures different from their own. While this is not unreasonable, it may be unhelpful. There are potential synergies that can make these intermediaries valuable partners in the ways discussed earlier.

While universities/schools and for-profit intermediaries have common interests in offering high quality education, they are different forms of organizations and have different methods and considerations for achieving goals. The potential implications of these differences need to be anticipated and managed through a combination of a robust legal agreements plus day-to-day human relationships:

- Create clarity through informed and open dialogue
- Be as transparent as possible
- Try to understand both perspectives – school and intermediaries
- Adopt a mind-set of shared experimentation
- Document what has been agreed in contracts and written communications
- Establish supporting processes
- Build trust-based relationship to facilitate give and take in what will be uncertain times - and be aware of how decisions and actions can support or undermine that trust
- Bring the other party into the conversation as early as possible
- Anticipate renegotiation of agreements
- Prefer reversible decisions over irreversible ones
- Discuss and document arrangements for the termination of the partnership where necessary / desired
- Take a phased approach to building partner relationships – accepting that building trust takes time and demonstrated action / behaviour
- Understand that behind each partner entity / brand are individual people and multiple stakeholders with differing perceptions and agendas

- Understand that the relative power balance may change over time

A great partnership between a business school and an intermediary would be a win-win relationship where both partners feel they are benefitting: both are achieving their strategic, financial and other goals; the relationship is characterised by reciprocity and mutual respect underpinned by transparency. Schools should not assume that such relationships can be easily created and maintained. Instead, they need to be carefully created and managed to overcome potential problems. In summary, don't be naïve: trust and verify.

## Principles For Building Win-Win Relationships With Intermediaries

My research supports the view that win-win relationships with intermediaries are under-pinned by a number of key principles that business schools should apply, as follows:

1. Have a clear strategic rationale and goals
2. Protect the school's reputation
3. Protect the school's and faculty's intellectual property
4. Protect the school's negotiating power
5. Choose the right intermediaries and relationships
6. Choose appropriate programmes
7. Clarify operational responsibilities
8. Understand and agree the financial implications and arrangements
9. Clarify rights and responsibilities in relation to participant data
10. Manage the transfer and sharing of know-how and learning
11. Build the capabilities to support sustainable win-win relationships

Points 2 – 4 might be regarded as gateways that establish clear criteria that must be met before the school proceeds in negotiations with potential intermediary partners. These principles prompt a series of questions that a school will need to address internally. The answers may evolve over time as the school's position and the market change. The answers lie in decisions, capabilities, structures, processes and metrics.

The principles also prompt a series of questions schools need to address with potential intermediary partners in exploring cooperation, in due diligence processes and when renewing agreements. The final answers will need to be reflected in contractual terms and processes.

The principles and questions are iterative, so that answers from an intermediary on a later principle may cause the school to reconsider previous answers. However, it is important for a school to have a robust discussion internally to clarify its position on many of these questions before entering discussions with potential intermediary partners.

### Have A Clear Strategic Rationale And Goals

Before starting discussions with an intermediary on partnering, the school needs to be very clear about

1. Why it wishes to offer online programmes - with specifics and success metrics, and
2. Why it wishes to partner with an intermediary to do so

The potential reasons include:

- Delivering on the school mission by making content and expertise accessible to those for whom the school's traditional business model for executive education does not work because of cost, logistics or existing commitments
- Reaching new audiences – for example expanding from local to regional or regional to global users
- Responding to market trends away from existing face-to-face programmes towards online programmes
- Generating incremental revenue and financial contribution – or protecting existing revenue and contribution from loss to online programmes of other schools / providers
- Generating leads that result in increased enrolment in face-to-face programmes
- Learning about online programme design, delivery and marketing with the strategic intent of doing this in-house

The school needs to prioritise these goals, understanding the implied trade-offs and resolving conflicting priorities within the school. This has to be more than simply the preparation of an aspirational presentation: it has to encompass a process that surfaces the issues and perspectives of different stakeholders and secures commitment from those who will be involved / impacted. In particular, the faculty must actively support this with a full understanding of the implications rather than simply stop objecting to it. The goals must be realistic, for example, it is most unlikely that an intermediary can help a school to develop reputation in an area or region that it has not itself been able to establish. Agreeing metrics for each of these potential outcomes can support a richer discussion among school stakeholders to secure broader support for partnering. At this stage it is also useful to explore how any anticipated incremental income be used: to re-invest in executive education or to support other activities within the school? It might be interesting to ask donors to sponsor the development of online capabilities that are essential to the future of the school in preference to funding a named building or scholarships, but few seem to think this would be a fruitful discussion.

This will be a busy marketplace with changes in technology and market access happening quickly. Schools may find that they need to continuously review their approaches.

Once the school has clarified and articulated its goals, it next needs to analyse what capabilities and resources will be required, referring to the earlier section on the challenges of establishing online programmes. It can then assess which of those it currently has and which it needs to either buy-in or develop. As schools generally have not built the capability sets (including marketing, admission and delivery) required to establish online programmes, this will in turn both build the business case for partnering with an intermediary and generate a list of criteria for the selection of one (or more). Some interviewees suggested that schools often under-estimate the complexity of how the different parts play off together and the challenges of meshing together capabilities that are individually complex. The earlier section on the challenges and the pyramid of competence may provide schools with some guidance on this topic. There is considerable evidence to suggest that a lack of cultural fit is a contributor to the failure of many mergers, so, at this point, schools might also usefully characterise their DNA, including their preferred learning approaches, their global or geographic perspectives and expertise.

Taken together, this clarification of school goals and assessment of what the school wants from an intermediary partner should help the school to determine what role the school wants one or more intermediaries to play in its broader executive education strategy. This should include the holistic view on its channel priorities in relation to B2B clients for open and company-specific programmes and B2C users of open programmes. Does the school want a 'full-service hands-off' model where it gives an intermediary considerable control and autonomy to deliver specified outcomes or a deeper partnership with less control assigned to the intermediary and greater responsibility continuing to reside with the school?

This analysis can also inform the decision on the relative financial and other investment the school is willing to make and will ask of the intermediary partner. A school that has a greater appetite for risk and is prepared to commit its own funds and resources up front can negotiate a very different deal than a school with a low risk appetite and more limited resources.

Finally, this analysis can also indicate the desired time horizon for the relationship. A school that sees an intermediary as a key channel to certain markets for the foreseeable future is likely to take a longer-term perspective on the partnership. In contrast, a school may see the use of an intermediary not as the final destination but as a short-term win / win arrangement that will be instrumental in developing the capabilities needed to take everything back in-house within a few years. Schools need to be clear on their intentions – at least internally – and should probably assume that the intermediaries are sophisticated enough to interpret those intentions if they are not made transparent.

Effective communication with stakeholders and partners is crucial. To secure buy-in across the school's stakeholders, consider the following steps:

- Have faculty meet key intermediary leaders including their academic director to overcome faculty reservations about academic integrity, detractors and resistance to change
- Get the support of senior faculty in creating new programmes and make their personal outcomes obvious early to build clear support from early adopters
- Educate the board of governors about the future need to invest in online learning
- Get everybody involved and everybody informed through top-down and bottom-up communication within the executive education department and across the wider school
- Keep selling the partnership internally – including the choice of partner
- Track the full range of benefits resulting from partner programmes including direct and indirect revenue, learning assets created, and process improvements

Approaching an intermediary with the confidence that comes from clarity on these questions is likely to give superior outcomes by facilitating the transparency that is necessary to build trust with an intermediary (as discussed earlier).

Once the school has clarified its own strategic rationale and is ready to start exploratory discussions with potential intermediary partners, it might usefully start its exploration and due diligence by asking what success looks like for the intermediary: participant numbers, user satisfaction ratings, repeat users, revenue, cashflow, exit value of intermediary?

In addition to asking these questions of the intermediaries themselves, schools might also consider other sources of confirming or disconfirming evidence, including other schools and investors in the sector.

### Protect The School's Reputation

A business school's reputation is a key asset that supports its continued success and that it has earned through years of work and effort. Schools are rightly concerned that partnering with an intermediary could put it at risk.

To understand how this might happen it is useful to refer back to the earlier section on the challenges of establishing an online programme, which would suggest that reputation can be damaged in several ways:

- The programme quality does not conform to that expected of the school in its design, content or operation
- How the programme is taken to market is inconsistent with the school's reputation: positioning of school name and brand; direct communication with potential participants; price discounting; enrolment process
- Enrolment criteria in terms of academic standards, work experience or level of responsibility have been relaxed
- Criteria for receiving certificate are too relaxed: moving away from a requirement for active engagement towards award of a certificate for passive observation of content
- Behaviour inconsistent with school values is tolerated (e.g., diversity, inclusion and equality)

A key risk on quality is that online programmes are 'dumbed down' on content and effort expected from participants for one or more of the following reasons: in order to make them less intimidating to potential participants; to make them feasible and economically viable; to improve completion rates and participant satisfaction. Related to this is the risk that a programme does not reflect the school's DNA in its approach to learning, including the rigour and discipline associated with the specific school. Schools will need to find ways to balance this with the reality of what is feasible on such programmes. They will also need to accept that the intermediary's business model requires some consistency on the programmes they offer. There can be real benefits in having a member of school staff with the necessary credibility mediate between faculty and provider, actively monitoring the design process, including the amount of work to be done by participants.

While the expectation may be that the programme itself is consistent with the DNA and the reputation of the school, interviewees have commented that in the online programmes market, potential participants expect the search and enrolment process to be as easy and slick as buying from Amazon or booking an Uber.  Several interviewees suggested that potential participants can be concerned that a programme from a school they know is being sold by a commercial business that may be operating from another country – raising concern about scams and cyber security. Schools should expect questions from the market on whether this or other intermediaries are legally authorised agents of the school - and be on the watch for scams where others mis-represent that they are.

Expertise and resources in direct marketing is a core element of many B2C-focused intermediaries' value proposition to business schools.  They emphasise digital marketing that targets people who have demonstrated an interest in a specific programme through online searches or viewing web pages.  Enquiries may be followed-up by calls from the intermediary, sometimes from a call centre. This raises a number of concerns.  If the intensity of follow-up on a specific programme becomes excessive, potential participants may feel that they are being stalked.  Equally, too many promotional messages can give the impression that the school is desperate, particularly if the programmes being highlighted feel irrelevant to the potential participant.  Some interviewees expressed concerns that those calling potential participants have little to offer by way of advice on the choice of programmes and leave the targets feeling that they are being aggressively sold to or mis-led on programmes to meet someone's sales targets.  In some countries, there are provisions for cooling-off periods during which a participant is entitled to change their mind and demand a full refund.  This has not always been respected by an intermediary so schools may need to establish customer service and quality control processes to deal with any complaints.  Schools may want to form an opinion on the level of advice that must be provided to potential participants to make an informed decision on whether a programme is suitable.  Schools will also need to establish guidelines on where and how the school's brand and logo can be used in all forms of digital marketing, noting that some schools are prepared to be more aggressive than others in how they use their brands and will allow partners use them

As part of its due diligence process, a school may wish to have some of its staff or associates enrol in programmes other schools offer via the intermediary (as mystery shoppers) and report back on the enquiry to completion process.

On this topic, schools might want to question the assumption that their existing reputation will automatically transfer to the online programmes market.  It might be wiser to assume that the school will have to earn its reputation in this mode, albeit with a good starting point.

An intermediary can potentially harm the reputation of a school through conscious decisions from the top or through the unintended consequences of actions of people further down the organisation.  The consensus of those to whom I spoke is that incidences of the first are rare. However, instances of the second become more of a concern as the intermediaries grow rapidly so that what has been agreed between the school and the intermediary is not properly understood further down the organisation.

This is probably best addressed by an open and honest dialogue between the school and the intermediary on the following questions leading to contractual terms:

- What are the intermediary's processes to ensure that all aspects of programme design are consistent with the school's reputation and DNA?
- How does the intermediary measure programme quality and impact? Is this aligned with the school's approach?
- How will programmes be marketed on social media under or using the school's name, logo and brand? How will this be managed and monitored?
- How will the intermediary want to use the school's brand and logo beyond promoting specific programmes?
- How does the intermediary train the staff who will call potential participants? As educational consultants or as salespeople?
- How will the intermediary ensure it complies with the cooling off period required by any laws in relevant markets? How and how quickly are refunds processed?

### Protect The School's And Faculty's Intellectual Property

Many UNICON members emphasise research-informed insights, frameworks and tools as a competitive differentiator. Faculty typically retain ownership of the outcomes of their work so schools have in place rules and processes to recognise and protect faculty intellectual property rights in the existing business model. Many faculty are rightly concerned to ensure that such protection is extended to the school's online programmes including those designed and delivered with intermediaries and to ensure their IP cannot be used elsewhere without permission and appropriate payment. Schools need to address these faculty concerns early in internal discussions.

Intellectual property can also exist in how generally accepted concepts and tools (such as net present value in finance) are presented for management education. Few members of faculty would presume to use the slides or other materials of their colleagues without express permission. While this might not be enforceable in a court of law, it does constitute part of the rules of engagement within a school and the academic community generally. Again, faculty will expect this behaviour to be respected by intermediaries.

There may also be intellectual property rights in relation to the 'red thread' of programme design. In general, school staff do not acquire intellectual property rights, although faculty may under the existing business model. Online programmes involve the creation of new or the transformation of existing red threads and content presentation. Since the intermediary will be heavily involved in this, there is an issue of ownership and rights in IP that might be considered 'co-designed' by some combination of the faculty, the school and the intermediary. There appears to be significant variation in how much each contributes, depending on the allocation of responsibilities that has been agreed between the school and the intermediary.

The agreement on IP needs to distinguish and appropriately address:

- Existing IP owned by faculty – covering both research and presentation of public concepts

- Existing 'school' IP which it brings to any specific partner programme - including programme 'red threads'
- Co-developed presentation of content e.g., faculty videos
- Co-developed 'red threads'

The partnering agreement will need to clearly define who owns each type of intellectual property and what processes will be implemented to protect this.

The general view of those I interviewed was that ownership of learning assets is one of the big grey areas that need to be discussed and documented. It has proven problematic in some cases where there has not been transparency around expectations, at least partly because, with the benefit of hindsight, the evolution of online learning was not accurately predicted.

Schools that take a holistic view and communicate their expectations seem less likely to encounter problems in the future in relation to IP.

### Protect The School's Negotiating Power

A school that chooses to offer and deliver online programmes only through a single intermediary risks putting itself in a weak negotiating position if the intermediary understands that there would be significant costs to the school of ending that relationship.

A weak negotiating position could manifest itself in a number of ways, including:

- Less advantageous financial terms
- Reduced ability to compel compliance with measures needed to protect the school brand and reputation, as discussed above
- Reduced ability to maintain quality of programmes
- Reduced ability to redefine the agreement to reflect the school's changing needs e.g., help in creating faculty videos may be less valuable now than it was 5 years ago

A school can maintain its power from a negotiating and autonomy perspective by one or more measures to demonstrate that it has credible alternatives to working with its current partner(s):

- Partnering with intermediaries to whom the relationship with the school is no less important than it is to the school
- Not locking itself into long-term contracts
- Avoiding exclusive contracts so it maintains its ability to work with new partners that can provide access to new markets (geographic or segments) or new technology
- Including exit clauses that protect the school from the failings / failure of an intermediary
- Building inhouse capabilities to improve quality of conversation it can have with current intermediary partner(s)
- Working with more than one intermediary
- Appropriate contract terms dealing with exit including notice periods and use of IP

To protect its negotiating power as discussed above, a school will need to have an open dialogue with the intermediary to ensure that there is clarity about any rights or restrictions on entering into other partnerships or the launch of own programmes that might compete against those to be launched under this partnership.

There will also need to be clarity around the exit mechanism if interests diverge.

Schools and intermediaries may also need to agree what restrictions and processes will be applied regarding hiring of the other's faculty / staff.

### Choose The Right Intermediaries And Relationships

As a starting point, it is important to understand that intermediaries differ. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses. Some have greater strengths in programme design while others are better at delivering participants. Some are better with some types of programmes than others. They differ in the markets they can reach: B2B vs B2C, global vs specific regions. They also differ in their goals and culture. Intermediaries can be on a spectrum around how they balance profit vs mission - and between current profit vs long-term share / stakeholder value. Schools need to ensure they are choosing the intermediary or intermediaries that best aligns, while accepting that there will never be a perfect fit or clarity so schools and intermediaries may need to tolerate some ambiguity. Schools should conduct appropriate due diligence on any potential partner.

In some cases, the 'parent' university may already have relationships with partners that make them the default option, but it should not be assumed that the intermediary appropriate for degree programmes can offer what is required for executive education.

In approaching these negotiations, it is helpful to understand what value is being created and how it can be shared - e.g., using learning assets elsewhere, increasing the value of other programmes.

The internal process of developing a clear and shared rationale and goals together with an assessment of the school's current capabilities should create a 'wish list' of what the school expects an intermediary to provide both in capabilities and outcomes. It may point to working with several intermediaries as part of its channel management strategy e.g., one with strong B2B capabilities and another with a stronger B2C offering. The earlier sections on protecting the school's reputation and IP provide gateways or 'order qualifiers' that need to be satisfied before the school proceeds with discussions with any intermediary – allowing it to eliminate from consideration some potential providers. The earlier section on the process for launching new programmes and the competence pyramid can provide useful guidance. And a note of caution from the experience of others is that the school may not at first glance fully understand what capabilities it needs. There is a strong argument for taking note of the intermediary's assessment of the school's capabilities.

One key question a school needs to address is whether it wishes to have one or several partners. There benefits and risks associated with each approach. As noted above, the intermediaries have different strengths, so there could be a logic in working with more than one to access different markets, offer different types of programmes and learn a wider array of skills. Working with several intermediaries also spreads the risk associated with the failure of a partner or a change of ownership that leads to significant changes in the intermediary strategy.  This effectively designs resilience and redundancy into the school's programme and channel management structure.  On the other hand, working with a partner demands effort and resources from the school, so the school needs to decide if it has the capacity to work with more than one, or if it needs to start with one and then potentially add others later.

The other high level strategic question is the nature of the relationship the school wants to have with each intermediary.  Some schools have preferred 'partnering' to match capabilities with heavy involved in the decisions around the positioning, design, marketing and delivery of programmes.  Other have preferred something more hands-off, where they felt like the silent partner.  Linked to this is the preferred duration of contracts and arrangements for the renewal or termination of agreements.

The general view is that reaching an agreement with a potential intermediary partner is not and should not be a quick process.  Schools will need to undertake a comprehensive due diligence process that will likely take many months before the design of the first programme starts in earnest, so they need to manage the expectations of their stakeholders.  Schools will likely want to start parallel initial conversations with more than one potential intermediary partner before moving towards a preferred choice.  There are clear parallels with the processes that company-specific programme clients employ before committing to a school for a significant leadership programme.  Early in the due diligence process, the school may wish to have some of its own staff go through programmes offered by intermediary as mystery shoppers, walking through the process from enrolment via delivery to certification.   As the market is maturing, before partnering, schools can now use reference schools in a way that was not as valuable in the early development of intermediaries.

The most obvious question to any potential intermediary partner is how interested it is in partnering with the school.  Be careful that they are committed to mutual success, not just getting the school on their books to impress investors!  Remember that the intermediary will be 'courting' the school in the early phase.

The next questions should focus on understanding how well the intermediary can deliver on the school's goals.  Barriers to entry to claiming to be an ed tech partner are relatively low, so schools should be asking potential partners about their track record in managing at scale across the target audience. The intermediary should be able to walk the potential school partner through the process of design, enrolment and delivery and be clear how much time from faculty and executive education staff will be expected.  They should be able to demonstrate the timelines for launching new programmes, from agreement to design to marketing to delivery.  As noted earlier, velocity is a critical success factor in the online programmes market, so the school should be assessing how quickly the partnership can get a programme to market and iterate for improvement.

The ability to provide access to new markets is a key part of the value proposition of many intermediaries.  What evidence can they provide of their ability to do so? What is their approach to pricing: value pricing or chasing sales by discounting?  The latter risks damaging the school brand and provoking a race to the bottom.  In what markets are they registered with any relevant regulators? If accreditation for CPD or towards qualifications is to be a part of the value proposition to participants, can the intermediary demonstrate familiarity with the qualifications frameworks of relevant markets?

It is also essential that schools understand how the relationship will operate: how many people from the intermediary will be involved in the relationship; how will they be coordinated; who will be the key contact person? The school will also want to ensure that the intermediary has a sound on-boarding process for new partners. As part of its due diligence process, the school should be forming a good sense of the culture of the intermediary and whether it is likely to prove a good fit with the school. Schools should be expecting partners to constantly evolve and improve their capabilities, so they need to choose partners for tomorrow not just for today.

Of course, the discussions internally and with potential intermediary partners can reach only a certain level without consider the programmes to be offered. A school will need to return to this section after using the next section to identify likely candidate programmes to be offered with each potential partner.

### Choose Appropriate Programmes

In moving from discussion of partnering in principle to specific programmes, the school and intermediary will need to agree which programmes should be offered first.

Established intermediaries are becoming more discerning about which programmes to offer as their portfolios have grown and the market potentially moves towards saturation. Schools would do well to assume that intermediaries will not agree to develop or maintain programmes that do not meet their goals, and that their goals may not be completely aligned with those of the school. For example, the intermediary may prefer to leverage topics and content the school already has on its degree or in-person executive education programmes while the school may see this as an opportunity to develop something new. Equally, the intermediary may want access to the school's gurus who are likely to attract big numbers while the school may prefer to involve other members of its faculty. There may also be differences in the time horizon between the school and intermediary, so that one prefers programmes that get immediate market results while the other may prefer programmes that may start slowly before growing enrolment. There must be some give and take between the school and potential intermediaries on these issues.

Few schools that decide to launch online programmes will be short of ideas from individual faculty and others. Given the investment and effort required to establish programmes, schools need to filter these suggestions to ensure they pursue only those with a reasonable chance of running regularly over multiple years with sufficient participants to be economically viable. This suggests that a number of filters need to be applied:

1. Is there sufficient market demand for a programme on this topic from this school?
2. Can the programme be delivered online in a way that is compatible with the school's DNA?
3. Are the relevant faculty willing and able to commit the time required to develop this programme?
4. Is the programme financially viable for the school and the intermediary?

Schools may be tempted to rely on their own knowledge of their own markets. While this has some validity, its needs to be questioned if schools are seeking to reach new participants in their own regions and even more so if they want to reach foreign markets. Superior ability to identify areas of sufficient demand in the market is a key part of the value proposition of most intermediaries, believing they know more about what customers want than do schools because they are scraping so much data from search engines and electronic analysis of conversations. They may have a more objective view than schools that can sometimes see what they want to see and presume that the market wants what faculty want to teach. The school and intermediary will need to develop ways of aggregating and balancing their market data and continuing to monitor it as a programme is promoted. This is ultimately a matter of negotiation and agreement as neither partner can impose programmes on the other.

Not all topics are well-suited to be addressed in asynchronous online programmes: some parts of learning are best kept for in-person live learning. Equally, the learning methodologies that characterise certain schools (and might be considered part of their DNA) are not easily replicated in an asynchronous programme with 300 participants, e.g., the case method. Accordingly, schools need to consider if the proposed topic can be addressed in a programme that reasonably reflects the school in all aspects while meeting the participant's 'job to be done'. For example: how will the programme develop critical thinking skills, how will the programme build a community spirit / shared learning? What criteria will be set for enrolment and for completion / certification? Are the live components required to support deep learning and networking compatible with this format? Is content designed to be modular and re-usable or is it tightly aligned for effectiveness on this specific programme. The business model of some intermediaries relies heavily on a consistent learning methodology, based on what they believe works for online programmes, and this needs to be taken into consideration when choosing programmes.

Choosing the right faculty and other contributors is key to the success of any online programme. 'Guru' programmes with big names exploring hot topics (e.g., AI) can be very appealing to participants and secure large enrolment numbers. In contrast, skills-based programmes may be better delivered by less high-profile faculty or (subject to school policy) by non-tenure track faculty, while programmes that emphasise the application of insights to the participant's context or employer may require a mix. This choice has implications not just for revenue but also for faculty / contributor availability and motivation.

Developing a new programme can take 4 – 6 months of elapsed time and require significant time and flexibility from faculty in preparation, recording and related meetings as well as in learning from and about technology. Schools need to ensure that faculty fully understand the time and effort they are committing to when they agree to develop an online course. The school may need to consider the use and role of non-tenure track faculty or other contributors to address issues here. Schools need to create the right incentives for faculty and others to ensure their active engagement.

The combination of market data together with decisions on programme design and faculty will provide the basis for a projecting the economics of the programme, from the initial offering over its expected life.  The school and the intermediary will need to be convinced that this is viable for both to justify the required investment.

As discussed earlier in this paper, there are no guarantees of success in the market for any programme regardless of the predictions of the early market research or of the quality of the programme: while some may prove to be block-busters, others will attract sufficient participants to be worth continuing and others will not.  The school needs to establish its own policies and processes to adapt these programmes that have failed or ultimately terminate them, thinking like a venture capitalist.

In addition to thinking about each programme as an individual offering, research indicates that the schools are considering how each will be positioned relative to and aligned with existing school programmes in all delivery formats (face-to-face, live online and asynchronous) and including those created and delivered with other partners or by the school itself.

In addition to discussing specifics about the first programmes to be launched, schools also need to agree with intermediaries the process for agreeing future programme topics, faculty, content and learning approaches.  While this should be collaborative there does need to be documented agreement on the rights of each of the school and the intermediary.

The partners also need to agree processes for reporting on programme enrolment and for dealing with those titles that are struggling.

### Clarify Operational Responsibilities

The choice of intermediary and the nature of the relationship together with the choice of programmes will inevitably contribute to determining the allocation of responsibilities between the school and the intermediary, at least at a high level.  However, as noted earlier, establishing a sustainable programme and then a portfolio of them is a challenging exercise involving the coordination of many activities.  There are suggestions that business schools encounter problems because they fail to commit the necessary resources and have unrealistic expectations of what the intermediary can and will do.  In this context, it is vital to have a more granular view of who will do what in the partnership, distinguishing decision-making from execution and bearing in mind the importance of velocity.  This detail will also need to reflect how much control the school feels that it needs to have, which may be driven by how much it trusts the intermediary.

In the interest of maximising velocity and optimisation, the intermediary will likely want to keep its product team close to the design team to give programmes the best chance of success in the market by continuously monitoring what participants want, using data on the response to what they are marketing.

The competence pyramid can also provide a structure for thinking about what needs to be done. At the operational competence level, the five steps in the iterative process of establishing an online programme together with the more detailed underlying tasks (See Exhibit 1) can provide a useful basis for clarifying the responsibilities and rights of each partner in a detailed manner.  This can then support of the design of the school's organisational structure and processes for dealing with partners and their programmes.  Simply walking through the detail on each of the steps and noting which of the school and the intermediary will take decisions and execute them can provide a good starting point for a transparent discussion to ensure there are no gaps and there is reasonable delineation.

Interviewees suggested that a few aspects of operational responsibility (and rights) can prove particularly contentious and therefore worthy of attention.

The first is the detail of programme design, including the red thread that provides a coherent learning journey and ensures compatibility with the school's DNA.  Two potentially opposing views need to be reconciled.  The first is that the school has complete control of all academic matters. The opposing view is that the intermediary has been appointed to bring expertise in designing online programmes that will be successful in the market.  The answer to this paradox may be best resolved by seeing the school in a continuous quality assurance role. This role should be handled by someone within the school who is responsible for coordinating programme design activities liaising with both partner staff and relevant faculty.  Ideally this person will have multiple years experience in executive education, so they are credible with all stakeholders.

The second contentious point is faculty scheduling.  It typically takes about 6 months from agreeing to launch a new programme to first delivery due to the lengthy process for developing course structure and content before getting into the studio for recording.  However, it can range from 4 - 9 months depending on faculty availability and how easy it is to get alignment around content. Intermediaries would like faculty to be available on demand to progress decisions and the creation of content in the interests of velocity.  The faculty can slow down the process because they do not have the same sense of urgency with on-line that comes from knowing they will be in front of a live class on a specific date.  This can result in issues around availability, preparation and participation in the process.  This can delay course launches and create production scheduling problems that lead to poor use of intermediary resources with cancellations at short notice.  While intermediaries recognise that some of this is an inevitable part of working with schools and faculty, they expect the school to put in place processes to find a reasonable balance between their needs, the needs of the school to have faculty deliver on other programmes and the desire of faculty to make effective and efficient use of their time.   This includes steps to get faculty to see creating and supporting these online programmes as a high priority use of their time.

As noted earlier, enrolment to online programmes seems to be more influenced than traditional programmes by what might be considered 'point of sale' marketing activities, including pricing (and discounting) and tactical marketing spend.  In this context, it is important to be clear who makes what decisions on these, both when programmes are launched and if enrolment numbers are proving low.

The next issue of concern is compliance with school governance and policies.  As discussed earlier, the school's brand and reputation are a key part of the value proposition to participants and clients. The cultural and other differences between the school and the intermediary can create problems in this respect.  The school will need robust processes to ensure compliance and quality assurance covering the participant experience from registration through programme to receiving a certificate of completion.

There are other areas that are less contentious, but still require decisions and resourcing by the school. One interviewee commented that schools do not always understand how much needs to be done to establish a programme. A significant part of the development cycle is coordinating with faculty and dealing with administration that includes legal contracts and clearances. Staff in many functions within the school will also need to interact with the intermediary on issues such as enrolment, programme delivery and the issue of certificates to participants.

Much of the above has been related to establishing programmes. The school will also need to decide who within the school will be responsible for managing the overall relationship with the intermediary both on a day-to-day basis and also at the strategic level. Those chosen need to be credible with all relevant stakeholders within the school and the intermediary. They will need to command the trust of the faculty to mitigate any temptation they feel to impose themselves in programme design or commercial decisions.

The challenge of optimising the outcomes of a specific programme highlights further questions to be explored with partners, including: what programme feedback they will provide to identify what can be done better immediately and over time? How quickly will this be provided? What will be quantitative and what will be qualitative? How much will be based on participant evaluation scores and comments? How much will be based on tracking of participant actions and behaviour on the programme?

The school will also want to understand the intermediary's own governance processes, including those to ensure that what is agreed between the school and the intermediary is applied across the organisation, particularly in relation to the use of the school brand and programme pricing.

### Understand And Agree The Financial Implications And Arrangements

Online programmes have financial implications for three different stakeholders: the intermediary, the school and the contributing faculty. The school needs to be clear that it and the other parties properly understand them.

When negotiating financial terms with an intermediary, schools need to ensure they are creating the right incentives for both parties to secure their engagement and their good behaviour. This needs to reflect an understanding of the value of the relationship to each partner, including not just the obvious financial investment and returns. For a school, the other benefits can include acquisition of knowledge, new learning assets and new relationships. For an intermediary, the association with a school can support its efforts to raise capital from venture capital or private equity sources. It is also helpful to look at individual programmes and the portfolio as a whole. The pie that is being created may be bigger than a school thinks, so it can benefit from sizing and valuing it before starting to slice it. This has implications for selling the deal to faculty and the wider school.

Developing and establishing new programmes involves substantial upfront costs for the school and the intermediary in expectation of future revenue and profits.  It is important to be clear much Investment in programme development and marketing will be required, how will it be phased, approved and controlled.  The school needs to assess how much it can afford to invest in developing its portfolio now and whether it is effectively asking the intermediary to sponsor its foray into this new market.  In assessing the financial viability of new intermediary relationships and new programmes, it is important to look at both cash flow and profitability.

Schools should be wary of any conscious or unconscious bias in the numbers being presented to them by an intermediary.  In the initial stages of courtship, the school should consider if the intermediary may be tempted to overstate the likely demand as a part of its pitch to get the school to commit to working with it.  Alternatively, it may be ‘under-promising’ to protect itself and it have the potential to over-deliver later.  Given this context, schools should be questioning its potential or active intermediary partner on the source and reliability of the predictions it is offering.  As the relationship matures, the school should be tracking the accuracy of predictions on numbers.

The other challenge is the source of leads and participants on the programme: a deal that assigns a significant share of revenue to the intermediary on the assumption that it will generate most of the participants may rankle with the school if it directs ‘bulk-buy’ B2B participants to a programme.  A number of schools indicated they are now becoming more concerned by this issue as the market evolves and reflecting this reality as they renew their agreements with intermediaries.  This can also apply to the potential conflict caused by the school offering programmes in different modes through different channels. One school has addressed this issue by creating incentives for cross-selling by the school and intermediary teams so that the school refers enquiries for asynchronous programmes to the intermediary and the intermediary refers enquiries for in-person programmes. This can help ensure the school and partnership do not turn away or lose out on enquiries.

Schools and intermediaries will also need to explore practical issues related to invoicing participants.  They need to consider the impact of sales taxes being charged from another jurisdiction.  Some schools have reported that this invoicing from a country other than the location of the school creates concerns for some participants about whether they are becoming victims of a “scam.”

The deal between the school and the intermediary is one aspect of programme and portfolio financials and economics.  The other side is the terms agreed with faculty.  As before, it is important to create the right incentives for the school and for faculty, securing their engagement and their good behaviour.  Again, there is a significant early commitment of time and energy by faculty in the expectation of subsequent payoffs.  As a result of this and the uncertainty, some schools have in the past struggled to get faculty to engage with these programmes but stories of programmes attracting 300+ participants per intake and generating strong revenue streams for the successful faculty may be changing attitudes.

Most schools seem to regard involvement with these online programmes as being outside normal teaching load because they are new and because the required working pattern is very different e.g., lots of weekends and nights working on content and dealing with the intermediary.  The specific terms with individual faculty members will need to reflect the likely revenue share the school expects to earn and the effort required of faculty.

A number of people pointed out that individual asynchronous online programmes tend to rely heavily on a small number of faculty contributors and that there are not many repeat appearances across programmes. As a result, few contributors have a diversified portfolio, and their risk is heavily concentrated in a single programme. This can provide a really good revenue stream for some faculty but not for others, so it is important to manage the expectations of faculty around potential outcomes. This variability can cause two different tensions with faculty. The first is between those faculty whose programmes are doing well and those whose are not, with the resultant differentials in financial rewards. The second tension is between the member of faculty whose programme is struggling and the executive education team. While the team may be willing to accept this as one of those programmes with acceptable but not outstanding numbers that are an inevitable part of a portfolio, the faculty member may expect more effort to improve enrolment. In this case, sound business decisions may be derailed by an individual faculty agenda. This can spill over to the relationship with the intermediary which may feel it is being forced to make inefficient investments to support a low-uptake programme because of school internal politics. The lesson from a number of schools is to consider carefully how much transparency to have within the school about financial arrangement.

Most faculty arrangements are between the school and individual faculty members, which likely reflects the reality of the school context. One intermediary interviewee asked if schools might usefully consider sharing faculty compensation across programmes, effectively having faculty share in the success of the portfolio rather than concentrate their risk on their single or small number of programmes (adopting the venture capitalist perspective). This might encourage the sharing of learning amongst faculty. While the reaction of other interviewees suggests this is an ambitious suggestion, there does seem to be merit in having this discussion with faculty as the school explores partnering with an intermediary. However, I suspect that faculty on the more successful programmes might want to renegotiate once they see the enrolment numbers on different programmes.

### Clarify Rights And Responsibilities In Relation To Participant Data

Participant data has value to both schools and intermediaries in two ways. The first and most obvious type of data is contact information as a source of leads to sell that individual a place on programmes through direct marketing. If we move beyond considering a narrowly defined B2C market, information on the individual’s employer also provides a source of information for B2B marketing, particularly for smaller and medium-sized enterprises. The second type of data is that which can be gathered from how participants have engaged with programmes on which they are enrolled, and which can inform improvements to the quality or alignment of programmes.

One of the interviewees described individual participant contact information as an annoyingly complicated topic with lots of barriers around the school getting access to it, while noting that it tends to be at the bottom of the list, so it never gets properly resolved.

There appear to be a number of barriers to schools being able to access and effectively use this participant data.  The first is that GDPR and other data protection laws may restrict what information the information the intermediary is allowed to gather and what it is allowed to share with external organisations, including the school that believes it has a right to this information.  This becomes more complicated when multiple legal jurisdictions are involved, e.g., if a person in the European Union enrols via Emeritus in Singapore for a programme from a school in the USA.  In some countries, proof of identity may be required when enrolling for a programme which may further complicate the matter.  Both intermediary and school need to ensure compliance with relevant legislation so it may not be possible to collect and share the information the school would ideally like to access.  There are also non-legal challenges in this.  As part of their business model of operating at scale, intermediaries need to employ relatively consistent systems and processes.  Different schools requesting different participant information, can create challenges in designing enquiry and application forms.  There are also challenges about how the participant information that can be shared is actually transferred to the school.  An automated flow of data to school contact management systems such as SalesForce is the ambition, but emailing spreadsheets seems to be closer to the reality.  This can be hampered by lack of clarity within the growing intermediaries on what is permitted and who is responsible for signing-off on these transfers.  Interviewees also questioned whether school contact management systems are capable of dealing with the increase in scale: moving from face-to-face programmes with 50 participants to online programmes with 300 participants creates certain challenges.

Sharing of aggregated information on how participants engage with the programme appears to be less complicated.  This may be due to the less stringent laws on the transfer of aggregated data.  It may also be due to the shared interest of both school and intermediary in improving the quality and alignment of programmes to increase enrolment and financial pay-off.

Given the above, the school and intermediary need to clarify what personal and contact information the intermediary can and will gather and share on participants and on individuals who express interest in the school's programmes but do not enrol.  This needs to be supported by questions on ensuring compliance with legal requirements and restrictions in different countries (GDPR).  The intermediary should also explain how it will transfer the appropriate data.

The questions on sharing data on participant learning are simpler.  What information will the intermediary share with the from participants on its programmes, when and how?  What information will it share with the school on what it has learned across its full portfolio of programmes, including those of other schools?

### Manage The Transfer And Sharing Of Know-How And Learning

Many schools have recognised that they need to undertake a digital transformation - 'we are all digital now'.  They see the need to build their internal capabilities, skills and craft in creating, editing and combining digital content with in-person content to offer the programmes that are now being demanded by clients and participants.  It is no longer sufficient to have a specialised team that can do this: people across the executive education team need to have meaningful capabilities in this area if the department is to evolve into a digitally enabled business.  Some articulate learning from the intermediaries as a key part of the rationale for partnering.  One interviewee highlighted that the right to use internally the learning assets co-created with the intermediary has greatly improved the quality of face-to-face programmes through new videos, better presentation of tools and new approaches to assessment.

The school will want to understand what support the intermediary will provide to the school and its faculty in the early stages of programme and relationship development.  It will also need to assess how transparent the intermediary is prepared to be, which is essential if the school is to learn and develop its capabilities.  The intermediary will likely have an incentive to transfer some operational knowledge, as a school that lacks the basic operational capabilities may prove to be a frustrating partner.  This may also apply to some of the knowledge about optimising programmes and marketing to improve their learner and commercial outcomes.

The willingness of the intermediary to share knowledge is one part of the equation.  The other is how effective the school is at absorbing, processing and applying the knowledge. There have been suggestions that limited band width in schools means that some are relying on osmosis rather than actively managing for learning.  One interviewee noted that 'if there are no smart goals for learning then it will not happen'.  Others commented that the school cannot learn everything at once but rather in steps, which suggests a phased learning process using an agile mind-set with an outline road map rather than detailed steps.

As a starting point, schools might usefully clarify why they want to learn.  Some aim to run their own online programmes in the future.  Others want to build or enhance their ability to create and deliver online components of hybrid programmes.  Once it has made that decision, a school can identify what capabilities it needs, assess its current capabilities and highlight any gaps.  Those capabilities might include:

- Design and delivery of online programmes – what does and does not work
- Capturing and using data to track learner progress
- Using participant feedback and data on behaviour to improve programme impact, quality and alignment
- Delivering programmes at scale
- Marketing and enrolment in the digital market

The school also needs to be clear who needs to learn: the institution (school or executive education); individual employees; faculty.

The first step in capturing learning may be to understand what the intermediary does, how this differs from what the school does and how well it works.  This can be done from conscious transfer by the intermediary (e.g., in their coaching of faculty on content preparation and recording), by observation and by interrogation (consciously asking intermediary people what they are doing and why).  One of the most effective means of learning seems to be operating joint teams that include school and intermediary staff from multiple functions and having school staff effectively shadow intermediary staff on the design of programmes and the creation of digital content.

This information gathered needs to be documented, analysed and shared across the school team. This 'knowing' phase may be relatively easy at business schools that are specialists in acquiring knowledge. The 'doing' phase of deploying this learning may prove more difficult. One interviewee was 'not convinced that findings reported by the partner are being implemented'. Schools need to establish processes and metrics for the application of what has been learned on the school's own programmes in all delivery modes and in its processes.

**Build The Capabilities To Support Sustainable Win-Win Relationships**

Schools will need to ask themselves what capabilities they will need to develop to be valued by intermediaries and users, consistent with the desired nature of the relationship. As noted earlier, it can be useful to distinguish decision-making and execution. The process for establishing programmes and the competence pyramid can provide some guidance. It is also useful to ask potential intermediary partners what capabilities they will require from the school so the combined partnership can operate effectively. This should cover not just programme design and delivery, but also management processes including in decision-making and information sharing.

As noted earlier in this paper, one of the distinguishing differences between business schools and the new intermediaries is the pace at which they work. This has been identified as a significant potential source of conflict in relationships, so schools need to increase the speed of their decision-making and execution. This may require significant changes to the processes within the school. Being forced to learn to make and execute decisions more quickly may be one of the indirect benefits of partnering with an intermediary! This has links back to the need for the school to actively commit to working with an intermediary to deliver online programmes. Recruiting and incentivising the people needed to operate these processes may require some rethinking of school HR policies.

Most obviously, from a day-to-day operational perspective, the school will need people with the technical, administration and coordination skills to execute the responsibilities assigned to the school in its deal with the intermediary. These people will need to develop enough knowledge of the responsibilities assumed by the intermediary to have a meaningful and constructive dialogue. At a more strategic level, the school will need a team that combines people with two complementary skill sets. The first is those with the deep and broad experience of education to understand how the partners and their programmes form part of the school's overall programmes and channels strategy. The second group is people who have deep technology and digital market experience, including possibly a digital learning director. These people need to learn from each other so that everyone on the team understands enough to have meaningful discussion with intermediaries. It is worth noting that a school interested in partnering with an intermediary would do well to hire some of these technology people as soon as it starts investigating options as they can add considerable value to the exploration and due diligence process.

Most schools have opted to have a close relationship with intermediaries rather than a hands-off one. The people in the school dealing with intermediaries need to have strong relationship management skills to build trust and open dialogue while protecting the school's interests. They need to find the balance between managing the intermediary to avoid risk to the school while collaborating to improve outcomes, which one interviewee described as 'compassionately managing the relationship'. The team needs to be able to represent the school to the partner, explaining the rationale for decisions, while at the same time understanding the intermediary's business model and financials to make sense of what they are doing and why. This understanding of the intermediary business model and the profitability of individual programme titles and the overall portfolio will help the school to influence tactical marketing actions (such as marketing spend and price discounting) to increase enrolment. Many schools adopt this 'bow-tie' model of multi-level relationship management for their B2B executive education clients, so it should not be unfamiliar although the roles are being reversed.

The relationship should evolve and can become more hands-off as shared trust is established, but the school should plan to devote considerable time to developing the relationship and programmes in the early days. It will need to keep investing time and effort thereafter.

It is worth noting that some of the larger intermediaries have far larger organisations (by headcount) than the executive education team of any business school. Many are operating on a global basis, so someone sitting in a business school on the east coast of the USA can be working with intermediary staff in multiple locations around the world, in different time zones and with different languages and cultures. The staff assigned by the school to work with the intermediary need to be capable of operating in such a context. As is the case with some of larger corporate clients, the school may need help to navigate partner organisation, possibly through an identified key contact person on the intermediary team.

Designing and developing new online courses requires faculty to develop new skills (e.g., speaking to camera instead of to a class of participants) and to work with new schedules (e.g., allocating time at short notice for recordings or meeting with the programme design team). It will likely require new faculty compensation terms and the differing commercial outcomes of programmes can generate very different financial outcomes for faculty. The school team dealing with intermediary partners needs to include people with the credibility and authority to deal effectively with faculty, having conversations with individual faculty members unlike anything they have had before.

The ability of faculty to quickly develop and record high quality content and their self-confidence around this is a key factor in achieving 'velocity' in establishing new programmes which supports commercial success for the intermediary, the school and the faculty. As a result, schools should be investing in pre-training interested faculty on skills needed, building on what they may have learned from online live delivery during the pandemic. Many of the intermediaries are eager to help with this process. A number of interviewees noted that they can be planning 6 - 8 months in advance around topics and faculty. They encourage on-going conversations to accelerate this process. Intermediaries would like to see schools build a pipeline of interested faculty who have relevant content and are capable of creating to programmes. One way to do this is for the school's online learning team to ask faculty three questions: who should we put you in front of; what will you tell them and what they will get out of this? Doing this in advance can make it easier to work with partners.

The schools should be asking who they will be dealing with from a strategic and an operational perspective and what experience they have in executive education, so they understand faculty and learning processes.  This should include identifying central contact points who can help overcome the challenges of dealing with multiple people in increasingly large intermediaries.

## Conclusion

The ability to deliver online, whether that is stand-alone programmes or as part of a hybrid programme, has become a core capability for the executive education operations of business schools.  Intermediaries have developed strong capabilities in designing and delivering such programmes.  They have also become a key channel to reaching users for open programmes.  Schools need to make informed decisions on whether or not to work with such intermediaries and how.  This paper has presented a series of principles that underpin win-win relationships between schools and intermediaries.  It highlighted some of the key questions that need to be addressed to apply them effectively.  It has also proposed some new perspectives that can inform consideration of those questions.

Schools that decide to offer online programmes, and particularly those that choose to work with intermediaries, now need to look at the big picture of their entire programme portfolio and their distribution channels to reflect the changing market, taking a holistic perspective.

## Acknowledgements

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## Exhibit 1 – Activities To Establish An Online Programme

**Time →**

**Decide strategic positioning**

- Identify valued participant / client – who is this programme for
- Define value proposition – why should they choose this programme – grounded in 'the job to be done' (topic and outcomes), reflecting participant commitment / experience (time, location)

**Design the programme**

- Choose learning platform – e.g., Canvas, others
- Choose pedagogy / learning approach – what techniques will be used
- Map red thread of story line / messages
- Choose faculty and other contributors
- Identify relevant existing content
- Create new video content: preparatory slides, walk-through, film, review, edit
- Ensure the time required of participants is appropriate and aligned with what is being signalled to them in marketing, including considering the impact of language ability
- Develop assignments to apply learning
- Plan live sessions
- Plan approach to providing support

**Take the programme to market**

- Listing on school / intermediary sites
- Active digital marketing
- Follow-up with those who have expressed / demonstrated interest
- Enrolment

**Deliver the programme**

- Hosting
- Technical support
- Learning manager / tutor

**Learn from feedback**

- Quality / impact
- Improve the positioning, content, structure, look & feel of the programme based on feedback

## Exhibit 2 - Intermediaries Relationship Diagnostic

Schools that are already engaged with intermediaries can use the principles as a diagnostic by asking how well it scores on each and identify opportunities for improvement.

| **Principles** | **Strongly disagree** | **Disagree** | **Neither agree nor disagree** | **Agree** | **Strongly agree** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Has a clear strategic rationale and goals | | | | | |
| Protects the school's reputation | | | | | |
| Protects the school's and faculty's intellectual property | | | | | |
| Protects the school's negotiating power | | | | | |
| Chooses the right intermediaries and relationships | | | | | |
| Chooses appropriate programmes | | | | | |
| Has clarified operational responsibilities | | | | | |
| Understands and agrees the financial implications and arrangements | | | | | |
| Has clarified rights and responsibilities in relation to participant data | | | | | |
| Manages the transfer and sharing of know-how and learning | | | | | |
| Has built the capabilities to support sustainable win-win relationships | | | | | |

## References

[1] This has been partly inspired by a similar pyramid of competence for the accounting function presented in CFO - Architect of the Corporation's Future by PricewaterhouseCoopers Financial & Cost Management Team, 1997