A Conceptual Instructional Design Model for Executive Education

Received: 30 October 2023; Revised: 15 January 2024; Published: 02 February 2024

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Abstract:

This paper presents a conceptual instructional design (ID) model for executive education derived from business school good practice and education theory. A review of executive education literature finds that today's executive education offerings are required to be real-world oriented, closely aligned with the demands of the post-pandemic workplace, attuned to the changing needs and circumstances of adult learners and sufficiently able to deliver immersive learning. A reconnaissance investigation of 14 top-ranked business schools identifies the most frequently adopted teaching and learning approaches in executive education considered as good practice for the sector. These include experiential learning, collaborative learning, and technology-enabled learning. The proposed conceptual instructional design model is rooted in these approaches alongside three key principles that underpin experiential learning, namely authenticity, reflection and collaboration. Moreover the model proposes ADDIE supported teaching approaches to ensure the realisation of these principles within an appropriate constructive learning environment (CLE). Informed by activity theory, an 'activity system' is presented as the outer shell of the model to ensure that an executive education-oriented CLE is informed by learner needs and authentic context.

Keywords: experiential learning, activity theory, constructive learning, business schools

1. Introduction

Defined as 'short, intensive non-degree programs offered by university business schools to attract people who are in or close to top executive positions' (Amdam, 2020, p.2), and from the perspective of one top UK business school as, 'A portfolio of training and development programmes designed by business scholars and industry experts; learning experiences that empower business leaders and decision-makers to navigate the uncertainty ahead, with clarity, certainty and confidence' (Imperial College Business School, 2022), executive training has been a pillar of the university business school for the last forty years.

Conger and Xin (2000) consider the evolution of executive education began in the early eighties as primarily lectures, seminars and case studies offered by university-based programmes or specialist training organisations, initially mainly related to functional areas of business and management (marketing, human resources, finance etc.). Then over the following decades, within the context of fierce global competition and rapid advances in technology, businesses became more interested in mergers, acquisitions, alliances and cost cutting, and began to require more complex organisational competencies both for the moment and for the future. Such developments were already leading to a switch from teacher to learner centered programmes, and also to a move from the study of static case studies to dealing with real-life problems. Later, social changes recognising equality, diversity, inclusion etc., and other ongoing changes to the business environment (sustainability, environmental issues, corporate governance etc.) would give rise to further demand for customised programmes. However, individual motivations for learners would remain diverse (Mahapatra & Dash, 2022), such as learning new ideas, refreshing knowledge and skills, taking stock of careers or beginning a new work identity (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007).

Yet nothing could prepare businesses or indeed business schools for the real-life problems arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, which would test 'the resilience, leadership and ability to manage organizations amid radical, ever-changing uncertainty' (Iñiguez & Lorange 2022, p. vii) and also accelerate changes, particularly in the development and acceptability of online education and training, leading Iñiguez and Lorange (2022) to surmise the future of education as being (i) increasingly hybrid - synchronous, asynchronous, using a variety of digitally available resources (ii) requiring flexibility and adaptation to learner requirements, personality and circumstances, and (iii) having stronger links with global citizenship and employability (2022, p. viii). Today, business schools need to adapt not only to the changing needs of businesses but also to help organisations adopt new strategic directions within environments of uncertainty and risk. It could also be argued that business schools themselves need to adopt a larger societal responsibility to help businesses cope, grow and contribute in this new era (e.g. LeClaire, 2022).

This paper aims to identify appropriate instructional design for executive education, given both the changing business environment and the evolving needs of today's learners. Recent changes to the business environment have been significant. The needs of firms for appropriate knowledge and competencies have never been greater, whilst the learning needs of students have also evolved significantly over a short time. Gaining an appreciation of appropriate instructional design and those features most suitable for executive education, based on existing good practice and academic insight,

is of significant practical use to business schools and other training providers operating in an extremely competitive environment (Roos, 2022), also consisting of MOOCs (massive open online courses), university affiliated corporations and consultants (Chakravarthy, 2022). Whilst instructional design models per se have been explored in the academic literature, they have not been well considered within the context of executive education.

This paper begins with a discussion on the research context of (i) instructional design and (ii) executive education, before reporting on a reconnaissance exercise to identify existing best practice of teaching and learning approaches adopted by the world's top business schools. This exercise found that active learning, experiential learning and other practice-led and collaborative approaches are already highly prevalent in executive education. These features are then defined, refined and illustrated before being discussed further within the context of relevant theories and frameworks, namely activity theory, and mARC, an instructional design model developed by Radović et al. (2021) for experiential learning in the higher education sector. Together these perspectives inform an overarching, pragmatic instructional design framework, which benefits from both theory and practice.

2. Research Approach

This paper has relied upon papers from academic journals and books in the field of education to present an understanding of the research context. Search terms such as 'instructional design', 'pedagogy framework' and 'executive education' were initially entered into Google Scholar, to generate relevant search results. A reconnaissance exercise was embarked upon to understand the current state of play in executive education as represented by 14 of the world's top business schools ranked by the Financial Times. According to McNiff, Whitehead and Lomax (2003), reconnaissance refers to those activities that can help a researcher to determine 'where I was at, what I hoped to achieve and how I thought that I would get there' or, 'where I was starting from in my real-world situation' (p.35).

Thematic analysis and coding (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) were applied to informational text from the executive education areas of these institutions' websites in order to identify the most frequently adopted approaches to teaching and learning. With such highly ranked institutions located in the US, Canada, France, Spain and the UK, it can be argued that the initial findings are generalisable, good practice in the sector, at least for business schools located in advanced economies. The literature was then reviewed to define and discuss these teaching and learning approaches from an academic perspective, and to further identify suitable learning theories and instructional design frameworks that can inform recommendations for a useful conceptual model to executive education providers.

3. Research Context

In this section, the research context for this paper, namely the principles of instructional design and the field of executive education will be discussed.

3.1. Instructional design

According to early writers such as Reigeluth (1983), instructional design is concerned with understanding, improving and applying methods of instruction, the outcome of which can act as a 'blueprint' for what methods should be used, for what courses and for which students. Molenda et al. (2003) later refer to instructional design as 'the principles and procedures by which instructional materials, lessons, and whole systems can be developed in a consistent and reliable fashion' (p.574). Yet more specifically, Smith and Raglan (2004) refer to it as the entire process of design, development, implementation and revision of instruction.

However, Gustafen (1991) also employed the term 'instructional development' to encompass broader antecedent activities, such as the analysis of the setting, learner needs and the design of the learner environment that occurs prior to the design of learner materials and the evaluation of the results. Enkenberg (2001) also emphasises the central starting points for instructional planning as being the *targets* of the teaching (the students), along with the character of the learning tasks and supported activities, and the roles of the teacher and learner, amongst other things.

To further set the context, Dick et al. (2009) explained that there was a shift in instructional emphasis over the previous 35 years, moving from expert lectures to interactive instruction, focusing more on the 'anticipated outcomes of the learning, the nature of the environment where acquired knowledge and skills would be used, and the particular characteristics of the learners in relation to the discipline and the environment' (p.xxi).

Smith and Raglan (2004) argue that an appreciation of the *process* of instructional design undertaken by instructional designers also offers a fuller understanding of the term – namely determining goals and intended outcomes, implementing a strategy and evaluating the results to determine whether the goals have been reached. Lee et al. (2017) maintain that steps in such design processes can be informed by related theory, while instructional theories and principles are put into practice through so-called instructional design models. The most referred to, generic instructional design process model from which others have since been derived, is the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation), which conveys an accepted wisdom that such processes are sequential and iterative (Molenda, 2015).

Lee & Jang (2014) helpfully distinguish between two kinds of instructional design models, namely conceptual and procedural. Conceptual models offer a theory-driven, macro-level perspective with important variables and the relationship between them, while procedural models offer a micro-level view of detailed procedures with actual design activities and guidance on how to perform tasks. Procedural models are often grounded in conceptual models. Furthermore, instructional design models may be subjective (influenced by the designers' beliefs) or objective (independent of the designers' beliefs).

As will be further discussed, executive education demands an andrological starting point that is embedded within conceptual instructional design principles. In this paper, a conceptual instructional design model for executive education will be proposed that is derived from not only extant educational

theories, but also from constructivist approaches already practised by top business schools and further illustrated in the reconnaissance findings below, in section 4.

3.2 Executive education

Some current trends, issues and challenges in the executive education sector that can influence instructional design, particularly arising from the changing needs of both businesses and learners, are now considered below.

3.2.1 Insufficiently practice- or real world-oriented?

Canadian management education academic Henry Mintzberg famously admonished business schools for training 'the wrong people in the wrong ways, with the wrong consequences' (2004, p.6). Since then, there has been further criticism of business schools' lack of real-world experience, giving rise to a 'valley of death' between today's executive education and practice (Stoten, 2022). This is exacerbated whenever a faculty prioritises research in narrow academic fields over real-world problems that need to be addressed more urgently by businesses.

Business leaders are now required to adopt a wider, more holistic, longer-term view of the world that enables them to understand how trends and unexpected events might impact upon their business models (Boccardelli, 2022; Holter, 2022). For executive education providers, such needs require new perspectives beyond the narrow functional areas usually offered – such as, for example, from the humanities (Iñiguez, 2022), or gained through inter-disciplinary discussion (LeClaire, 2022). A scarcity of highly qualified talent has led to businesses prioritising talent development in order to retain employees (Holter, 2022; Paloma, 2022). Demand for executive education, therefore, should be strong, providing that its offerings meet the needs of business.

3.2.2 Changing needs of learners

The needs of executive education learners are also evolving. Can business schools and other education providers keep up? Trends now shaping the workplaces where learners are situated include digitisation, automation, hybrid and remote working, empowerment of (virtual) teams, along with well-being (Van Dam, 2022). Moreover, the skills essential in today's workplace are no longer merely functional capabilities, management knowledge and 'leadership', but rather 'core behavioural skills' such as self-management, relational and political skills, emotional intelligence, critical reflection, the ability to resolve ethical dilemmas, resilience, tolerance and complex problem-solving, amongst other things (Cabrera & Iñiguez, 2022; Roos, 2022). Finally, the individual circumstances of learners, such as caring obligations, living conditions, teleworking and mobility between locations - more accepted in the post-pandemic workplace - need to be accommodated by flexible, adaptive, intensive and intuitive hybrid formats (Del Alacazar & Iñiguez, 2022).

3.2.3 Personalisation and customisation

The competitive environment (growing number and variety of available courses and formats), the ongoing search for value for money or 'return on fees', and the need to solve today's rather than

tomorrow's problems have led to the emergence of a more discerning customer for executive education, who seeks a degree of personalisation and customisation. A current trend is for learners not to be attracted to programmes designed for whole cohorts, but rather to seek the benefits of modularised virtual learning and stackable micro-credentials (highly intensive online courses), certificates and badges (Beck Dudley, 2022; Birkenshaw, 2022; Del Alacazar & Iñiguez, 2022; Kang, 2022). Here, students can realise the benefits of digitisation and artificial intelligence to personalise their education (Beck Dudley, 2022). Businesses facing specific challenges may also demand customised, bespoke programmes. Whilst top business schools offer their brands along with their well-established programmes, they face pressures to personalise and customise learning in order to protect their market positions.

3.2.4 From pedagogy to andragogy

It seems obvious that teaching adults with prior experience, especially those in managerial or leadership positions, will require a different approach compared to teaching school age or even undergraduate students, but this cannot be assumed. In his paper 'Adult learning processes: pedagogy and andragogy', Malcolm Knowles (1977) contended that it is the responsibility of teachers to move adult learners from 'dependency' (a reliance on the teacher to 'teach me' and upon passive learning) towards 'self-directedness'. This also leans towards a constructivist approach where 'meaning is not imposed or transmitted by direct instruction, but [rather] is created by the student's learning activities' (Biggs, 1999 p.60).

Recognising the value of independent and creative thinking, business schools have been adopting andragogical, constructivist, rather than transmissional, pedagogical approaches. Students are being given more control over their own learning, allowing them to fulfil their individual needs and apply learning to their own context. Business schools are moving their teaching approaches from abstract thinking to work-oriented experiences (Lorange & Thomas, 2016). Wind (2022) calls for yet more application and active experimentation in the workplace, while Chakravarthy (2022) endorses 'participatory action research' outside the classroom, supported by bringing real world experience into the classroom (e.g. 'executives in residence' etc.).

3.2.5 Technology and innovation

This demand for stackable micro-credentials, certificates and digital badges etc., along with the accommodation of learner needs and availability through online delivery, already points towards a more technology-enabled educational experience. However, to support experiential learning, there is increased use of (and expectation for) virtual reality, augmented reality, immersive technology and computer simulations (Chakravarthy, 2022; Beck Dudley, 2022). The effective deployment of such approaches requires dexterity and skills beyond those usually expected of instructors. However, despite all this, there remains a demand for in-person interaction and activity, since executives desire to meet interesting people, expand their networks and seek advice for corporate problems (Birkenshaw, 2022). This is a reminder that an overreliance on technological solutions for teaching delivery is not advisable. Striking the right balance between virtual and in-person delivery modes is important.

3.2.6 New needs for a new era

The characteristics of executive education in the post-pandemic era are considered to be understanding the broader context of learning, including macro-societal trends (Iñiguez & Lorange, 2022); accounting for the needs of industry, employers and line management scenarios in which learners must perform and operate (Beck Dudley, 2022); teachers that focus on listening, synthesising and orchestrating rather than just transmitting knowledge about managerial skills and principles (Del Alacazar & Iñiguez, 2022); along with mobile instructional design for learners (Iñiguez & Lorange, 2022). Business schools need to meet these challenges by overcoming departmental silos, embracing technologies and offering more flexible programmes (Chakravarthy, 2022).

To match the requirements of today's learners, and to avoid mismatches between course content and skills for the future (Cabrera & Iñiguez, 2022), executive education also needs to go beyond narrow functional knowledge and provide cognitive, human and digital competencies (Van Dam, 2022), along with judgement skills more broadly (Arena, 2022).

Here, several trends and challenges that providers of executive education are already grappling with have been outlined. The needs and expectations of businesses and learners, accelerated and brought sharply into focus by the pandemic, lie at the heart of these. Next, some existing approaches adopted by top business schools are identified and discussed.

4. Reconnaissance

In this section findings from the reconnaissance exercise will be presented, namely the teaching and learning approaches already practised by several top business schools delivering executive education, as sampled from business schools featured in the annual Financial Times (FT) rankings 2022 (see https://rankings.ft.com/home/executive-education). As well as offering an understanding of existing approaches currently considered to be best practice, the insights also ensure that the conceptual instructional design model presented in this paper is informed by and relevant to practice. The websites of the top 5 global business schools appeared in both the FT's open and customised executive education programme rankings, and similarly the top 5 UK business schools were searched for text relating to teaching methods and practices. A total of 14 websites were investigated. Teaching and learning methods tend to be explicitly stated by business schools within their online promotional materials or downloadable brochures that might refer directly to, for example, 'experiential learning', 'collaborative learning' etc. Coding to assess the frequency of such explicit approaches was used by copying and pasting relevant text into a table, before colour highlighting and quantifying the various methods adopted. Some other themes such as 'real world perspective' also emerged from the text and were similarly captured and quantified. This can be considered as thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), useful for evaluating and extracting meaningful information from qualitative text through coding and categorization, whilst also allowing for flexibility to capture emerging themes (Saldana, 2015). The results from the coding are presented in Table 1. The 14 business schools drawn from the FT rankings are shown in the left-hand column, while the predominant teaching and learning approaches are shown in the first row. Frequency is indicated by 'x', whilst the totals are shown for comparison in the bottom row.

From the reconnaissance exercise, we learned that the most frequently adopted executive education delivery approaches of the 14 top-ranking business schools sampled are, (i) experiential learning, (ii) collaborative learning and (iii) technology-enabled learning. Other teaching and learning approaches identified in the reconnaissance exercise can be grouped under these three categories for the purpose of further discussion. For example, case study-learning, action/active-learning, application of learning and real-life contexts may all be associated with *experiential learning*. Peer-to-peer learning may be grouped with *collaborative learning*, while immersive learning can be linked to technology-enabled learning. These three main learning approaches will now be considered from an academic perspective, supported by quotations captured during the coding of website text.

4.1 Experiential learning

According to Hoover and Whitehead (1975) 'Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally processes knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement' (p.25). In a teaching and learning scenario, this kind of learning implies that it is 'applied' and 'interactive'. Learning that can be consolidated by application includes academic theories, concepts or research insights. According to Zamorksi (2002), research-led teaching is heavily informed by insights derived from research, and already promises an enhanced learning environment for students. To benefit from applying such insights to a situation or context relevant to the student is therefore a double win. London Business School is one of the UK institutions that stresses the benefits of research-led teaching.

> Our curriculum is informed by faculty research, enabling our learners to develop a deeper and more rigorous understanding of different subjects based on the latest findings and thinking from our research (London Business School, 2023).

Table 1. Teaching Approaches in Executive Education at Top-Ranking Business Schools

Business School	Action/ Active Learning	Experiential Learning	Peer-to-peer learning	Research - led learning	Collabor-ative Learning	Immersive learning	Real world perspective	Technology enabled learning	Case study learning
Duke Corporate Education					X	X	X		
Esade Business School	X	X			X	X		X	X
Essec Business School		X			X		X	X	X
HEC Paris		X	X			X	X		X
Iese Business School	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
International Institute for Management Development			X		X		X	X	
SDA Bocconi School of Management		X	X					X	X
Western University Ivey	X	X	X						X
UK									
Cranfield					X		X	X	
Henley Business School	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Hult EF Corporate Education		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
London Business School	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
University of Cambridge: Judge		X	X	X	X			X	X
Warwick Business School		X	X	X	X		X	X	
TOTAL	**5**	**11**	**10**	**6**	**11**	**6**	**10**	**11**	**8**

France's ESSEC Business School joins with the UK's Warwick Business School in emphasising the application of academic learning to the workplace.

> The singularity of ESSEC's learning model is based on the constant concern to blend academic learning with in-the-field experience (ESSEC, 2016).
>
> We ensure that every element of your development programme is deeply embedded in practice, to ensure it takes your workforce to the next level (Warwick Business School, 2023).

The UK's Henley Business School also gives recognition to relevant knowledge derived from fields beyond those of management and leadership studies.

> We also draw on expertise from fields outside the world of business, including neuroscience and politics (Henley Business School, 2023).

It is argued that with experiential learning, learners benefit not only from the application of learning, true to life variability and uncertainty, but furthermore from the structure, evaluation and feedback offered within organised programmes (Gentry, 1990). From the perspective of Kolb's learning cycle (2005, 2009), synonymous nowadays with experiential learning, students within a classroom, or virtual learning environment, are able to test out what they have learned through discussion ('active experimentation'), then be an active participant in a real or close to real-life interaction/activity ('concrete experience'), before enjoying the benefits of feedback and discussion with participants and peers ('reflective observation'), and finally learning from interactions likely to influence their future behaviour and perspectives ('abstract conceptualization') (Voss & Blackburne, 2019). This cycle is reflected well in the approach to teaching adopted by Spain's IESE Business School.

> Our teaching methodologies engage participants in dynamic discussions about real life business challenges. On their own, with a peer or in teams, participants are invited to reflect on these challenges and extract insights to apply to their work (IESE Business School, 2023).

Case study teaching is also an approach frequently mentioned by the top business schools sampled. Case studies are defined by Thomas (2011) as 'analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods' (p.531). Kreber (2001) argues that the case study approach to teaching in higher education is an effective means for providing students with an opportunity to become involved in phases of Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

Canada's Ivey Academy emphasises the "learning by doing" benefits of the case study teaching approach.

> The case method is a learning methodology built on learning by doing and which aims to prepare students for strategic decision-making in companies through the practice of real situations (Ivey Academy 2023).

Involvement in real-life scenarios where real people are engaging with real problems in real time and learning through questioning and reflection (therefore closely aligned with experiential learning) is also the hallmark of so-called 'action learning' (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). HEC Paris Business School states that all knowledge acquisition on its programmes is pointed towards real-life application.

> Online courses at HEC Paris are not just about passively acquiring knowledge. Our focus is on helping you frame issues, exercise critical judgement, develop your own solutions and apply them in real life to add value to your projects and your organization (HEC Paris, 2023).

Belonging to a constructivist epistemology, 'active learning' demands that students take an active part in their learning, rather than be passive recipients of teachers' direct teaching, (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Active learning pedagogies include project-based, problem-based, inquiry-based, case-based, and discovery-based approaches, all of which offer learners the opportunity to be self-directed, build

on prior knowledge, think critically and present information independently and/or in small groups (Cattaneo, 2017). Spain's ESADE Business School emphasises active learning in its promotional literature.

> Active learning is an educational approach in which students are the protagonists in their own learning process. Students carry out authentic tasks that invite them to test themselves and constructively apply knowledge (ESADE Business School, 2023).

4.2 Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning is an approach for not only embedding and situating knowledge, but also for helping to develop soft skills. According to Laal and Ghodsi (2012), collaborative learning involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product" (p.486). It has been attributed to the development of social skills (Johnson et al., 1984), higher-level thinking skills (Webb,1982) and oral communication skills (Entwistle & Tait, 1993). It is also acknowledged that such student interaction (through discussion, dialogue and collaborative working) results in 'deeper' (in contrast to 'surface') learning (Marton & Säljö, 1976).

The UK's Henley Business School stresses the importance of collaboration in its approach to teaching and learning.

> There is a real hands-on approach to learning, you work collaboratively with your fellow students and classes are taught by international faculty at the cutting edge of their disciplines (Henley Business School, 2023).

Also identified in the reconnaissance exercise, 'peer to peer' learning is a type of collaborative learning, where students learn with and from each other without the immediate intervention or direct involvement of a teacher - although the interactions might be established and monitored by staff (Boud et al. 1999). As a teaching approach, it is likely to involve people matched from similar social groupings or as status equals (Topping, 2005)**.** Student-led workshops, as well as student-to-student discussion and feedback groups are examples of this approach which fosters critical enquiry, reflection and communication skills, as well as a sense of belonging (Boud et al., 1999). London Business School acknowledges the important contribution that peer-to-peer learning brings to the experience of its students.

> The peer-learning focus, including active class discussions and team assignments, complements the collaborative network that lives beyond the programmes (London Business School, 2023).

Interactions between students within a programme, such as collaborative learning and peer-to-peer learning, also link in with the notion of 'communities of practice' (CoPs). Educational theorist Wenger asserted that learning is a social process, and as such can occur within 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991) in the workplace or within organisations. Defined as 'groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.4) at both formal and informal levels, CoPs offer a forum for discussion amongst practitioners interested in a

topic (Saint-Onge & Wallace, 2003). It can be argued that cohorts of students on executive education programmes share a 'domain' (Wenger et al., 2002) or a common ground from a business or management perspective, and furthermore that CoPs are already embedded within the infrastructure of effective executive education delivery.

4.3 Technology-enabled learning

In the past decade, educational technology has transformed the student experience offered by education providers, helping to realise and enhance the promise of experiential learning and collaborative learning. 'Immersive learning', centred more upon 'choreographed experience and exploration, and mediated by structured and semi-structured social interactions' (De Freitas et al., 2010, p.82) has also benefitted from technological innovation.

UK's Cranfield University praises the risk-free, but close to real-life experiences that have now been made possible by technology-enabled learning.

> *Tech-enabled, simulated learning experiences* - Business simulations allowing people to take control of a fictional organisation, in a safe, risk-free environment, sensitising them to potential and real-world situations, mimicing real life situations that reflect the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world we live in (Cranfield University, 2023).

Moreover, Warwick Business School has revolutionised its collaborative learning by taking full advantage of what technology can offer.

> Warwick's technology now includes green-screen video studios that allow presenters to be superimposed on different backgrounds. "We take some content from a member of faculty that's a flat information-sharing process….. [and] around that, we'll design activities, interactive features and encourage the students to engage with the content and with each other. We have social aspects to the technology so they can comment on things, work in groups virtually and engage with work simulations." (Conboye, 2022).

Duke Corporate Education in the USA stresses the impact that immersive experiences can have on the mindsets and behaviours of learners.

> We are transforming face-to-face programs into fully-virtualized, immersive experiences that change mindsets and behaviors to drive business outcomes (Duke Corporate Education, 2023).

Finally, the true breadth of active methodologies enabled by technology is outlined by ESADE Business School

> Active methodologies include a set of teaching-learning methodologies based on innovation, diversity, and technology: Case-based learning; Collaborative learning; Problem-based learning; Challenge-based learning; Simulations; Action Learning; Gamification; Game-based learning; Design thinking; Service Learning; Evidence-based learning (ESADE Business School, 2023).

Nevertheless, top business schools still combine technology-enabled learning with a wide selection of in-person learning interactions, described by Judge Business School, as ranging from:

> Cambridge debates; Innovation design sprints; Field observations; Case studies; Simulations; Role play; Executive coaching; Live projects; Forum theatre; Negotiation labs (Judge Business School, 2023).

In this section, the teaching and learning approaches identified during the reconnaissance exercise have been outlined, illustrating current practices with relevant quotations from the websites of top business schools. These demonstrate that top executive education providers have already adopted innovative and technologically advanced methods to satisfy the needs of executive education learners.

5. Theoretical Perspectives for Instructional Design for Executive Education

In this section, *activity theory* and mARC will be proposed as suitable perspectives for informing the design of learning environments that optimise teaching and learning approaches for executive education.

5.1 Activity theory

According to the work of Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy (1999), activity theory offers a starting point for designing effective teaching approaches within 'constructive learning environments' (CLEs) - defined as embracing constructionist beliefs and practices, where learners are directed towards structuring their own knowledge, rather than knowledge being embedded within teaching itself for transfer or acquisition. Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy (1999) define activity theory as 'a socio-cultural, socio-historical lens through which designers can analyze human activity systems. It focuses on the interaction of human activity and consciousness within its relevant environmental context' (p.61). A fundamental aspect of the theory is that the conscious process of meaning-making (and learning) emerges from activity (or from the personal reflection on activity), rather than being a precursor to it. This facet of activity theory links particularly well with executive education.

To elaborate further, in activity theory, knowing can only be interpreted in the context of doing, and consciousness is manifested in practice - 'you are what you do' (Vygotsky, 1982, p.7). Within this context of learning, Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy (1999) add, 'As we act, we gain knowledge, which affects our actions, which changes our knowledge, and so on - this transformational process is critical to the activity-theory conception of learning' (p.65). As such, effective CLEs must replicate all the key components of an actual activity (the 'doing'), namely its 'activity structure' - tools, signs, systems, socio-cultural rules, community expectations etc., that are present in real life.

The context of an activity is key and involves not only the kinds of activities that people engage in, but also who is engaging in that activity (the 'subjects'), their goals and intended outcomes (the 'objects'), the 'tools and mediators' (instruments, signs, procedures, laws etc.) typically used in or associated with the activity and the 'community' (relationships therein, rules of the game, division of labour etc.) in which the activity occurs. This is known as the *activity system.* Learning will only occur

if participants are able to perform or practice behaviours within a true-to-life activity system, which therefore must be designed into constructive learning environments. Furthermore, activities are complex and interactive and necessitate collaborative effort. The implication is that instructional designers must deliver/create an authentic context in which people can carry out activities to ensure that learners will construct meaning effectively.

Activity theory therefore attaches great importance to the context of learning. The same goes for the approaches of top-ranking business schools that emphasise an authentic, real-world perspective, supported by the likes of case study learning (tools that present problems and challenges to learners) and technology-enabled immersive learning, achieved through simulations, visualization tools and virtual environments that can replicate regulations, procedures and communities.

In this section, a case for adopting activity theory as the overarching theory for developing a suitable instructional design approach for executive education has been made, but by itself it remains insufficient as a standalone instructional design model, or more especially for offering a blueprint for methods of instruction.

5.2 The mARC instructional design model

Here it is argued how Radović et al.'s (2021) mARC instructional design model (more Authentic, Reflective, Collaborative) is able to further inform conceptional instructional design for executive education. The mARC instructional design model was developed with the underpinning of ADDIE for application within the context of experiential learning in higher education. It has already been acknowledged above that the characteristics of experiential learning are highly relevant to the effective delivery of executive education.

Radović et al. (2021) conducted a systematic literature review (albeit limited to a Master of Educational Sciences context) that identified three pillars of experiential learning to be embedded within their instructional design model. *Authenticity* is posited as supporting the re- and de-contextualisation of knowledge. It has been defined by Gulikers et al. (2008) as the extent to which professional situations, reassembled in a learned environment, are relevant to the learner. By designing in *reflection*, the authors have sought to overcome earlier criticisms of Kolb's model for not accounting for methods to address learners' reflections, while *collaboration* aspects compensate for Kolb's perceived overlooking of the social aspects of learning, along with interactions between individuals. For instructional design purposes these three pillars were presented by the authors as an overlapping Venn diagram (2021, p.12), each including phases of the ADDIE cycle, thus indicating an iterative approach to teaching and learning, that is constantly reviewed and refreshed and ultimately able to maintain an effective experiential learning environment.

The key components of the mARC design model resonate strongly with the needs of executive education learners, as well as with the offerings of top executive education providers identified during the reconnaissance exercise. Authentic, real-world perspectives – *authenticity* - and related teaching approaches, such as case study learning, were emphasised in the promotional literatures of IESE Business School and Ivey Academy, above, while the benefits of immersive learning to authentic business outcomes were proposed by Duke Corporate Education.

As a key part of the experiential learning cycle, *reflection* is a vital step for internalising knowledge and also for its re-contextualisation for later application. IESE Business School (above) emphasises the role of reflection for the purpose of extracting insights for later application in the workplace. Finally, the *collaboration* pillar of the mARC model is already embedded in executive education, as highlighted by the embracing of collaborative learning and peer-to-peer learning by Henley Business School and London Business School, shown above.

Yet, on its own, the mARC instructional design model is unable to fully capture the importance of the 'activity context' for executive education, nor is it, without suggesting specific learning approaches, able to convey the technology-enabled learning required by today's executive education learners.

5.3 Instructional design informed by activity theory, mARC and business school best practices

Both activity theory and mARC offer instructional design principles suitable for executive education, potentially offering linkages between learner needs and education. However, is it possible to visualise these principles within a single conceptual instructional design model that also captures and learns from existing best practices in business school executive education?

Now, an instructional design model that combines the benefits of activity theory, mARC and the existing good practice identified in section 4, above, will be proposed. As acknowledged above, authenticity, reflection and collaboration are principles already reflected in existing executive education delivery offered by top business schools. However, Radović et al.'s mARC model can be applied to executive education more effectively by further acknowledging the importance of a constructive learning environment (CLE) informed by activity theory, as proposed by Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy (1999), which furthermore can be made more effective nowadays by digital technologies. By including the notion of an activity system within a conceptual design, the impact of individual learners and other factors on the constructive learning environment and related teaching approaches can be fully recognised. This also ensures that teaching and learning approaches are fully authentic and close to real-life.

As shown in Figure 1, below, in the *conceptual instructional design model for executive education* proposed in this paper, the importance of Radović et al.'s Authenticity, Reflection and Collaboration remains at the centre of how effective instructional design is visualised. Indicative teaching approaches identified during reconnaissance (including several technology-enabled methods adopted by Esada and Judge Business School, above), are now linked to these principles. These elements, along with relevant teaching and learning approaches, are then embedded within an activity system.

5.3.1 The activity system

The activity system is visualised as the outer shell of the instructional design model in Figure 1, consisting of subjects, objects, community and mediators. Understanding the 'subjects' (or participants) of the CLE, along with their motivations and goals, is essential. However, subjects do not only include the executive education learners themselves (what they want to get out of their learning, along with their values, conscious needs etc.), but also any other participants or 'actors' in a learning

scenario - say, a management problem - into which the learners might be immersed. 'Objects' in the activity system are those things to be acted upon – for example corporate issues or problems that require resolution or transformation into an outcome manifested in say, a final report or presentation. These too need to be fully defined for the students - what is expected, what criteria will be used to evaluate the outcome, how does completion fit in with the overall intentions or context of the individuals or within a programme etc.

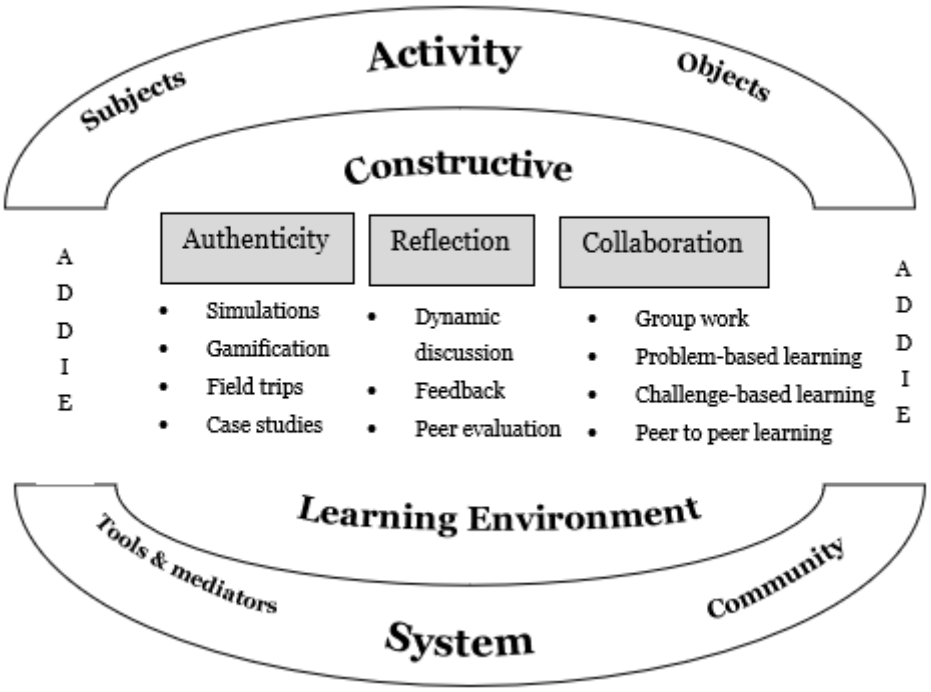

Figure 1. Conceptual Instructional Design Model for Executive Education

The learner is also the central character in a community or 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991), that might not only include co-learners involved in a project or exercise, or fellow students, but also a broader professional community to which the learner wishes or aspires to be associated with. The intentions of co-learners and any division of labour must be fully considered for effective collaboration. Moreover, the roles of 'actors' in a problem scenario (company representatives, managers, customers), as an important part of the context, must also be clarified in the informational resources given to students.

'Mediators' (protocols, practices, cultural values, theories, accepted ways of doing things etc.) shape activities, while 'tools' (say, computer systems, language, procedures etc.) connect people with objects and facilitate relationships. Together, mediators and tools make up those factors that constrain activity and therefore should be built into CLEs and teaching approaches to ensure their authenticity. Relevant background reading on how these have developed historically or socially, and on how to manage them should be made available in the informational resources for executive education students. Mediators

and tools also apply to how students work together on, say assignments, group work or break-out sessions.

5.3.2 Incorporating ADDIE

The model visualised in Figure 1 also incorporates ADDIE explicitly. As explained earlier, ADDIE refers to the well accepted, generic Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation instructional design process model, often referred to as being essential for good practice in instructional design (e.g. Molenda, 2015; Wagner 2011).

Here, the Analysis stage (surveying executive education learners and their environment to determine learning problems and objectives) of ADDIE, is also implicit in the 'subjects' component of the Activity System. Just as with the 'instructional development' approach proposed by Gustafen (1991), it is vital to know your students, what they wish to achieve and why. The Design, Development and Implementation stages of ADDIE are further reminders for instructors to introduce rigour into the teaching approaches adopted within the constructive learning environment, when it comes, for example, to ensuring that overall objectives are translated into lesson plans (Design); that specific materials and procedures for teaching and using them are developed – including assessment and feedback (Development); and that these are implemented with regards to or adopted by learners (Implementation). Finally, the Evaluation stage demands that assessment against objectives takes place and that there are opportunities for revisions. Embedding ADDIE within an instructional design model is more likely to deliver the so-called 'constructive alignment' of learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment as advocated by Biggs (1996). ADDIE is an iterative process that requires ongoing monitoring and review and is an important component of the instructional design model proposed here.

In this section, it has been shown how Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy's interpretation of activity theory and Radović et al.'s mARC model can be combined and integrated with business school good practice to depict a pragmatic conceptual instructional design model for executive education.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This paper has generalised good practice from 14 business schools. However, these make up only one, albeit important category, of executive education providers. Here, the executive educational experiences offered by other corporate or private (non-university) providers that also operate within the competitive environment have not been investigated. But while some good practices that could further inform our insights may have been overlooked, the recommendations arising from this paper for effective instructional design in executive education are highly applicable to providers across the sector.

As regards learner (or indeed employer) needs, the main insights on executive education reflected in this paper have been derived from relevant peer-reviewed academic literature, rather than through surveys or interviews with learners or businesses. Since the main objective of this paper relates to establishing conceptual instructional design, such empirical insights fall outside the scope of this paper. However, further research of this nature would be useful for strengthening arguments relating to appropriate teaching approaches.

Finally, many executive education programmes have evolved over time. A conceptual instructional design model might assume a clean slate for designing new programmes. This is not always possible, since programmes have often evolved incrementally. Nevertheless, the model put forward in this paper is still able to contribute to the programme review processes , with the strong rationale of existing good practice, combined with academic perspectives. Further research may consider a procedural instructional design model that may be derived from the conceptual model presented in this paper.

7. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to visualise and articulate pragmatic, appropriate instructional design for executive education in the post-pandemic era. To do this, a conceptual instructional design model has been proposed based on existing approaches already adopted by top business schools and supported by academic theories and frameworks, namely activity system and the mARC instructional design model rooted in the experiential learning principles of authenticity, reflection and collaboration. These are underpinned by the generic and well accepted instructional design process of ADDIE.

In presenting the executive education practice of top-ranking business schools, some andragogical teaching and learning approaches for experienced, adult learners have also been highlighted. Taking into account today's business and learner needs, the number of new market entrants within a highly competitive environment, and the technologies and human resources necessary to realise students' expectations, the delivery of this kind of high-quality executive education requires both institutional commitment and investment. For business schools, this still means managing a number of tensions, for example (i) being able to accommodate not only high quality virtual, but also in-person activities - technological innovation should serve as an enhancement, rather than a replacement for human interaction; (ii) providing high quality, cost effective programmes capable of accommodating the needs of individual learners - skilful and purposeful instructional design is able to ensure that standard content can still be applied to individual learner context; (iii) taking responsibility for building a better world, while offering solutions for today's problems - establishing a common vision with stakeholders is key.

It is hoped that the instructional design model presented here will be helpful to providers wishing to operate effectively in this sector, or to those seeking to understand the key principles behind the successful delivery of executive education.

Declarations and Acknowledgement:

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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