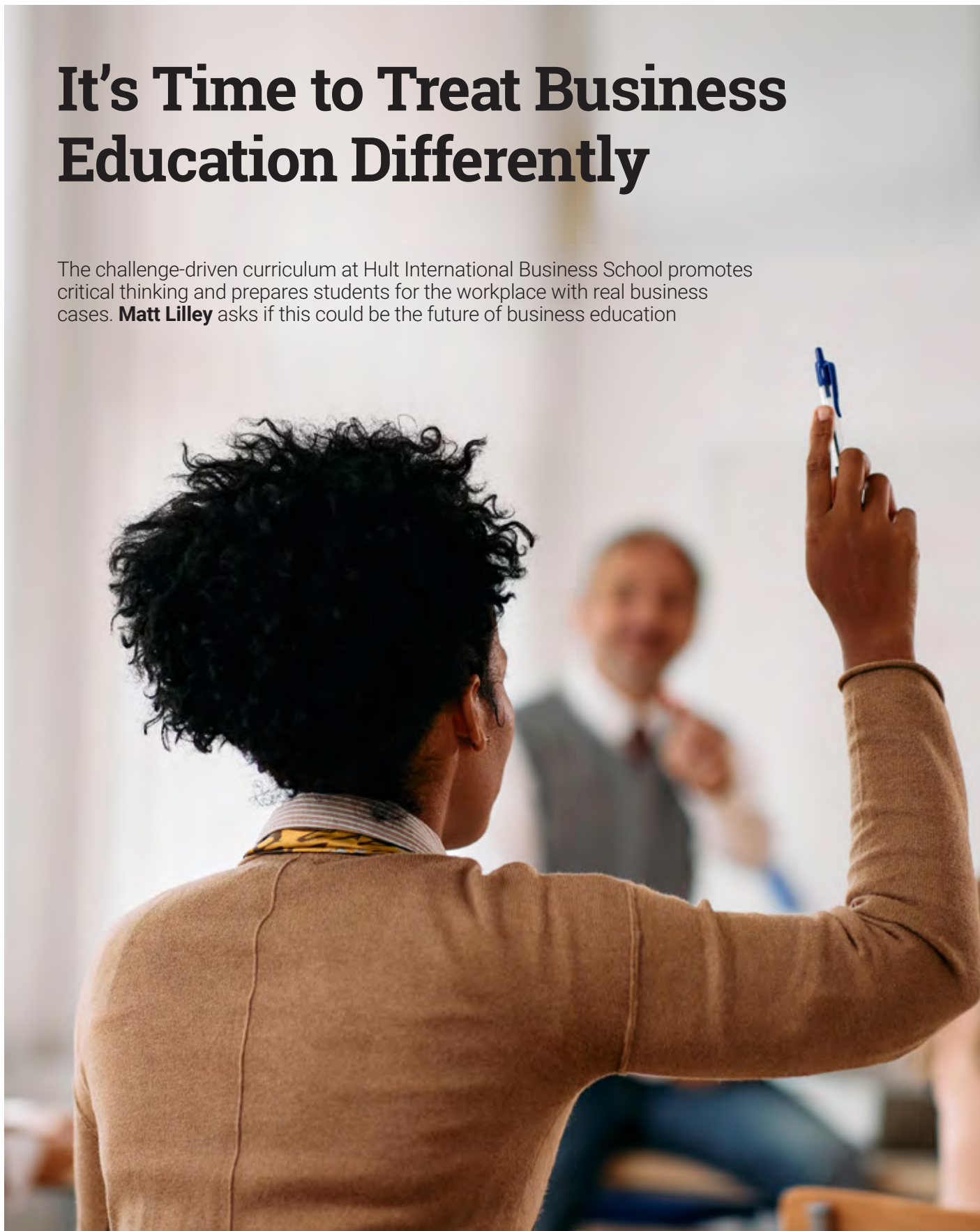


It's Time to Treat Business Education Differently

The challenge-driven curriculum at Hult International Business School promotes critical thinking and prepares students for the workplace with real business cases. **Matt Lilley** asks if this could be the future of business education



For most people, the decision to go to business school is a practical one. People come to business school to further their careers and to learn new things, in hopes of applying that learning to the business world.

Yet, higher education in general has largely centred around research and the pursuit of knowledge, often with little focus on the practical application of these ideas. Does this mean our institutions have been approaching business education the wrong way?

To stay relevant, a business education should incorporate both theoretical and practical elements into its teaching. It is essential that a business school curriculum reflects the real world, particularly as we are educating many of those expected to make a significant impact in the economic and societal issues of the future.

Business students must be exposed to the types of challenges that real companies face on a regular basis and they must learn to solve the tasks they might be expected to complete after graduation.

With this in mind, Hult International Business School has developed a curriculum that approaches business education differently, centred around challenge-based learning that helps students not just understand what is expected in real-world business environments, but also how to put this learning into practice. Here are just a few of the steps Hult has taken to prepare graduates for the future of business:

Solving challenges through a critical lens

With student employability as a core focus, Hult proactively looks at what employers are expecting from business school graduates and brings that perspective back into our classrooms. Furthermore, as game-changing technologies like AI become more powerful, human skills such as critical thinking become increasingly important; and with access to knowledge more widely available, what's becoming more critical

is how that knowledge is *applied*.

Critical thinking is taught at Hult International Business School through a business lens. We teach people to work well in teams, and in complex, diverse environments. We want our students to excel at the things only humans can do, not the things AI can do – skills like teamwork, hands-on management, and reacting to unexpected changes in complicated, challenging environments and knowing what questions to ask.

That's why we encourage our students to use AI in their work and show them how it can complement, not replace, the skills they've developed while at Hult.

Hiring faculty who focus on teaching

In many business schools and universities, professors aren't hired on their ability to teach. At Hult, our professors are teachers first, researchers second. We know that research is important and has its place in business and society. We value it greatly and contribute via our Hult Impact Research Labs and through various faculty projects.

But at Hult, we hire individuals who are great teachers first, with a passion for their area of expertise. If business schools are going to ask students to give up a year or so of working and pay us tuition fees, they cannot afford to compromise on teaching excellence. We provide this at Hult. It's our job as educators to develop the essential skills required to be successful and bring about change.

We bring together forward-thinking people from all over the world to learn business by doing business. Through our teaching, Hult students become highly employable and ready to make an impact on the world.

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More than any other discipline, business students must be exposed to real business challenges, working on the types of tasks they might be expected to complete after graduation

Context is as important as content

We believe that context is as important as content. Students need to know why they're learning something. As much as possible, we're trying to simulate a business environment for students while they learn, putting everything into this challenge-based context. We are helping to develop strong leaders and managers - years before they would encounter this type of training via development programmes provided by employers.

As Hult's curriculum is challenge-driven, it is designed as a series of group exercises. We partner with real businesses, who offer our students the opportunity to take part in genuine challenges their organisations are facing. After teaching Hult students the knowledge they need to solve these challenges (whether that is finance, strategy, marketing or other 'subjects'), they'll then work in small groups to apply this knowledge and come up with solutions.

That's why when we recently re-designed our new Bachelor's in Business Administration, we partnered with Burning Glass Technologies to review and learn from some 50,000 job postings. We wanted to capture the key skills and capabilities that employers are recruiting for, all the way from graduate roles to senior management.

We created a skills dashboard to assess the top 30 skills and then worked to embed these into the programme's core. Throughout the programme, students are assessed on the application of skills and mindsets that are essential to a successful career on a global scale and – really importantly – given feedback on how to improve.

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We are helping to develop strong leaders and managers - years before they would encounter this type of training via development programmes at commercial companies



Teaching people to structure and communicate their ideas

Learning how to communicate is an important part of the training we offer at Hult. To have an impact in the world, not only do you need to bring new ideas or do great work, you must be able to communicate information in a way that people understand, and that helps them remember and act on. We train individuals to structure their ideas before they speak. We expect students to communicate these ideas in a simple, effective way.

To help with this, when students are set a real business challenge, they'll not only come up with a solution, but present that solution in front of the class. Part of their grades will be based on this presentation.





After all, one of the hardest skills that anyone can learn in business and management is how to manage people who are different to you. At Hult we want to teach students how to have those difficult conversations, how to manage people who are different to them and how to receive feedback as well as how to give it.

It was only when I started travelling that I realised how many things I thought about the world were influenced by where I'd grown up, and how other people have completely different ways of thinking.

At Hult, students will be completely immersed in this diverse environment from day one. Everyone is different from each other, and most of the work is done in teams.

Then, of course, there's the alumni community, which is made up of more than 30,000 people, who are working in just about every industry and every country on Earth.

A different approach to business

Students are smart, perceptive, and forward-thinking. They like having the opportunity to work on real projects, debating solutions with their clients.

When I talk to graduates, years after they've left Hult, it is this approach and the skills they've built that they particularly remember about their schooling, not just the knowledge. They remember the teamwork, the problem-solving, and learning to understand different perspectives.

People often ask me, "what will business education look like in the next five years?" I answer that in five years' time, a lot of business schools will look like Hult does today. Challenge-based learning really is the future of business education.



To complement the challenge-based learning, Hult's career services help students accumulate and present their professional experiences to potential employers. Each student at Hult has a personal career and development coach who works with them to better understand a student's strengths and weaknesses, and to help connect these learnings with specific career goals. We help students decide on the story they want to tell, and to help them to fill the gaps.

This is why 98% of our graduates are employed or in graduate school within six months of graduation.

Diversity in the classroom

Many schools say they are global, but I would argue that none are global in the way that Hult is. We have students and faculty from some 150 nationalities, with no one nationality making up more than 10% of our community in a given school year.



About the Author

Matt Lilley is President at Hult International Business School.