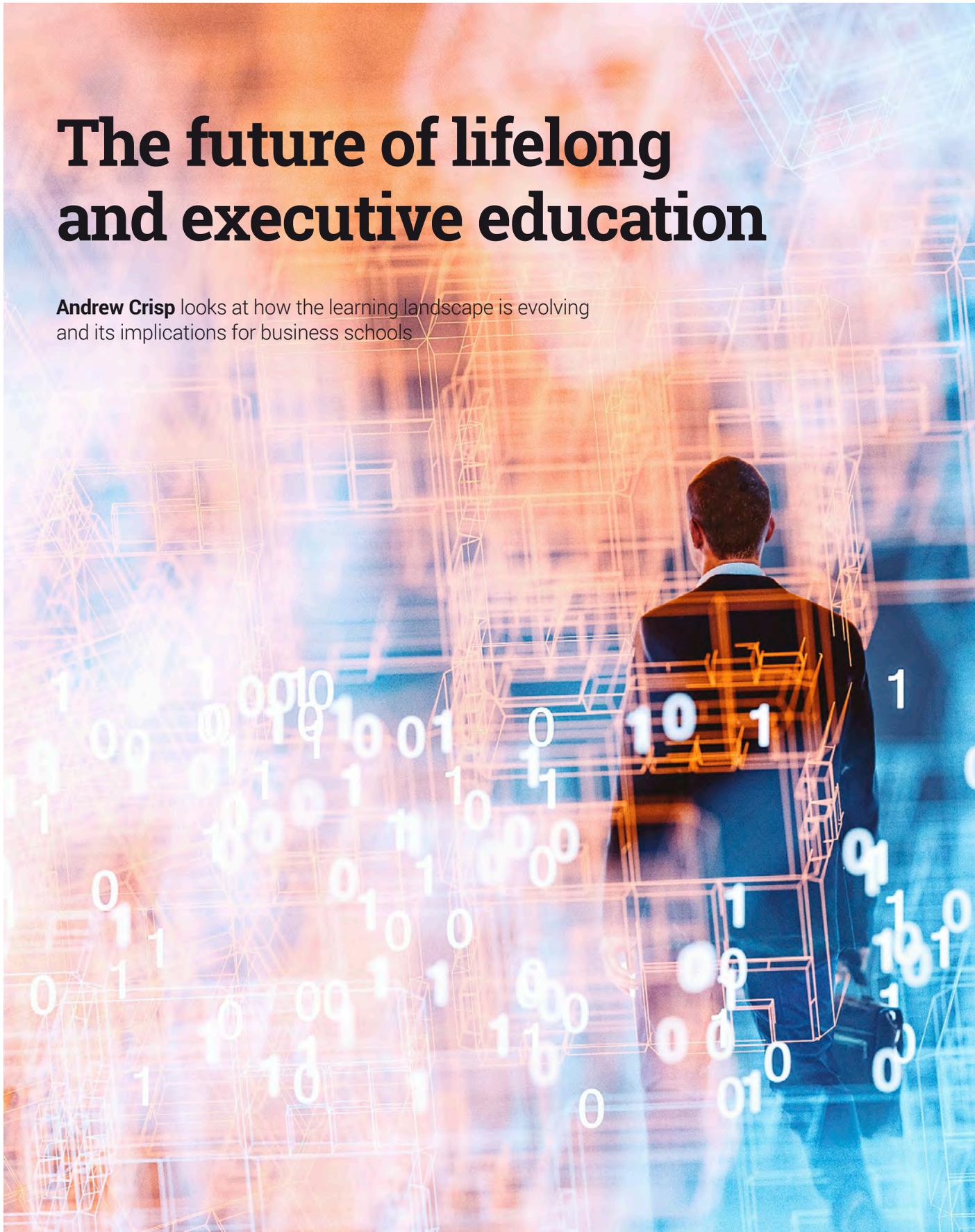


The future of lifelong and executive education

Andrew Crisp looks at how the learning landscape is evolving and its implications for business schools





Have you heard of Byju? If you follow cricket, you may have seen the name on the shirts of the Indian cricket team this year, but otherwise it seems unlikely. But you should know Byju as it may be a big part of the future of lifelong and executive education.

Byju started just over 10 years ago in India with an app for mobile phones to teach young children better maths skills. Recently, it announced a deal to license Disney characters to support their learning tools for children. At about the same time, the company suggested one of its next steps would be a move into workplace learning. It's not difficult to see how a company that builds brand recognition and loyalty with children and continues into workplace education could become a key player in lifelong learning. Especially, when you discover that at its last fundraising round, Byju was valued at \$18.5 billion.

It's no surprise to learn that COVID has accelerated digital adoption across society, and learning is no different. In a recent study with LinkedIn, entitled 'The future of lifelong and executive education', CarringtonCrisp discovered that two-thirds of employees will increasingly use online methods to develop themselves and their careers and more than three-quarters (79%) of employers anticipate online learning becoming the standard approach to developing people in their organisations.

However, accelerated digital adoption has far greater implications than just how people may choose to learn in the future. A former Chief Operating Officer at an international business school and now a senior adviser at an online programme manager (OPM) summed things up with the comment that, 'Rather than spending 50K sending two people to a Harvard programme, an employer can now try to send 50 people to Harvard content for the same cost.'

It doesn't have to be Harvard, it could be any number of business schools that have a reputation with an employer and a strong online offering, but brand will certainly be key. Building a lifelong learning journey in an organisation probably means having more than one partner, but you may choose a core partner to be with

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you on the journey. Just over eight out of ten employers (81%) agree that their organisation will seek to build long-term relationships with learning providers to build understanding of their business and maximise impact from learning.

Brand is also key for individual learners: 62% agree it is important that any future learning they undertake is with a provider with an international brand reputation. When a learner is investing in their future, they want to know that they will get a return on their investment, that a future employer will recognise and value their qualification and the provider of their learning. As new providers enter the marketplace, brand becomes ever more important as a sign of quality.

Brand also plays another role related to the choice of learning provider. With learning increasingly available on an “anytime, anywhere” basis, top-of-mind awareness of a learning provider will be key. For the learner at work who needs to quickly develop a new skill or build on an existing skill to help in their current role or for a new role, provider awareness will be key in making quick decisions. There will no longer be months of researching the market while a learner waits for a once-a-year, fixed starting date at an institution. Instead, needs will be identified on a Monday, learning will start on a Tuesday, and impact at work will commence on a Wednesday.



Increasingly, the first thought of adult learners won't be to enrol for a degree. At a recent conference, a Business School Dean suggested employees will change jobs nine or ten times in their lifetime and while every change might be a learning opportunity, they won't be taking a degree each time. Instead, learners will sign up for diplomas, certificates, microcredentials, digital badges and much more. And if their new qualification has been delivered by a well-known provider with a strong brand reputation, the qualification gains portability, meaning the learner has something that they can take from employer to employer and it will be valued.

That doesn't mean new providers won't have success in the market. LinkedIn Learning has already been used by 1 in 5 learners who took part in a study on the future of lifelong and executive education. Similar numbers of respondents indicated they would consider using FutureLearn, eduCBA, Coursera, ServiceSkills.com, Open Sesame, General Assembly, 2U and edX in the future.





And that future may already be here. In the second quarter of 2020, Coursera registered 5 million new users on their platform – that is the equivalent of almost every EQUIS accredited business school in the world each recruiting 25,000 new students in just 3 months.

There's no doubt that there is a growing demand for new approaches to learning among employers and employees. While training and development budgets took a hit during earlier stages of the pandemic, 51% of employers who took part in the CarringtonCrisp/LinkedIn study suggested that spending had been frozen over the past two years, 48% expect growth in the next two years.

Just over two years before the pandemic arrived, McKinsey in their study, 'What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills and wages', suggested that 350 million workers would have to reskill or upskill to remain in employment. If we add in the digitisation of the economy that has come about because of the pandemic, then the number needing to acquire new skills will have grown significantly.

The evidence for large scale reskilling can also be seen in a number of corporates in the USA. Starbucks, Chipotle, Walmart and now Amazon have all announced programmes that will provide free college and other skills development programmes to their employees. Amazon alone has over 700,000 staff in the USA. Skills, and with them career development



programmes, will increasingly be seen as an employee benefit, used by employers to retrain and retain their staff.

Much of this reskilling will be done online. One interviewee in 'The future of lifelong and executive education' report commented, 'Online is here to stay and a lot of Chief Learning Officers have caught up with the fact that online providers can do it well and deliver it at much cheaper prices.' Studies published by Shell and IBM both found that by widely adopting e-learning across their businesses, both companies had each saved around \$200 million from their learning and development budgets.

It's not just how people learn and the qualifications they want that are changing, but the skills they choose to learn as well. Inevitably there are a host of digital skills that are important, but the list of interests is much longer. For employers, the top five skills identified as important for their business, but not widely available are: Change management, Resilience/mindfulness, Global mindset, Ethics and ethical behaviour, and Managing across cultures. Other studies highlight the importance of skills such as Diversity, equality and inclusion, and managing a multi-generational workforce as people live longer and work later into their lives.

Traditional skills such as leadership remain popular, and alongside communication this is one of the top two skills sought by individual learners. But learners may be seeking new approaches to leadership. Instead, leading remotely and digitally from the other end of a laptop screen is of growing interest to learners with a recent suggestion that the influencers and YouTubers of today may have the skill sets to be the leaders of tomorrow. For individual learners, the list of skills they are seeking still includes subjects such as strategy and marketing, but also social impact, responsible management, and decision making in complex and uncertain times.

The demand for skills was well summed up by a Dean at a business school in North Africa when he said 'Corporate needs are evolving very quickly in turbulence, needs are not clear yet, but just like a tango, they are moving forward.' He might have added that, just like a tango, needs can change direction very quickly.



So what does this all mean for business schools? In one word, change. There will still be students on campus doing degrees – undergraduate and postgraduate – but perhaps they will do these degrees differently. The Education Minister of Singapore suggested in an interview in January 2020 that students would be enrolled for 20 years, but rather than frontloading their learning, it would be accumulated over time and interspersed with periods of work.

In the postgraduate marketplace, change may be more dramatic. In the 2020 testing year, 173,176 students took the GMAT and 60.4% sent their scores to schools to study for an MBA, the equivalent of around 105,000 individuals applying to hundreds of schools worldwide. Yet in the same year, Quantic, an online provider of MBA programmes that launched in 2013, received around 70,000 applications.

Look a little further into the executive education, workplace and lifelong learning marketplaces and the change is even greater. Some business schools have embraced these changes – Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford now has a suite of 23 short course online certificate offerings delivered in partnership with Esme Learning and Get Smarter.





Others are working with a multitude of other partners, who grew on the back of MOOCs, and have now built substantial offers for corporates and working individuals – Coursera, FutureLearn, Emeritus, edX, and 2U to name just a few.

For business schools wanting to be ready for tomorrow's learners, there is much to think about. Selling undergraduate degrees to a 16 year old is a very different proposition to engaging corporates seeking short online courses for their staff. And it doesn't stop at selling, delivering degrees and short online courses, as well as managing the 'alumni' relationships, require different skills and approaches. All of these changes may then need to be wrapped in a different business model to achieve sustainable success.

Embracing uncertainty, delivering in a world where geography is less important, collaborating with external partners and putting flexibility and personalisation at the heart of learning will all be key concepts that have to be built into future business school strategies. Building a sustainable and successful lifelong learning offer that meets the different needs of learners, whether they are 16 or 60, is possible, but it will mean taking risks, being imaginative, and putting learners first.

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About the Author

Andrew Crisp is the co-founder of CarringtonCrisp, an independent global provider of intelligence, market insight and consulting services for business schools and universities.