

Interview guide for case studies in the Megatrends project

Institutional factors

Name of institution: EDHEC Business School Lille-Nice

Manager of e-learning: Prof Bernard Curzi

URL of e-learning: <http://www.netedhec.com>

Number of online courses: 903

Number of e-learning students: 4157

% of e-learning students who could be said to be distance education students:
(defined as students who do at least 50.1% of a course online):

98% of students have a mix of face-to-face and elearning

Historical context

1. How would you describe the history of distance education in your institution?

With the creation of our campus at Nice in 1991, EDHRC needed to guarantee its pedagogical identity with regard to courseware, evaluation and the range of methodological processes. The professors, the administration and the students quickly got the habit of exchanging and sharing information by email and Intranet links.

In 1999 the head of the Executive MBA programme wanted to go further than just offering course assistance on line. His objective was to organise students' work outside the monthly week of course sessions and to encourage cooperation at a distance between professors and students and between the students themselves.

In 2000 EDHEC launched its first elearning modules for 40 students of this Executive MBA and for 10 professors.

In 2001 we wanted to facilitate the integration of students returning directly to their second year at EDHEC after obtaining a university degree or diploma. According to their records these students needed to upgrade their levels in Finance or in Law or in Accounting for example. We therefore developed new elearning modules for them, as soon as their enrolment was confirmed.

Since 2001 all our programmes (and thus all our students) took on elearning. There were online course supports, foundation courses by elearning, revision packages and self evaluation packages. The important thing is that EDHEC's elearning strategy allows us to improve our learning processes.

2. How has competence in e-learning developed in your institution and how has it contributed to your success?

There was no resistance to change in the Information Technology culture at EDHEC. We gave information and training to all the users, we gave a range of very simple applications to the professors, allowing them to become autonomous in producing their own content. But the foremost factor in the success of elearning at EDHEC was the support of the Group Directorate General. E-learning is a major strategic channel for the Group.

3. Has this development been abrupt or would you describe it more as a gradual step-by-step process)?

E-learning was a natural development of our pedagogical practices, Nevertheless, we proceeded gradually. We acquired experience for one year with the cohort of students in the Executive MBA and with a small number of professors. From that, elearning spread to other programmes year by year.

4. How has online education been followed up by evaluation and research and how has this contributed to your success?

There is no link between the developments in elearning and the different fields of research of the professors at EDHEC.

Technical issues

5. How would you describe competence in information and communication technology in your institution?

EDHEC is not more competent in the use and integration of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) than any other French *Grande Ecole*. On the other hand there is an ITC culture that is spread by the elearning courses and services.

6. To which extent are e-learning courses in your institution based on widely used technologies that can be taken into use by students without requiring them to buy additional hardware or software?

All our courses are accessible to students without the need for purchasing specific hardware or software. The elearning materials contain printed documents and 'rich content' in FLASH.

7. How would you describe the integration between different IT-systems that are involved in e-learning in your institution? How has this contributed to your success?

Our elearning platform is directly linked to all the websites of EDHEC. The students' identification criteria are the same for accessing all the services (email, sessions, international services, use of time and elearning).

On the other hand we wanted the platform and all the elearning policy decisions to be controlled by another service other than the Computer Centre. Elearning is first and foremost a methodological and pedagogical sector. We did not want the technical teams to impose their view or their course formatting.

8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your e-learning administrative systems (from enrolment through delivery to certification)?

Strengths: autonomous organisation directly supported by the Director General. Very strong support for all requests for the creation of new accounts and new course enrolments.

Weaknesses: not having enough internal resources; the pedagogical approach is not always precise enough; collaborative working could be more developed; few examples of online assessment (as opposed to self correction).

Courses

9. Which types of subjects are covered by online education in your institution and what is the relative importance of different subjects?

With more than 900 online course modules, all the disciplines in management and administration are well covered. One could consider that, in proportion to other areas, Computing, Law and Marketing are well covered.

10. How would you describe the "onlineability" of the subjects your institution has chosen for e-learning?

At present there is no limit to online development other than the availability of the professors. One could consider that Human Resources courses are not well represented.

11. Do the online courses provided by your institution have flexible start-up and progression?

The majority of our elearning modules form part of the pedagogical structures of our face-to-face courses. It is better not to speak of flexibility of progression because the elearning modules usually deal with the fundamentals of a discipline, and our face-to-face courses can, therefore go much further into the topic than the elearning provision.

12. What is the role or importance of synchronous and asynchronous communication between students and teachers and among students themselves?

The discussion forums that we have in certain modules are used principally by the students and the professors before examination periods to facilitate revision and to ensure that themes are only done once. For our distance education students, that is those who are studying between two face-to-face sessions, the forums and collaborative working groups constitute elements which cannot be neglected and which are much appreciated. From the point of view of satisfaction, our students greatly appreciate these 'learning communities' which are therefore supported. From the point of view of the professors, the forums constitute FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) which can be used year after year.

Management, strategy and attitudes

13. How would you describe involvement from the institution leadership in terms of being supportive, and how has this been important for success?

The Director General of the EDHEC Group supports the elearning developments because he knows that the world is changing and that educational practices are evolving. He knows also that new elearning products can lead us to new students and to new resources.

More importantly, this support of the senior management has a direct effect on the activity plans of the professors who can get recompense at the end of the year for the elearning modules they have developed. Thus course development is easier. Finally the Director of elearning has budget responsibility for equipment and organisation.

14. How would you describe the attitudes of the different groups of staff towards online teaching? How has this affected your success?

This depends on the importance elearning plays for a particular course. One can say that now all the teaching staff in the EDHEC Group have a role in elearning. This goes from the most basic (online course support with organised access) to the most complete (course enrolment, self evaluation and interaction). The administration is also involved in elearning (International services, organisation of sessions). Rather than a success, this is a cultural impact of elearning which is of direct interest to all in the EDHEC Group.

15. Does your institution have a strategy for online education? If yes, what is (briefly) the content of the strategy and how is it followed up by employees in your organisation?

At the beginning elearning allowed us to improve the learning processes of our regular courses, assuring in distance learning the provision of basic concepts, revisions and self evaluation. Now we envisage the provision of diploma and degree courses using the 'blended learning' methodology.

16. How does your institution deal with quality issues related to online education and has quality contributed to success?

Success is not measurable. From the time when our elearning developments brought clear responses to the new situations that were indicated, EDHEC supported it.

17. How would you describe the effectiveness of your administrative routines in online education?

The effectiveness of the administrative routines is shown by the facilitation of the interchanges between the administration and students. Documents are now permanently available and the flexibility born of the communication tools has reduced response time.

18. To which extent do teachers involved in online education have predictable and manageable workloads?

The question of staff having predictable and manageable workloads will depend on decisions which will be taken in a short time about diploma and degree qualifications by blended learning.

19. To which extent does your institution collaborate with other educational institutions and how has this affected success?

For some years EDHEC has collaborated with numerous colleges and universities in France and overseas and with some large business corporations in France. The aim is to share experience and to promote the exchange and adaptation of elearning content. This comparative and constructive approach allows EDHEC to be a global player in elearning, with a reputation in the environment in which we operate.

20. How would you describe the credibility of your institution (both formal and informal) with the government and public administration and how has this been an important criterion for success?

In 2003 we received an important European Commission subsidy for the installation of our e-learning operation and again in 2005 a further subsidy from the Regional Council of Provence-Alps-Cote d'Azur. Two large French administrative agencies entrust their online personnel training to EDHEC. While we do not have interaction with the national government, the regional government is well aware of our activities. Therefore EDHEC has credibility in the field of elearning.

21. How are you able to handle the large number of online courses and students?

The Director of elearning is responsible for the training of the users (instructors and students), for the creation of new courseware and for the creation of course enrolments.

The professors are fully autonomous in the creation and running of the courses, with the help of assistants in the teaching departments. It is the same for the administrative services.

Departmental assistants, professors and elearning administrators combine for replying to questions, animating the forums and taking care of eventual technical outages.

Economy

22. How would you describe the cost-effectiveness of online education in your institution? How has cost-effectiveness affected success?

The investments in materials and computing are considerable but we consider that they are compensated for by the enriching of the training, by the services to students and by the good reputation we gain from these investments.

23. To which extent is income from operation of online education stable and predictable?

The elearning provision of EDHEC has enabled us to gain a number of contacts for training in businesses. But this question for EDHEC is closely linked to the development of training diplomas and degrees by blended learning.

24. To which extent does your institution experience pressure to be flexible to be able to adapt to a changing market?

The specific function of the French *Grandes Ecoles* is to anticipate the needs of the market by proposing new programmes and new training methods.

25. To which extent does your institution apply a strategy of flexible employment and use staff to adapt to changes in markets?

At present, a lot of elearning modules are administered at a distance by professors who are not employed by EDHEC and who only come to give a few hours of face-to-face courses. Our pedagogical organisation is growing greatly outside our walls. To provide the best organisation possible of our diploma and degree programmes in elearning, and to be able to respond in a very short time to our students located in all time zones, we need to demonstrate our effectiveness by probably accepting the recruitment of pedagogical and technical assistants located throughout the world.

Additional factors

26. What other factors have contributed to sustainability, robustness and the achievement of critical mass in your institution?

An additional factor was the availability of a professorial staff who had no resistance to change nor to the adoption of information and communication technologies.

Thank you