



Frik Landman, USB-ED



Prof Wim Gevers, USB



Prof Frikkie Herbst, USB



Martin Butler, USB

Perpetual Motion

Moving with the times, the USB and USB Executive Development (USB-ED) have made changes to the way they teach and their students learn. **SUE BLAINE** reports.

Business schools have a choice: To wait until their students demand change, or to change ahead of request.

USB and USB-ED have changed ahead of request.

"In the past few years, the need for globally responsible business leadership and governance has been splashed all over the press ... There were faint signals for a long time that there is a need for change in business education. This is when we realised we need to ask: 'Do we only respond to requests from clients, or do we lead our clients?'" says USB-ED CEO Frik Landman.

Starting almost a decade ago with the Enron crisis, which put a global spotlight on the need for an emphasis on ethical accounting practices, right up to the current financial crisis that has plunged much of the world into recession, it was obvious something was rotten in the state of global business.

It was time to change things in order to emphasise to business students that most problems they encounter in business, and in life, have multiple facets, including ethical elements. Any solution that does not take into account as many factors as possible will simply morph into a problem somewhere else in the business.

A recently released study by IBM – the IBM Global CEO Study, the largest study of chief executives ever conducted – reveals that, while there is a dramatic increase in the number of global business leaders who have the ability to see important change ahead, the

ability to absorb and manage change is widening the gap between winners and losers in the global economy, says Landman.

"What's lacking? That's the million dollar question ... Off the cuff, I'd say a 'tool' to make sense of the complexities that confront leaders in today's complex business world," he says.

That, then, is what USB-ED did – revamped its executive education programmes to better fit the new world order.

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This is also what has happened at the business school itself, where head of the MBA programme Prof Wim Gevers explains that business schools across the globe have been criticised for 'silo-thinking' – which results in an inability to see all the factors that constitute a problem – and the school decided to make changes to the MBA programme to adapt it to "trends for the future".

CLASS ACT: USB-ED and USB have revamped their programmes to suit the new world order.

PICTURES: DON BAILEY



“It was not as though there was something wrong with our programme – which got international accreditations in 2006 and 2007 – but we can’t be complacent. We must adapt to trends for the future, so we put together a committee to redesign the MBA programme,” he says.

The MBA makeover took approximately 15 months, and USB hopes it has now come up with something that gives MBA students the great technical skills they got from the old programme, together with tools they can use to manage and, importantly, motivate the people they are expected to lead in their respective organisations.

“But improvement is a progressive thing. You don’t redesign something and end up with a Rolls Royce. Programmes continually need to be looked at and refined,” says Gevers.

The new MBA programme has three overarching outcomes – the comprehensive development of an individual’s leadership qualities which shows them how they operate in leadership situations and how to use that effectively; the ability to ponder business problems from a holistic viewpoint, and personal communication skills, both verbal and written.

One of the biggest changes, in both the MBA programme and the USB-ED courses, is team-teaching – a new lecture method where two or more experts in different fields present a class in which the links between the fields are emphasised.

While challenging for teachers and class alike, team-teaching is a good way of showing students the ways in which the different functional areas of business and business management interlink; and that they must be linked for a business to operate optimally, says Frikkie Herbst, USB associate professor in Marketing Management.

Another very visible change is the use of the internet to improve the learning experience.

Students are given reading to do ahead of a class, and have to complete an online multiple-choice test before attending a class, with the marks counting towards a small percentage of their final mark. The aim is for students to arrive in class ready to discuss an issue about which they are already reasonably well-informed.

“The point of departure for us was that time on campus is precious. MBA students are not necessarily enrolled full-time. Of the 250 students who registered this year, about 200 are doing their MBAs in part-time or modular format,” says USB Senior Information Systems lecturer Martin Butler.

Another advantage is that lecturers can add articles of interest to a website, for students to read if they want to, says Herbst.

This, says Landman, is a very good thing. Today’s business leaders need to be used to reading up on a vast array of issues because their customers are increasingly well-informed and sophisticated because of the ease with which information is transferred in today’s technology-rich world.

MBA student Surette van den Heever says the use of technology in the MBA programme is “very efficient and user-friendly”, and the new teaching methods stimulate class discussion, while students can benefit from lecturers’ practical and academic expertise.

For Landman, however, the most important change for executive development students is that there is now post-qualification follow-up, because “the real learning starts back in the workplace”. ^a

Read more
about the restructured USB MBA
at www.usb.ac.za/mba