



NewMindsets Case Study

Creating a virtual university resource that can serve multiple learning needs – simultaneously

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The Situation and Project Objectives:

Business schools and corporate universities are facing major challenges in shifting from “supply-driven” to “demand-driven” modes of operation. The old supply-driven approach based on a “one size fits all” curriculum of established course offerings is being challenged by the need to create program offerings that meet diverse client needs. Business schools face the challenge that student populations have increasingly diverse cultural, technical and knowledge backgrounds – making it extremely hard to find a common starting point that will meet everyone’s needs. Students typically have knowledge and competency gaps that cannot be filled through formal classroom education; hence independent study projects are becoming more important as part of a well-rounded business education and platform for a future career. Similarly, corporate universities are facing the challenge of meeting just in time learning needs of employees faced with difficult work problems and of delivering customized study programs that can help employees remedy competency gaps revealed in ‘360’ feedback evaluations, or for succession planning and career development purposes. The NewMindsets learning platform has been successfully used by one of Canada’s premier business schools - the Schulich School of Business at York University – to provide a faculty-wide resource that can deal with these challenges and bring major new value and support to students.

Implementation Approach:

Starting with implementation of *NewMindsets* as a blended learning tool supporting classroom teaching in the field of Leadership and Critical Thinking skills, the application has evolved into a multipurpose project that also provides a “demand driven” management survival kit for upgrading personal knowledge gaps and competencies; a career development support that students can use to prepare for the job market; and as a team development and consulting support tool in the execution of practical field projects:

- *Blended learning:* As a first step in moving toward use of online learning as a support for the main classroom-based curriculum, a decision was made to integrate NewMindsets into the core leadership development course. Each week students were asked to contribute to class discussion by reviewing a specially selected cluster of online resources, and to apply the ideas to personal leadership projects. The aim was to create four parallel sets of learning activities throughout the course – involving classroom discussion and instruction, online learning, group assignments and the use of reflective learning journals to capture the personal dimension of what was being



learned. The process increased the program's capacity to customize learning to meet individual needs – by creating opportunities for online “gap filling” and in depth investigation of topics of special interest. Since all the NewMindsets learning materials are available at all times as a student and faculty resource, other courses are able to tap into the same content base, creating learning synergies in the program at large.

- *The “Management Survival Kit”*: As a means of meeting new “demand-driven” learning needs the next step involved making major segments of the NewMindsets resource base available in the form of an action-oriented tool kit focused on core competence development in areas like teamwork, communications, dealing with ambiguity and change, project management, etc.. This allowed students to meet independent and group study needs encountered as part of their ongoing coursework and practical field projects, and provided a valuable means of increasing idea and knowledge sharing using the program's virtual learning space. The survival kit became a particularly important learning tool at the group project level, seeding all kinds of exchange between team members.
- *Career development support*: The NewMindsets content base was also matched against career development competencies using the CareerLeader skills framework being used by the Schulich career development office. This allows further value to be extracted from the system as students access relevant materials to fill the gaps identified in their career readiness profiles.
- *Team development and consulting aid*: The NewMindsets system is also constantly available to support strategy field projects undertaken by all students as a capstone for their MBA. These are live consulting projects with major deliverables to clients. NewMindsets is available as a consulting tool that can be used in actual presentations or communications with clients e.g. on how to implement “stretch benchmarking,” or use of experiments and prototypes to mobilize change, and have also become valuable means of providing remote group field support – especially for those students working internationally. The power of the basic resource has also been extended by using the NewMindsets self-authoring system to give access to online resources outside the NewMindsets system, or to create custom advice from Faculty and group project advisers.

Achievements:

- This application has been granted a brandon-hall.com / Online Learning Magazine excellence in e-learning award.
- Use of the NewMindsets learning resources has led to a major increase in the quality and quantity of online learning and knowledge sharing via Schulich's virtual learning network and provides an exemplar of what can be done to stimulate the development of effective online communities of practice.



- Major strides have been made in building new program value through “demand driven” learning focused on individual development needs
- For a relatively modest marginal expenditure the IT department has been able to lever major return on existing technology investments, with minimal service and maintenance demands.
- Major spin off benefits continue to accrue through improved career services to students and potential employers
- The Faculty has found an effective way of supporting the independent field study consulting groups and of ensuring better service to their clients. Annually, there are approximately 100 consulting groups, involving 600 or more students, placing considerable demands on faculty resources and time. The online support continues to increase their autonomy and effectiveness to a major degree.
- In the words of Dr Patricia Bradshaw, Director of Schulich’s MBA Program:

“NewMindsets promised a world-class online management education resource and that’s exactly what we got. In just a few months we were able to take a major leap in using the internet to support our core MBA program and offer a blended learning resource that’s at the forefront of management education.”

For further information contact info@newmindsets.com