EXPERIENCE THE VLERICK LEARNING JOURNEYS
The world of education is changing quickly. Today’s technology makes it possible to move the learning experience out of the classroom and onto the internet. Which opens up a plethora of possibilities to create learning through MOOCs, SPOCs, online platforms, etc.

But as we look for the answer to what the technological future holds for education, have we lost track of the real question? Have we become too focused on the technology and forgotten what learning is really about?

Indeed, we no longer need a classroom to transfer information. And executives are indeed no longer satisfied with listening to experts deliver content in lengthy presentations. Instead, they want to be engaged in the process of acquiring new knowledge as active participants in a learning journey.

At Vlerick Business School, we noticed this shift in our executive clients’ expectations – and, after various pilot experiments and in-depth studies, we decided that incremental changes in the system are not enough to respond to, and exceed, the client expectations of tomorrow. So, our whole school has been going through a transformation process to ensure that each one of our programmes is a transformational learning journey, and that each member of staff embodies the spirit of ‘learning as change’.

Marion Debruyne
Dean
Vlerick Business School
FROM LEARNING TO PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

When organisations and individuals buy executive education, they are buying change. They are not buying knowledge – they are buying the ability to make something happen in their organisation.

When defining learning objectives, we usually ask: “What do you want to learn?” But learning objectives are only one step along the journey … they are not the destination. The destination is action.

Instead of learning objectives, we need to talk about performance objectives. When we are looking for performance, we need to ask: “What do you want to do better or differently?”

LEARNING & CHANGE – A QUESTION OF MINDSET

Learning, innovation, and change are closely entwined in today’s business vocabulary. Yet they carry different notions depending on the perspective in which the words are used. If teaching equals learning, it can be understood as a one-way process that, in theory, a teacher could do without anyone listening.

True learning is an active process that requires the learner’s attention. We cannot force learning upon someone. Similarly, change cannot be imposed on people – it needs their active engagement. While there are many things we can teach about innovation models and techniques, it is vital to nourish the culture of learning.

If people resist new ideas, it’s a lot harder to bring new innovations to life. But when people take charge of their own learning, development, and change, they can innovate and produce extraordinary results.
LEARNING AT VLERICK

So what does this mean in practice? How do we walk the talk?

Our role as a business school has evolved from being focused on transferring knowledge from faculty to participants to being focused on crafting powerful change experiences. This shift in focus impacts our work radically – from design and sales, to teaching and coordination – because the heart of our work is no longer knowledge, it is transfer: the ability to apply the knowledge to the different contexts that our participants are facing.

**Our work does not end when the participants understand a new concept.** Ultimately, they need to be able to apply the concept to create their own solutions.

Coming up with one great idea is not enough. The solutions created today won’t be the ones needed tomorrow. So, we don’t focus on quick fixes, but on **building the capacity to learn and continuously find new solutions to challenges**. The capacity for innovation and change is what lies at the core of an executive’s work – and enabling leaders in their mission lies at the core of executive education.

At the end of the day, a business school is not a consultancy – so we don’t create the answers for our clients. But we have a pedagogical choice between delivering teaching or facilitating learning. Which one do you think will inspire and improve business performance more?

> **PEOPLE DON’T RESIST CHANGE. THEY RESIST BEING CHANGED.**
> 
> **Peter M. Senge**
> Author of ‘The Fifth Discipline: the art and practice of the learning organization’

CEO workshop around the Non-Market Strategy game
Learning is more than a training programme, a curriculum, or a single event – it is a journey. And just like every journey, between the beginning and the end the road takes twists and turns. A journey can be planned, but there is nearly always something emergent and unexpected along the way ... which adds to the journey’s richness. Today, the best learning journeys do more than simply engage and involve the learner – they lead to practical, impactful results in the real world.

When it comes to the long-term performance of organisations, it is vital that executives become lifelong learners. In fact, any company that is serious about stimulating growth and achieving success needs to adopt a culture of consistent and effective learning at every level. Change is a constant in the business world – and maintaining a competitive foothold demands knowledge and learning that is both innovative and timely.

A learning journey is an acceleration of learning and has 3 phases:

1. ENGAGE
2. REFLECT AND EXPERIMENT
3. RIPPLE

1. ENGAGE

Whether their involvement begins online or face-to-face, a learner-centred approach ensures that participants are engaged from the very start and lays the foundation for a successful learning outcome. So, the engagement phase of any learning journey should inspire curiosity, build excitement, and instil a sense of purpose in the learner.

As the single most important factor in learning, motivation drives the engagement phase, and a well-designed learning journey should address and answer such questions as:

• What will I be learning, and how will I be learning it?
• What previous experience or knowledge can I build on?
• How will my learning impact and benefit my work?

Make the learner the star of the learning process

Whereas teaching puts the Professor at the core of the process, learning is where the participant is the focal point. These experiences are not created in isolation by our staff, but in partnership with our clients. We see them as co-creators of impact, because it is only by their ownership of their
learning that we can have the impact we set out to have – which is real
and observable change. Because faculty and staff are only the architect
and facilitator of this process, we must create an atmosphere in which the
participant takes co-responsibility for his/her learning.

2. REFLECT AND EXPERIMENT
As the learning journey unfolds, participants benefit most when they are
fully involved in the process on an experiential level. Learning involves
both reflection and experimentation, which are indispensable for impactful
learning that goes beyond the transfer of content from faculty to participant.
Reflecting and experimenting are a constant cycle involving the whole
person:

- **Reflection** is led by Vlerick faculty and experts and provides new ideas,
  concepts and frameworks to inspire and broaden horizons.

- **Experimentation** is about trying new things through practice, prototyping,
  and showcasing, and it revolves around participant co-creation.

**Embed action in the learning process**
Learning is a process of trial and error, of experimentation and re-calibration,
of testing ideas and reflecting on the outcome. This means that action is not
postponed until after the learning, but that it is an integral part of it.
Learning is visible in the application of new knowledge and new insights, in the action that individuals and organisations take as they learn, and in actions and initiatives to improve things and explore new opportunities. The learning processes we design are action-based and characterised by the feedback loop: insights-action-reflection-insight.

3. RIPPLE

As the very core of the learning journey, the ripple phase is perhaps the most crucial stage of the entire learning process. Any value that has been gained along the way is quickly lost if the participants' organisations don't understand how to apply what has been learned to the workplace.

The outcome of a learning journey is that the participants become agents of change for their organisations – thus rippling the impact of the experience. For this to happen, both Vlerick and the participant's organisation need to work hand-in-hand to facilitate the transfer of learning into the professional environment.

An effective ripple phase should be both impactful and measurable in terms of:

• Communicating and transferring knowledge back to the workplace
• Engaging and inspiring others to make practical use of this knowledge
• Improving the overall performance of the business

Create a risk-free learning environment

As learning requires action, the learning journey should also encompass the attitude of entrepreneurship, the courage to stretch out of the comfort zone, and the risk to apply something new. So, it's important that the learning journey creates an environment that encourages action while also providing a safety net. By creating a risk-free environment for the first trials of new knowledge, powerful learning journeys facilitate the jump into the non-risk-free real world.
WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT LEARNING JOURNEYS AT VLERICK BUSINESS SCHOOL?

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