

# Incorporating Distributed Learning Technology in EMBA Education

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## Abstract

This study (research in progress) investigates the students' perceptions on distributed learning using information technology. The specific distributed learning technology under study is Lotus LearningSpace™. The technology has been implemented for an executive program in a Midwest University. The research question to be answered is that whether using technology in management education is as effective – and often more effective - as traditional instructor led learning.

**Keywords:** Distributed learning, information technology, management education

## 1. BACKGROUND

When Cisco Systems CEO John Chambers said “education is the next killer application for the Internet (Chamber, 2000),” he hits the nail squarely on the head. According to a recent IDC market research report, “almost half of the academic institutions in America currently offer on-line learning as part of their curriculum.” Furthermore, it has been predicted by the some report that 85 percent of these schools will have some form of on-line learning in place by the year 2002.” This and other events bring about an increasing interest in how information technology (IT) can be leveraged to facilitate distributed and collaborative learning.

This paper discusses how the authors have utilized Lotus LearningSpace™ in the EMBA program in a mid-west university and what their experiences in using the technology have been. The research question to be answered is that whether using technology in management education is as effective – and often more effective - as traditional instructor led learning.

## 2. LearningSpace™

LearningSpace™ is a distributed learning software package marketed by Lotus Development Corporation. It provides an integrative learning environment for creating and delivering training and education through the Web. LearningSpace™ courses are instructor-facilitated, collaborative learning experiences that combine the anyplace, anytime benefits of distributed learning with the “being there” advantages of a traditional classroom – interactions between students, communication among the members of project teams, and direct feedback from the instructor (Lotus, 1998).

Five specialized interactive course database modules were created using the course tool in LearningSpace™. These five modules allow users (instructors and students) to engage in problem-solving activities, debates, discussions, and learning exercises, as well as access and use stored information, and receive personalized feedback from instructors.

### 3. RESEARCH APPROACH

A study is underway to investigate the users' perceptions of using LearningSpace™. Students from three EMBA courses are involved in the study. All three courses were provided with LearningSpace™ as a tool for collaboration among fellow students, interaction with instructor, and access to various learning materials over the Internet.

Students are all employed full time, and generally only meet face-to-face during their weekly class session. In addition, these students are geographically dispersed, which presents a barrier for meeting outside of class. Thus, LearningSpace (along with e-mail) is the primary means for collaboration outside of classroom.

At the end of the term for each course, students completed a survey designed to measure perceived learning and satisfaction with participation. Items of the survey are derived from Alavi, et al. (1997). Usage data has also been logged to supplement self-report data.

### 4. REFERENCES

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