

CRASH COURSES

Should companies be cutting back on executive education budgets, or is now the time to spend more effectively on developing skills to help weather the economic crisis? IESE Business School's **Giuseppe Auricchio** tells Jim Banks about the increased need for customised training to get ahead when times are hard.

At a time when every penny counts it is to be expected that companies will look at all of their expenditure with a view to cutting costs. Executive education may seem like a luxury when the challenge of surviving the downturn means business leaders already have enough to pack into their crowded schedules. For others, developing their key leaders is still a vital part of meeting today's demands.

'Attitudes towards executive development are still the same, but the cash situation of many companies has changed,' says Giuseppe Auricchio, director of Custom Programs in the International Executive Education department of IESE Business School.

Why invest in talent development in the downturn? The answer is twofold. First, executive education can equip business leaders with ideas, strategies and experience that enhance their ability to deal with specific issues. Secondly, it can help companies avoid the recruitment expenses that come with rebuilding when the economy improves.

'In the last downturn, many companies let people go and then had to spend a fortune in recruitment when the market turned,' says Auricchio.

'Companies have to realise, for instance, that "who gets the axe?" is the wrong question to be asking. They should be worrying about the motivation of the people who remain in the organisation. It is not just about who you send home.'

Focused and direct

IESE has been expanding its presence around the world from its base in Spain and is now developing a campus in New York. The school is known for its

open programmes, but the current economic climate has pushed its short and customised programmes to the fore.

Through its custom programmes it is helping many companies address the problems created by the downturn. Custom courses can also build on the knowledge of an experienced faculty to address specific issues such as how companies can survive on less now that the good times have gone.

'Our executive education team sits down with the client to develop solutions

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that address their corporate needs,' says Auricchio. 'Once the programme has been put together, the basic concept is to combine learning with a 'real' business problem and, by involving numerous executives from the organisation, create innovative solutions.'

Rather than academic exercises, Auricchio prefers for these programmes to be seen as vehicles to help execute strategies and deliver institutional change. 'Customising a programme's content so that it can be related directly to a company's actual business and to its specific business challenges allows us to combine both learning and action, which can be key in helping achieve a tangible result,' he says.

They can provide insight into how to build new models for the finance function, for example, or how to approach streamlining operations to be more efficient and less costly.

IESE's custom programmes are designed to be highly focused

on specific business issues, short enough to fit in the schedules of busy executives, and transformational in their outcome. They stretch the horizons of participants, challenging their assumptions and preconceptions. They fuel the kind of self-analysis that leads to innovation and inspires creative thinking.

'The advantage of custom programmes is that they can adapt to changes in the market. Our programmes accelerate or create strategy, so they

can be very important for the business manager,' says Auricchio.

'We realise that there are budgetary constraints and cost-cutting is a priority, but the benefits of the courses outweigh the costs. These are not training exercises, but courses to facilitate the implementation of business strategy. They address companies' specific problems, so they are worthwhile, crisis or no crisis.' ■

Further information
Website: www.iese.edu

