

Megatrends in e-learning provision

EDHEC Business School Lille-Nice

Context

In 2007, EDHEC Business School is :

- 4 700 e-learning students
- 18.193 graduates
- 102 permanent faculty
- 800 guest lecturers
- 40 visiting professors
- 783 international students
- 76 nationalities
- 41 % non-French professors
- 93 universities on 5 continents
- 10 international courses
- 903 online courses
- 98% of students have a mix of face-to-face and e-learning.

In December 1951, HEC Nord became EDHEC (*École De Hautes Études Commerciales du Nord*). At that time, EDHEC had 169 students. A competitive entrance examination was introduced in 1954, with two sessions, one in June and one in September. Students could enter after obtaining the baccalaureat and the programme included compulsory subjects such as French, mathematics, at least one foreign language, etc. In 1956, EDHEC left the protective wing of the Catho' and moved to what was then known as the EDHEC Hotel at 67, boulevard Vauban, Paris.

EDHEC presents itself thus;

The goal is to train the talent and develop the knowledge that moves the world forward. Firms are increasingly looking for people who can manage projects and multicultural teams in an international environment to drive their development, Our mission is to shape this talent by transmitting the know-how and the people skills that are needed. This implies developing a clear vision of tomorrow's world.

EDHEC's ambition is to move businesses, society, and the world forward. We aim to do this by developing the talent and the values in our future alumni that

will take them towards excellence and ensure they are the builders of a better world. At the same time, by creating an added value that is useful to everyone, thanks to the research conducted by our teaching faculty.

EDHEC's values are the values that drive the world forward:

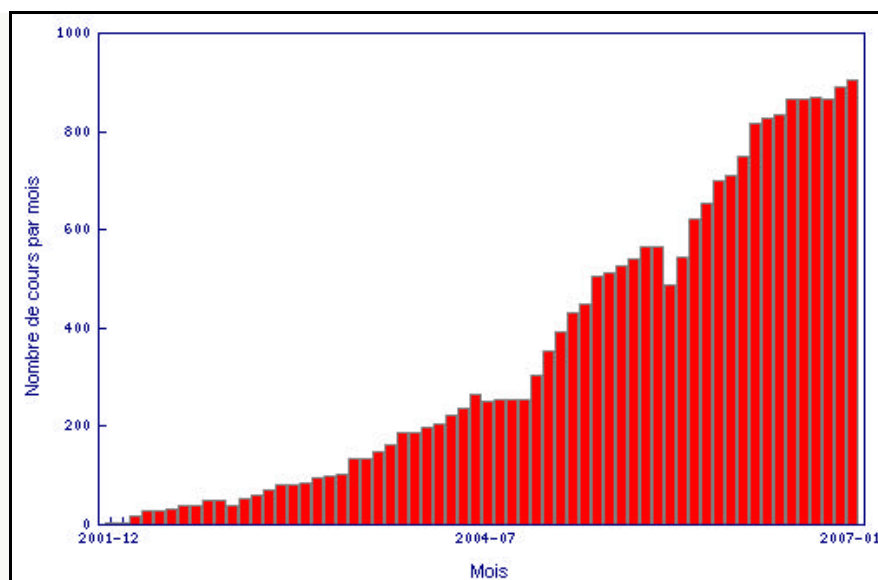
- Commitment: to a mission that drives both EDHEC and its community. Commitment, the key virtue in great leaders.
- Conviction: because no one can successfully lead a project they don't believe in.
- Culture: because it is essential to understand others and to understand the key issues and challenges in today's world.
- Solidarity: an EDHEC value for over a century, it underpins our students' deep-seated humanity.
- Independence: which allows us to make our own choices and to act freely in the governance of the school, and independence in the spirit of our alumni which enables them to tackle any issue that may arise with great open-mindedness.

EDHEC's aim is to be the first choice business school for European firms by 2010

It is the market that will express this preference. It is the market that will express business organisations' demand for our students, our programmes and our research because the market appreciates the force of our values, the fit between our courses and their needs, and the quality of responses offered by our research to the new challenges that the business world and society must confront.

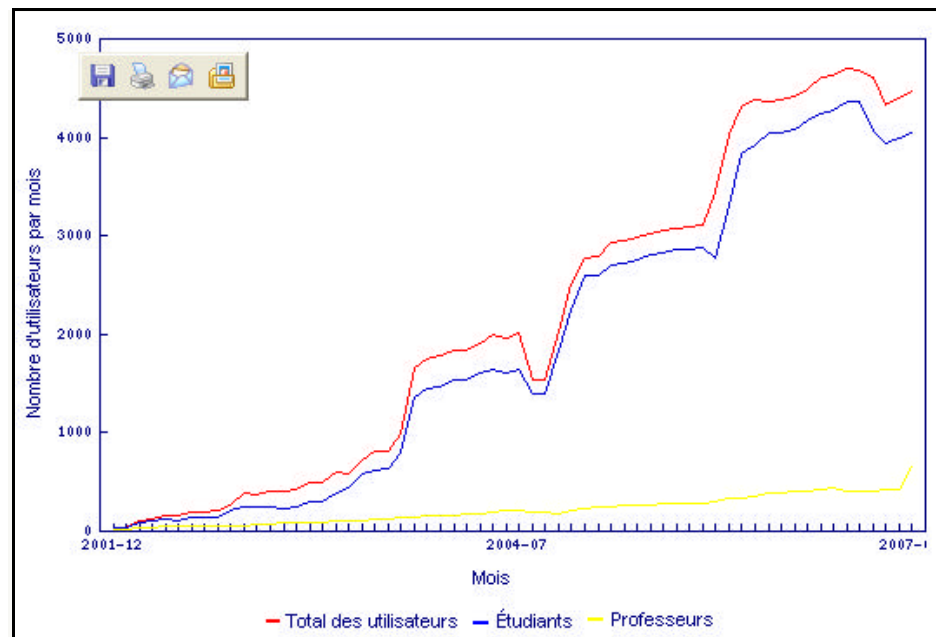
The progression in the provision of online courses to 903 today is shown below:

Number of online courses: **903**



The progression in the number of e-learning students is shown below:

Number of e-learning students: **4157**



Historical context

With the creation of a new campus at Nice in 1991, EDHRC needed to guarantee its pedagogical identity with regard to courseware, evaluation and the range of methodological processes. The professors, the administration and the students quickly got the habit of exchanging and sharing information by email and Intranet links.

In 1999 the head of the Executive MBA programme wanted to go further than just offering course assistance on line. His objective was to organise students' work outside the monthly week of course sessions and to encourage cooperation at a distance between professors and students and between the students themselves.

In 2000 EDHEC launched its first elearning modules for 40 students of this Executive MBA and for 10 professors.

In 2001 EDHEC wanted to facilitate the integration of students returning directly to their second year at EDHEC after obtaining a university degree or diploma. According to their records these students needed to upgrade their levels in Finance or in Law or in Accounting for example. EDHEC therefore developed new elearning modules for them, as soon as their enrolment was confirmed.

Since 2001 all the programmes (and thus all the students) took on elearning. There were online course supports, foundation courses by elearning, revision

packages and self evaluation packages. The important thing is that EDHEC's elearning strategy allows it to improve the learning processes.

There was no resistance to change in the Information Technology culture at EDHEC. Information and training was given to all the users: a range of very simple applications to the professors, allowing them to become autonomous in producing their own content. But the foremost factor in the success of elearning at EDHEC was the support of the Group Directorate General. E-learning is a major strategic channel for the Group.

E-learning was a natural development of the pedagogical practices, nevertheless, EDHEC proceeded gradually. It acquired experience for one year with the cohort of students in the Executive MBA and with a small number of professors. From that, elearning spread to other programmes year by year.

There is no link between the developments in elearning and the different fields of research of the professors at EDHEC.

Technical issues

EDHEC is not more competent in the use and integration of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) than any other French *Grande Ecole*. On the other hand there is an ITC culture at the institution that is spread by the elearning courses and services.

All the courses are accessible to students without the need for purchasing specific hardware or software. The elearning materials contain printed documents and 'rich content' in FLASH.

The elearning platform is directly linked to all the websites of EDHEC. The students' identification criteria are the same for accessing all the services (email, sessions, international services, use of time and elearning).

On the other hand, it was desirable that the platform and all the elearning policy decisions were controlled by another service other than the Computer Centre. Elearning is first and foremost a methodological and pedagogical sector. We did not want the technical teams to impose their view or their course formatting.

The strengths and weaknesses of the e-learning administrative systems are:

Strengths: autonomous organisation directly supported by the Director General. Very strong support for all requests for the creation of new accounts and new course enrolments.

Weaknesses: not having enough internal resources; the pedagogical approach is not always precise enough; collaborative working could be more developed; few examples of online assessment (as opposed to self correction).

Courses

With more than 900 online course modules, all the disciplines in management and administration are well covered. One could consider that, in proportion to other areas, Computing, Law and Marketing are well covered.

The programmes offered are :

- Full time Theseus-EDHEC MBA
- Edhec Grande Ecole
- EDHEC-CAMPUS Executive MBA
- Master in Management (MIM)
- Master of Science in Finance
- Master of Science in Risk and Asset Management
- Master of Science in Marketing
- Master of Science in Strategic Management
- Master of Science in European Business
- Master of Science in Research for Business Administration
- PhD in Business Administration
- ESPEME
- Executive MBA
- Cycle Supérieur de Management (CSM)
- CEVE (Conseil en Investissement financier)

At present there is no limit to online development in any subject other than the availability of the professors. One could consider that Human Resources courses are not well represented.

The majority of the elearning modules form part of the pedagogical structures of the face-to-face courses. It is better not to speak of flexibility of progression because the elearning modules usually deal with the fundamentals of a discipline, and the face-to-face courses can, therefore go much further into the topic than the elearning provision.

The discussion forums that are in certain modules are used principally by the students and the professors before examination periods to facilitate revision and to ensure that themes are only done once. For the distance education students, that is those who are studying between two face-to-face sessions, the forums and collaborative working groups constitute elements which cannot be neglected and which are much appreciated. From the point of view of satisfaction, the students greatly appreciate these 'learning communities' which are therefore supported. From the point of view of the professors, the forums constitute FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) which can be used year after year.

Management, strategy and attitudes

The Director General of the EDHEC Group supports the elearning developments because he knows that the world is changing and that

educational practices are evolving. He knows also that new elearning products can lead to new students and to new resources.

More importantly, this support of senior management has a direct effect on the activity plans of the professors who can get recompense at the end of the year for the elearning modules they have developed. Thus course development is easier. Finally the Director of elearning has budget responsibility for equipment and organisation.

The attitudes of different groups of staff towards teaching online depends on the importance elearning plays for a particular course. One can say that now all the teaching staff in the EDHEC Group have a role in elearning. This goes from the most basic (online course support with organised access) to the most complete (course enrolment, self evaluation and interaction). The administration is also involved in elearning (International services, organisation of sessions). Rather than a success, this is a cultural impact of elearning which is of direct interest to all in the EDHEC Group.

At the beginning elearning allowed EDHEC to improve the learning processes of the regular courses, assuring in distance learning the provision of basic concepts, revisions and self evaluation. Now the institution envisages the provision of diploma and degree courses using the 'blended learning' methodology.

Success is not measurable. From the time when the elearning developments brought clear responses to the new situations that were indicated, EDHEC supported it.

The effectiveness of the administrative routines is shown by the facilitation of the interchanges between the administration and students. Documents are now permanently available and the flexibility born of the communication tools has reduced response time.

The question of staff having predictable and manageable workloads will depend on decisions which will be taken in a short time about diploma and degree qualifications by blended learning.

For some years EDHEC has collaborated with numerous colleges and universities in France and overseas and with some large business corporations in France. The aim is to share experience and to promote the exchange and adaptation of elearning content. This comparative and constructive approach allows EDHEC to be a global player in elearning, with a reputation in the environment in which it operates.

In 2003 EDHEC received an important European Commission subsidy for the installation of the e-learning operation and again in 2005 a further subsidy from the Regional Council of Provence-Alps-Cote d'Azur. Two large French administrative agencies entrust their online personnel training to EDHEC. While EDHEC does not have interaction with the national government, the

regional government is well aware of the activities. Therefore EDHEC has credibility in the field of elearning.

The Director of elearning is responsible for the training of the users (instructors and students), for the creation of new courseware and for the creation of course enrolments.

The professors are fully autonomous in the creation and running of the courses, with the help of assistants in the teaching departments. It is the same for the administrative services.

Departmental assistants, professors and elearning administrators combine for replying to questions, animating the forums and taking care of eventual technical outages.

Economy

The investments in materials and computing are considerable but EDHEC considers that they are compensated for by the enriching of the training, by the services to students and by the good reputation the institution gains from these investments.

The elearning provision has enabled EDHEC to gain a number of contacts for training in businesses. But this question for EDHEC is closely linked to the development of training diplomas and degrees by blended learning.

Experiencing pressure to be flexible to be able to adapt to a changing market is inherent in the business model. The specific function of the French *Grandes Ecoles* is to anticipate the needs of the market by proposing new programmes and new training methods.

At present, a lot of elearning modules are administered at a distance by professors who are not employed by EDHEC and who only come to give a few hours of face-to-face courses. The pedagogical organisation is growing greatly outside the walls. To provide the best organisation possible of the diploma and degree programmes in elearning, and to be able to respond in a very short time to students located in all time zones, EDHEC needs to demonstrate its effectiveness by probably accepting the recruitment of pedagogical and technical assistants located throughout the world.

Additional factors

An additional factor that contributed to sustainability, robustness and the achievement of critical mass in the institution was the availability of a professorial staff who had no resistance to change nor to the adoption of innovations in information and communication technologies.

