



The Game Changers: Exploring Transformational Challenges Confronting Education Business Models

In This Minute

We are witnessing game-changing forces that will radically affect education and its provision, delivery, work, and workforce, as well as the student experience, schooling outcomes, and education business. We need to identify these changes at all levels and in all sectors of education, understand their implications, and address them.



Talking Points

The challenges and their implications are inextricably interlinked and comprised of paradoxical, inconsistent, and contradictory tendencies. To understand them, we must first take a closer look at the context in which they have been created.

First, education is now considered a global commodity in many areas, and competition is fierce. Free market ideas, including everything from curriculum individualization to institutional autonomy, are commonplace. Next, the economic recession has honed everybody's focus on achieving the best possible return on investment while facing slashed budgets.

In addition, we have witnessed increased government intervention as well as a constant quest for "quality," which is rarely explicitly defined. And our advanced technology has led to rapid sharing of media commentary (often negative), which in turn legitimizes further government intervention and results in government and public distrust of educators.

"Every educational decision has a business implication."

The Challenges

Traditional schools are challenged by the rapidly growing for-profit sector. These flexible, low-cost, low-bureaucracy education providers offer online or low-rent changeable facilities, a movable product, and incentivized enrollments. This of course increases choices for students and parents.

Moreover, increased deregulation practices in schools has led to a growing number of non-educators who undergo quick training before taking on school leadership positions. Deregulation has also led to a shift in accountability—problems often get pushed down the line, which may result in a crisis requiring government action.

The Game Changers (continued)

Despite the ever-evolving high-tech world around us, there are schools and districts that are still deeply rooted in old-world industrial-age thinking. However, while moving with the times is necessary, it's no easy task to achieve a harmonious blend of education principles and teaching methods.

And technology, while offering incredible educational assets, raises questions. Students can learn anytime, anywhere, on any device. Why have classrooms when one can listen online? Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) are currently available at the higher-education level, but is it possible for this to filter down to the secondary level?

The Implications

These challenges raise the issue of school viability. Are brick-and-mortar schools even necessary, and if so, how many are needed? How can schools become more flexible to cater to 21st-century lifestyles?



We find ourselves in an increasingly assessment-focused education environment. Not only does this de-professionalize the teacher workforce due to a decrease in time focused on teaching and learning, it narrows curricula, dumbs down educational standards, and increases competition between schools.

Remember that technology is dual-sided. Telecommuting is possible in certain elements of education and can often save time, money, and other resources. However, it cannot replace people for everything. Some “mean and lean” approaches may be cheap but aren’t always more efficient.

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These challenges and others are unfortunately expanding equity issues both nationally and internationally, widening the gap between the haves and have-nots. But there is hope that the business side of education can find the means to provide money needed to meet 21st-century education goals.

What’s Next?

School business leaders are a powerful group, especially when they collaborate with professional organizations. ASBO members should make efforts to:

Discover how worldwide pervasive changes are affecting or will likely affect education, and consider what these challenges will mean for business education and the implication for schools.

Educate themselves about current education policy and pedagogy as well as educate educators on business implications, with a focus on how school business can help improve education.

Advocate for education on various levels, such as taking a proactive stance on education policy; developing alternative measures of school and student success/quality; questioning equity impact; fostering commercial partnerships; broadcasting good news about local education achievements; and taking a stand through public statements and political lobbying to get the truth out about what is required to fix current education problems.

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