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# LIQUID LEARNING IN TIMES OF LIQUID MODERNITY

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The polish born sociologist, Zymunt Bauman (1925–2017), introduced the metaphor *Liquid Modernity.* He refers to this as an age of the disappearance of existing structures, patterns, codes, rules and institutions that once provided stable foundations in society and guided people's behaviors.

"LIFE IS LIKE A RIVER THAT IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING."
– Heraclitus of Ephesus
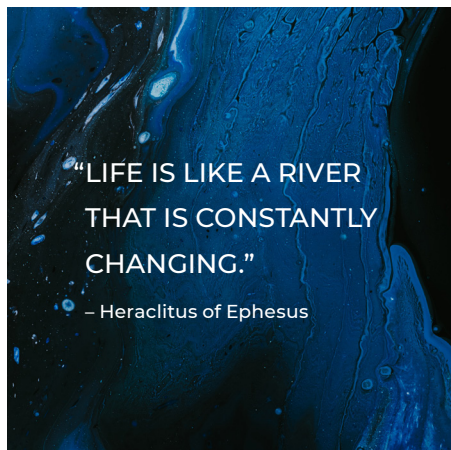
Liquids are characterized by ultimate agility, they flow and conform to various structures while retaining their volume. The term liquid represents adaptability, flexibility and fluidity. Heraclitus of Ephesus (530–470 BC) who is often referred to as the philosopher of change said, "Life is like a river that is constantly changing." The world we are living in has become liquid on many dimensions, including economic, social, geo-political, environmental and technological. Covid-19 has definitely accelerated our liquid lives as many of our best made plans and forecasts have become irrelevant. As trend watcher, Li Edelkoort calls it, we have come to "an empty page for a new beginning."

Our work and careers have become liquid as well. As many of us live longer lives, we can expect to work 45+ years. The paradigm of the past was (life-time) employment at one or a few companies. Because the lifespan of companies continues to shorten—new generations can expect to work for many employers and will likely participate in the 'gig economy' during their careers, if they aren't participating already. People will also switch roles frequently and fluidly as well as combine a number of roles like being an employee, contractor, entrepreneur, student, parent, homemaker, part-time retiree, etc. We will have a number of different jobs, which require distinctive competencies. Incomes levels can be expected to fluctuate strongly during our lifetimes. Many of us have learned to work completely virtually during Covid-19 and a growing number of companies have announced that the new permanent feature of working life is remote, supplemented with a couple of days in the office, if needed and desired. McKinsey research (2020) suggests a number of regions are seeing a decline of available work while the job growth is clustered in dynamic cities.

These changes are likely to result in the accelerated movement toward cities, and even greater urbanization. Furthermore, the growth of careers is no longer about simply moving 'up-the-the ladder,' but rather, enjoying exciting greater horizontal and virtual roles. People will switch seamlessly between leadership and specialist roles and the other way around.

Institutions of higher education around the world are, according to Zymunt Bauman, better characterized as 'Solid Modernity.' The way that education has been organized and delivered at universities has not changed dramatically over the last 50 years, in spite of rapidly changing times. Students at the age of 18 start a 4-year bachelor degree in a specific field, living on campus, attending classrooms, receiving lectures from professors, reading books, completing exams, and typically begin their careers after graduation. Other students continue to graduate school or return there later, and leaders often pursue executive education that are designed around similar traditional models of learning pedagogy.

In order to support the dynamic lives and unique needs of students in an emerging unpredictable, fluid, and fast changing world, IE University has launched their 'Liquid Learning Model.'

Liquid learning is a transformational, comprehensive, holistic and interactive educational experience that transcends single learning methodologies and platforms by blending together physical and digital learning ecosystems in innovative ways so that students obtain the highest quality of education no matter where in the world they are and what their current situation might be. It is all about the richness of the experience.

LIQUID LEARNING AT IE UNIVERSITY IS BASED ON FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES.

ILLUSTRATION 1: FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF LIQUID LEARNING

MULTI-CHANNEL   REAL WORLD   FACULTY EXCELLENCE

ACTIVE AND SOCIAL   PERSONALIZED
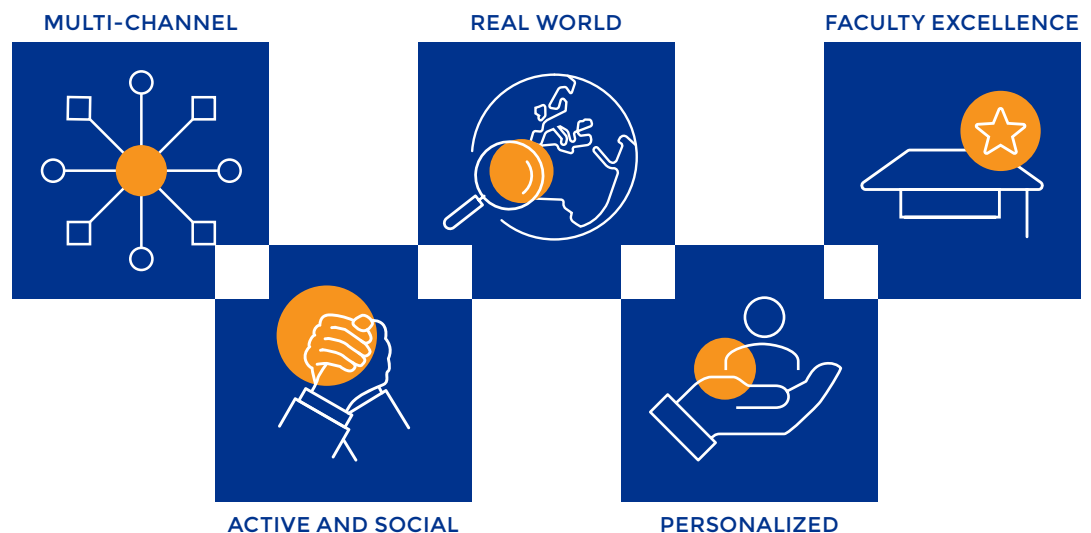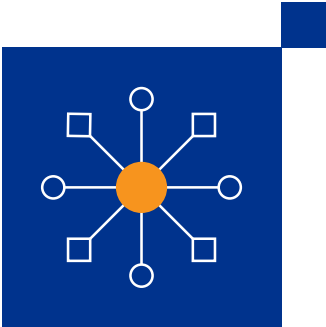
MULTI-CHANNEL

Multi-channel learning optimizes student experiences across different learning delivery channels including on-campus, online and hybrid.

In the hybrid format, students from all over the world attend the classroom simultaneously in person and online. To enable this, the physical classrooms have been redesigned and equipped with technical solutions that enhance the interaction among online and on-campus students. In IE University campuses in Madrid and Segovia, students will attend class and develop their professional networks, and enjoy the culture of the two cities. Students who choose to connect their program online in the hybrid class will benefit from the same academic and networking opportunities as their peers on-campus while participating in collaborative learning.

IE University uses state-of-the art learning technology platforms to support both synchronous and asynchronous online learning. Each technology platform provides unique functionality that enables the pedagogy to advance the learning experience and provides interactive learning, feedback and support from faculty and peers. Examples of powerful instructional strategies enabled by technology include:

- Personalized private feedback using the chat
- Responding to polls to gain insights
- Using breakout rooms for small group collaboration and peer-to-peer dialogue
- Using emoticon buttons for giving real-time feedback
- Leveraging whiteboards and annotation tools for introductions and brainstorming enabled screen sharing to view and discuss content from students
- Using application sharing to demonstrate a new system
- Sharing relevant content by streaming videos and animations
- Delivering quizzes at the end that cover all topics that have been discussed

The benefit of multi-channel learning is that it provides interactive learning available any place using flexible learning delivery channels. Multi-channel learning integrates the best of each format and for dynamic and effective learning. If needed, IE can switch overnight between different channels: from on-campus to hybrid to completely online. It is "liquid-proof" and supports both global and local learning, reaching a greater diversity of students.

THE BENEFITS OF MULTI-CHANNEL LEARNING ARE THAT THEY PROVIDE INTERACTIVE LEARNING AT ANY PLACE USING FLEXIBLE LEARNING DELIVERY CHANNELS.

ACTIVE AND SOCIAL

Active Learning is an effective developmental approach rooted in the learning sciences where students actively engage and 'learn by doing.' Students learn the best by collaborating, observing others, as well as by getting and giving feedback. This experience is at the root of social learning, and fosters human connection, an essential developmental need. Active and social learning stimulates both the cognitive and emotional development of students. Reflection is a key ingredient of the learning process and experience.

Active and social learning occurs by using a variety of instructional and didactic methods that support the liquid learning experience including:

- Multi-cultural group assignments and discussions
- Individual study projects
- Multimedia cases
- Simulations and learning games
- Labs and role-plays
- Presentations
- Networking events, discussion forums and debates
- Peer evaluation and feedback
- Gamification techniques that are used to engage the learners

THE BENEFITS OF ACTIVE AND SOCIAL LEARNING ARE THAT STUDENTS ARE GAINING A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF CONCEPTS AND IT BOOSTS SHORT- AND LONG-TERM RECALL. THROUGH ACTIVE AND SOCIAL LEARNING, STUDENTS ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE, DEVELOP SKILLS AND CHANGE MINDSETS.

REAL-WORLD

It is invaluable to educate students for current and future jobs. Therefore, learning needs to be anchored within the context of organizations and society. The learning experience need to be evidence- and practice-based with a focus on achieving concrete learning outcomes. Examples of learning outcomes include: acquiring specific expertise, knowledge sharing, application of expertise, solving specific problems, practicing new skills, action learning for executives, creating new knowledge and developing new skillsets.

Programs need to strike the perfect balance between robust foundations of theoretical and conceptual knowledge as well as developing skills for solving real-world challenges. As discussed, the real world is liquid. Therefore, students need to unlearn, change, and develop new behaviors that are important in the real world. Furthermore, real-world learning drives the (co)-creation of knowledge and insights.

THE BENEFIT OF REAL-WORLD LEARNING IS THAT THE NEW ACQUIRED EXPERTISE AND DEVELOPED SKILLS CAN BE APPLIED BY THE STUDENTS IN WAYS THAT IT WILL DRIVE CHANGE, INNOVATION AND IMPACT.
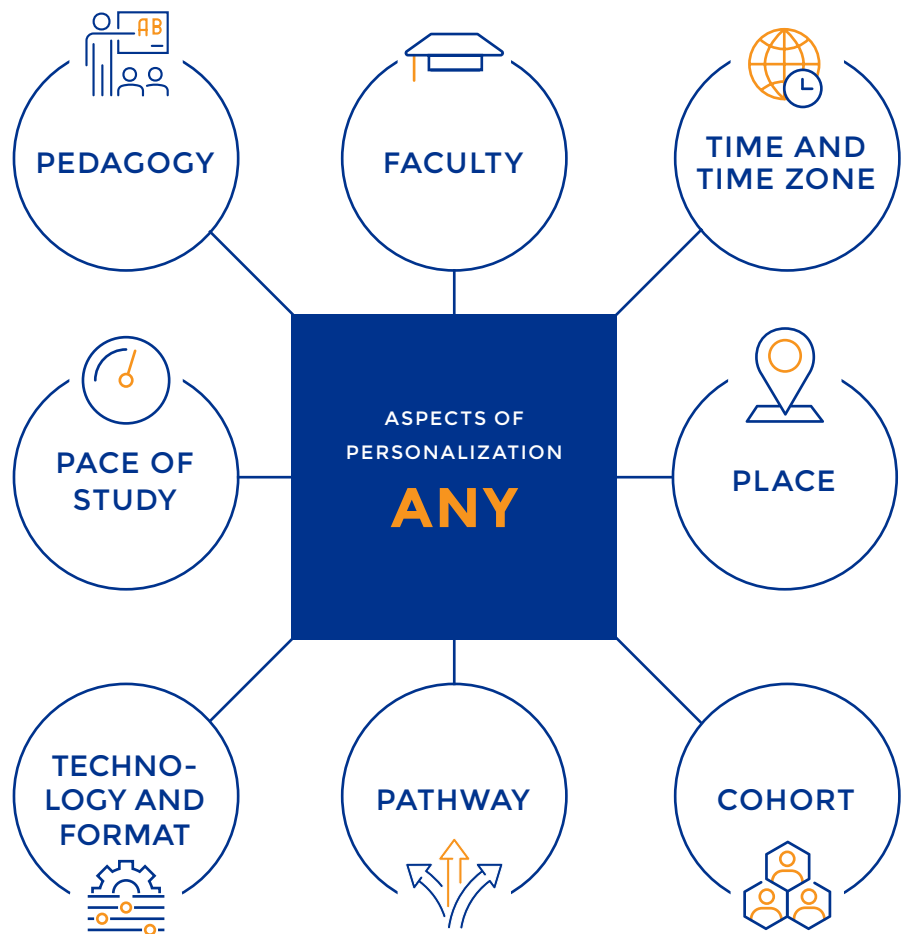
PERSONALIZED

Every aspect of the lives of today's students is highly personalized. From ordering coffee, checking the weather, online shopping, news apps to entertainment. 21st Century learning needs to be personalized to support the unique needs, personal growth and aspirations of students.

ILLUSTRATION 2:
ASPECTS OF LEARNING
PERSONALIZATION

Aspects of learning personalization include:

- Any-place learning delivery (e.g. on-campus, online, hybrid, on-the-go)
- Any-time and time zone (e.g. flexibility in schedule)
- Any-pathway learning (e.g. dual degrees, core curricula, electives, extracurricular activities, exchanges, part-time work and internships)
- Any-pace of study (e.g. opportunities for tuning up or down, full-time, part-time, flexible)
- Any-cohort (e.g. composition, size, backgrounds, interests)
- Any-technology and format (e.g. use different technologies e.g. virtual classrooms, forums, virtual reality, mobile learning, etc.)
- Any-pedagogy (e.g. experiential learning, learning in action, problem-based learning and self-directed learning)
- Any-faculty (e.g. from any location, different profiles, different styles)

The personalization of the learning experience can be supported by big data and artificial intelligence.

THE BENEFITS OF PERSONALIZED LEARNING IS THAT IT CREATES MORE ENGAGING AND DYNAMIC LEARNING EXPERIENCES THAT DRIVE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERSONAL GROWTH. HIGH LEVELS OF PERSONAL CHOICE ALSO ENHANCES MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING AMONG STUDENTS BY DRIVING CUSTOMIZED KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION AND PRACTICAL SKILLS.

FACULTY EXCELLENCE

The learning experience, whether on-campus or online, comes back to the quality of faculty. As a metaphor, as faculty member you have 2 legs on which to stand. One 'leg' is your deep and relevant expertise, conducting research that has impact, publishing in leading journals and magazines, and being a thought leader in your domain. The other 'leg' is your role as an exceptional and dedicated teacher, having deep insights in didactics and pedagogy, understanding how to design and deliver highly effective learning experiences for different audiences, and knowing to how to integrate learning technologies inside and outside the classroom. The core that unites the two is the gift and capacity to inspire students to approach their education with intellectual curiosity while being an advisor and mentor. This gift is also one that has the potential to facilitate transformation in students and liquid learning for the rest of their careers and career transitions in the future of work.

Achieving faculty excellence requires ongoing faculty training, practice, and feedback from students and peer faculty members. In addition to using faculty excellence competencies in recruitment of new faculty, achieving excellence also requires universities to align their rewards and recognition with desired faculty behaviors.

A liquid faculty model also leverages a blend of different faculty profiles including research faculty, adjunct faculty, visiting faculty, leading practitioners, facilitators, coaches and mentors, teaching assistants and guest speakers, keeping diversity top of mind.

The benefits of these features of faculty excellence is that they provide the best learning experience for students as well as a very flexible and scalable human resources model for emerging educational needs and trends.

In conclusion, the future of learning is liquid. It all about the richness of the experience: curricular and extracurricular, social and individual, global and local, thinking and doing, active and reflective, cognitive and emotional, professional and personal, physical, digital and natural, supported by teaching and research excellence.

Join us for a transformational learning journey that is fluid, dynamic, adaptable, immersive, personalized and engaging. The future of learning is Liquid, it prepares students working in the time of 'Liquid Modernity.'

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Nick is an internationally recognized thought leader, advisor, researcher, best-selling author, and facilitator on (Corporate) Learning and Leadership Development. Dr. van Dam has over 25 years of business experience as a former Partner, Global Chief Learning Officer, HR-Executive, and Client Advisor at McKinsey & Co. as well as at Deloitte. He IE University (Spain) Chief Learning Officer, IE Board Member and Director of the IE Center for Corporate Learning Innovation. Nick is a professor at IE University, Nyenrode Business University and the University of Pennsylvania, GSE. He is Academic Director at IE University's Executive Master in Positive Leadership & Transformation and the International Masterclass Learning and Development Leadership. Nick is affiliated with McKinsey & Company as faculty in leadership development programs. He is (co-) author of 25 books and numerous articles.
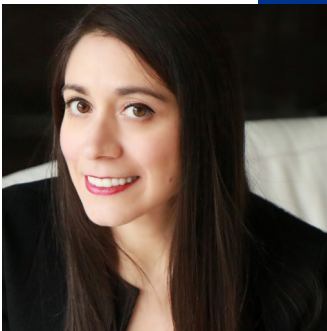
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