



# **Corporate Education Strategies: Corporate Universities in Practice**

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## **Introduction**

The accelerating pace of change in most sectors of the world economy is a powerful source of anxiety for managers, organizations and nations. The capabilities, skills and knowledge that make a company good at what it does today are no guarantee of future success, or even future survival. Change is occurring across several dimensions, and is especially driven by new forms of competition and new entrant competitors, globalisation in markets, manufacturing, supply chains and services; industrial restructuring, capital mobility, and changes in technology which result in product and process innovation.

Such changes demand continuous regeneration and development of organizational knowledge – that is, organizations and the people within them must be continually learning. Learning is the most fundamental of the *dynamic capabilities* (Teece *et al* 1997) organizations require. Learning enables the continual updating and re-creation of the skills and knowledge base of the organization. A learning culture provides the ability to create, absorb and assimilate new knowledge, and also to benefit from the lessons gained from past experience. Importantly, learning new things depends on having a pre-existing level of knowledge and understanding.

For obvious reasons the greatest source of knowledge lies beyond the boundaries of the organization. However, accessing external knowledge requires the organization to possess the capabilities to locate, understand, assimilate and internalise that external knowledge – that is, they need *absorptive capacity* (Cohen and Levinthal 1990). The internet, for example, contains vast amounts of information, but turning that into useful knowledge for the firm requires effort and capability.

The importance of investment in corporate education is justified in terms of increasing the *human capital* of the organization, a concept especially associated with Gary Becker (e.g. Becker 1964). In 1992, Becker won the Nobel prize for his work on human capital, which included a focus on investment in education and training as a route to increasing human capital.

There are of course many ways in which people in organizations learn, beyond the formal training and education schemes and R&D programmes. Most obviously, people learn from experience. Learning results from the day-to-day engagement in the problems and challenges of organizational activities. We learn from doing, from reflection on our activities, and indeed we learn from failing. Much of this learning takes place in social contexts, including communities of practice (Wenger 1998), where learning is shared.

Other ways in which we learn include the acquisition of technology, which brings knowledge embedded in the design of those goods into the firm. Hiring key individuals as consultants who bring in specialized knowledge may be effective if the firm has a learning strategy – that is, actively seeking to maximize learning from specialist consultants so that the organization ceases to be dependent on them in the future. Customers and suppliers can be a source of new insight for an organization and its products and services. Joint ventures often involve the exchange of technology,

routines and procedures, which can be important sources of learning. Benchmarking allows a firm to discover how well others are doing and, sometimes, what processes they use. Market research can provide important understanding of customers and potential customers.

Much has been written about *organizational learning*, which may be defined as:

the ways firms build, supplement and organize knowledge and routines around their activities and within their cultures, and adapt and develop organizational efficiency by improving the use of the broad skills of their workforces.

(Dodgson, 1993, p. 377)

Organizational learning is a generic term which includes public sector and not-for-profit organizations as well as corporations. In the remainder of this article we explore corporate education, focusing on a particular approach that has become widely adopted – the corporate university (CU). CUs are viewed as strategic learning initiatives that take a variety of forms. We investigate what is new and significant about them and why they have emerged at this time, as well as exploring their continuity with earlier generations of company training initiatives.

Our aim is to map the variety of forms such strategic education initiatives commonly take. This is done by considering the main options - concerning *function*, *form* and *funding* - open to those who initiate or sponsor them. Thereafter, we offer a simple typology of the main forms, and suggest what may be a trend underlying the apparent profusion of different approaches.

We start by setting the CU phenomenon in its wider context. The following section looks at the scale and scope of corporate learning and the reasons driving its growth.

### ***The scale and significance of corporate learning***

Market intelligence companies such as IDC or Datamonitor estimate that almost 30 billion pounds is spent in the UK alone each year on training. Figures from surveys in the US yield similar expenditure per worker. Unfortunately, beyond such indications of widespread activity, more detailed and reliable information about training and development investment by employers is unavailable: it is not a cost that employers monitor closely (Keep et al. 2002), definitions of training and learning vary from company to company, and informal training is often excluded from such calculations. We know that structured learning in and for the workplace is a now pervasive feature of contemporary employment, at all levels of organizations and all around the world. But we know far less about how that learning is arranged, and the relative frequency and success of different approaches to enabling (and guiding, providing, monitoring and resourcing) that learning.

Nevertheless, over the last 15 years the number and visibility of corporate universities has grown sharply, initially in the US and subsequently in other areas of the globe. Over this period the number of conferences, consultancies and publications devoted to corporate learning practices and issues has increased steadily. By no means all corporate learning takes place within or through corporate universities (CUs), and a number of large prestigious companies have invested heavily in corporate-

level initiatives that are specifically not branded as CUs. Others utilize the CU label while pursuing training and development through separate training departments at business unit level. Inevitably, managerial practice, consulting and academic work are all to some extent creating and following fashion in this area, but to ignore or dismiss the corporate university phenomenon as 'only a fad' seems overly cynical and misguided – too much has been happening, and for too long.

It is not just that 'a lot seems to be going on'. CUs have emerged at the same time as four major developments have been taking place in industry, education and society:

- The emergence of the knowledge economy and learning organization as key managerial discourses;
- The frequency and rapidity of corporate re-structuring, leading managers to focus on common corporate principles and practices in order to maintain some corporate glue;
- The pervasiveness and potency of communication technologies and their application to training and development;
- The increasing diversity of educational systems, moving away from curriculum-centred to work-role centred, from campus based to distributed learning, from pre-vocational to timely continuing development, from a single, standard progression route to a multiplicity of pathways.

The corporate university phenomenon is situated at the confluence of these four powerful currents in the contemporary economy.

### ***The origins and spread of the corporate university phenomenon***

As with many apparently novel managerial initiatives, the roots of the contemporary corporate university movement can be traced through the course of industrial society. Eurich (1985) reports the concerns of managers in the earliest US industrial organizations about the state educational system, and how it was not providing the 'right kind of person' to work for their rapidly expanding corporations, either in terms of skills or attitudes. Corporate colleges such as DuPont's and Edison's were set up to fill this gap, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century US, and it is worth reflecting that the perceived need to implement new (more autonomous) working practices, in a context where many staff reportedly did not have the linguistic, or numerical skills is still voiced today. The spread of such activity in the US was to some extent moderated by reforms to state education to achieve better fit with the new conditions of work, and the subsequent arrival of business schools and commerce departments in universities and colleges in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century managers in large corporations (such as Disney, McDonald's, and Motorola in the US) began once more to find that employees recruited out of the state education system lacked the attributes they required, and set up provision within organizations to enable more specific training and development (see Wiggernhorn 1990). These new institutions moved from the shadows in the early 1980s as they began to acquire degree-granting powers, and a definition of the hybrid corporate educational institutions emerged:

[A corporate college is] an institution offering postsecondary degrees which was initially established by an entity, profit or non-profit, whose primary mission was something other than granting collegiate degrees.

(Hawthorne *et al* 1983: 2)

Hawthorne and her colleagues were able to identify 14 of these colleges and argued that they would become significant competition for established educational institutions. (Indeed, they argued that academics were in part to blame for this competition because of their reluctance to acknowledge the legitimacy of corporate education until then.) More recently, the Dean of a former corporate training facility that now trades independently as a private business school, has argued that a significant number of business schools will soon disappear, and that the role of the 'management professor' would change (Moore 1997). Such developments would be driven by changing rules in a more competitive marketplace, and in particular by the expansion of degree-awarding corporate universities. Currently, however, CU initiatives that seek degree-awarding powers let alone to become competitors with 'traditional' business schools are in the minority, particularly in Europe. An alternative scenario sees managers within CU initiatives working closely with academic partners, as companies might with other strategic suppliers, to jointly determine course content and methods of delivery, closely tailored to the corporate definitions of relevance, while continuing to draw heavily on the research of leading business schools and cherry-picking faculty as course contributors and staff (Paton and Taylor 2002). Far from being competitors, the relationship may be more symbiotic and collaborative.

This cursory sketch of the historical and institutional context is enough to suggest that corporate education and training has co-evolved with public and private education, both stimulating and responding to developments. At a time when higher education is currently undergoing very rapid change around the world, such co-evolution seems likely to continue. It would be a serious mistake, however, to locate CU initiatives within the conventional (further/higher) educational domain. One aspect of CU activity that is clear, in the UK and Europe at least, is that the various academic labels used by companies – institute, college, academy, university - are generally more symbolic than literal (which does not mean the label is unimportant). One can point to interesting similarities between CUs and various other types of university (Paton and Taylor 2002), but profound differences are also obvious. This means that in some respects any attempt to produce an essentialist definition of a 'corporate university' is unhelpful.

### ***What's new and different about Corporate Universities?***

It is however useful to examine the rationales for these initiatives and the activities they encompass. To this end, we argue that what the CU label refers to is a new generation of *strategic learning initiatives*. Three features make them different.

*1. They are corporate-level initiatives in large, highly complex and differentiated settings.*

Organizationally, CUs tend to be located in or near to corporate headquarters, have a board level sponsor, and are often distinct from the HR function within business units. Decision-making is evident at a higher level of the organisation in the management of these initiatives than is common in managing training and development. They aim to deliver on a specific *corporate* contribution, to provide 'corporate value added', as one CU manager put it. This means avoiding the replication of what is done well at a local level, such as specialised skills training, while seeking to promote corporate consistency in relation to common terminologies and approaches, trans-national working and communication, or instilling of common corporate values. The scope of such content varies between organizations (and within them over time), but CUs tend to be given high priority and significant resourcing.

*2. The pursuit of continuing strategic alignment.*

A fundamental driver for CUs appears to be gaining control of training and development activities more effectively in relation to strategic priorities. Such priorities vary; some are concerned with post-merger integration, others with building customer loyalty, cross-cultural working, high-flier retention and development, making training more cost-effective and timely, or developing leadership. Clearly, strategic business priorities are continually changing, and as a result CUs frequently have to be re-positioned and programmes have to be re-developed. Traditional universities are among our oldest and most stable institutions; but everything about CUs is provisional.

*3. They attempt to raise standards, expectations and impact as regards training and development.*

This aspect of CUs reflects the strategic priority afforded to learning. It may be seen in attempts to identify and engage the highest quality providers almost regardless of location, the development of frameworks intended to increase consistency of provision, reinforcement of key messages and competences between levels and across diverse business and cultural settings, innovative programme designs including much greater attention to pedagogy, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) through e- and blended learning, by fostering distributed alumni communities, and rationalizing the sourcing of learning services from external providers. This is not to suggest that everything CUs do is new, and that all previous corporate training was non-strategic, unsophisticated, non-innovative, and so on. Nevertheless, the explicit aspiration of CU managers operating at very senior levels and from within the corporate centre, is to more closely manage standards of provision and ensure alignment with organizational strategy.

### ***A public and private phenomenon***

The factors that have led to the emergence of the Corporate Universities in the private sector have in several respects been mirrored in the public sector too. The governance and management processes may be different, but many of the imperatives are seen to be the similar: keeping pace in a knowledge based society, the frequent reform and re-structuring of institutions, the commitment to an e-society and the increased concern for demonstrable quality improvement in education.

Furthermore, privatization, other outsourcing initiatives, and public-private partnerships have blurred the distinctions between these sectors.

In certain cases, there may be additional factors that contribute to the case for a public equivalent of a corporate university. For example, a prestigious National College of School Leadership was launched by an incoming government in the UK at a time when morale in public education was seen to be low and managers in schools felt undervalued as well as poorly supported. There is in any case a long history in parts of the public sector of dedicated and sometimes high level training provision in the form of “staff colleges” - noticeably in the military and allied services and the civil service. In the UK over the past decade, there have been a number of attempts to create new public providers that address similar objectives to the CUs, but which focus on a particular sector or set of skills. In the UK the original formulation of a ‘University for Industry’ (Hillman, 1996) sought to improve the skills base of strategically important industries, whilst the UK’s NHS (National Health Service) University (see Paton et al., 2005) and National Health Leadership College were created at a time of considerable reform and change in the organization of public health provision. In almost all cases, they have sought to broaden their appeal and remit. The UK National College of School Leadership now sees its clientele as half of all the teachers in state schools, the University for Industry (re-branded as *learnirect*) provides on-line learning in basic skills as well as vocational topics. UK NHS (National Health Service) University too wished to address an even wider audience of not just health and care staff, but carers and patients before, in 2005, the UK Government amalgamated it with the Leadership College and other agencies to form a National Health Institute with a remit to concentrate on supporting innovation and reform.

### ***New modes of knowledge-creation and knowledge-sharing***

It is also necessary to attend to what is new and significant about the learning *processes* fostered by these initiatives. A description of learning in the workplace from around a century ago would look something like this:

- knowledge capture and creation through some form of research or enquiry focusing on those who have the relevant practical ‘know-how’
- codification of that knowledge in terms of abstract principles, techniques and frameworks
- communication of de-contextualized knowledge to those who plan and deliver education and training
- delivery of the general principles to practitioners-as-trainees to be applied in working contexts
- contextual adaptation and application of the general principles by the practitioners to their particular situations.

This is represented in figure 1. It is immediately obvious that the communication chain is long and prone to varying degrees of failure, and that if and when practitioners facing similar challenges in comparable contexts can communicate directly they may devise solutions to their practical problems a lot more quickly. This is precisely what has happened in a wide range of settings and in different ways since the beginnings of industrial work. Skilled and knowledgeable practitioners, drawing on

the experience and tacit knowledge of colleagues, create new knowledge in the course of tackling novel and complex challenges in the field, and in so doing become resources to colleagues.

Equally, it is clear that such collaborative learning processes are not new. What *is* new is the extent to which their importance as part of a highly competitive knowledge economy is being recognized, encouraged and facilitated. This is happening in a range of different ways, as Paton *et al* (2005) illustrate. Just as new corporate universities often co-exist with training departments at the business unit level, so new modes of learning extend and complement the more traditional modes of training and learning. It is not necessarily 'all change', with the new supplanting and replacing the old. Rather, the new strategic learning initiatives encompass, integrate and go beyond the more familiar and established structures and processes of corporate learning.

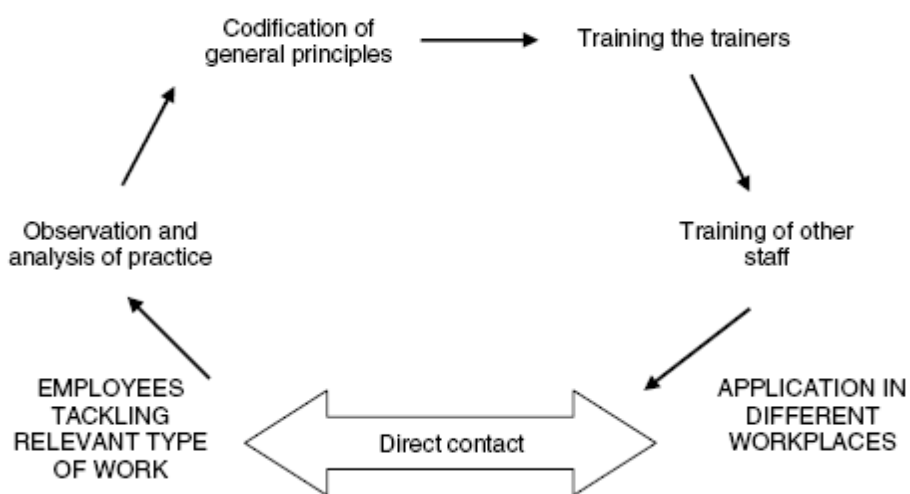


Figure 1. Training versus knowledge sharing approaches to learning

### Types of Corporate University

If we accept that CUs are usefully viewed as strategic learning initiatives, it is important to explore the space that such new entities and groupings occupy. CUs have to take some structural form no matter how limited this might be and hence to understand them necessitates examining managerial practice and language. We try to make sense of the profusion of different forms by offering an overview of their key dimensions and the formative choices that generate that variety. In doing so the discussion will chart more clearly the boundaries and interfaces of the CU phenomenon as we have defined it. The diversity of CU activity arises in large part from the different sorts of strategic challenges for which a substantial, corporate-level learning initiative may provide an appropriate response. Thus, for example, where the preservation, dissemination and reproduction of a company's distinctive expertise is seen as vital for future success, we can expect to find certain sorts of initiatives, with strong links to knowledge management activities and processes. Alternatively, where labour market shortages of appropriately trained labour threaten to constrain or undermine business development then externally focussed initiatives, involving partnerships and with corporate citizenship dimensions, can be expected. Or as another instance, where the strategic issue is a longer-term concern with ensuring the development and availability of sufficient numbers

of high-performing leaders, then the CU will take a different form again (Paton, Taylor and Storey, 2004).

Part of our intention then is to make the observed diversity of CUs intelligible in relation to the strategic issues they are designed to address. We approach this by considering the key choices facing managers in organizations that are either setting up a CU, or trying to renew the relevance and effectiveness of an existing CU. Notwithstanding the manifest variety, we think it is also possible to distinguish some broad types of CU, and an underlying trend towards arrangements that provide and support different forms of networked learning.

### ***Formative decisions***

When corporate or industry leaders are minded to create - or re-create – a corporate university the first decision tends to relate to how they need to set out the shape and structure of what is envisaged; both the characteristics they seek and those they expressly wish to avoid. In doing so they take formative decisions in three areas. These concern:

- The *function* of the initiative – including its central role and contribution to the parent institution
- Its organizational *form* - including strategic choices over how 'real' and how 'virtual' it may be, or how much to 'make' and how much to 'buy'
- Its *funding and governance* – including choices that concern how it can be effectively embedded in the wider systems it is designed to serve.

These choices are of course inter-related, but nevertheless they provide a convenient framework for starting to explore the variety of corporate university practice.

*Function.* The corporate or strategic challenges to which the CU is a response shape its central purposes. These purposes are likely to be expressed in three key areas:

- The scope of the initiative: does it have a 'tight' remit, for example focussed around leadership or is it intended to encompass a much wider range of learning? Examples of the former are the Boeing Leadership Centre (and its Institute for Aerospace Leadership), while initiatives like the BAE Systems Virtual University and ST University have a much wider remit including technological learning.
- The range of learners: reflecting the scope of the initiative the possibilities here range from an expressly elite body of learners through to a more or less 'mass' or 'open' approach. The NHS U, with its early emphasis on providing elements of a common induction programme for *all* staff, exemplifies the latter approach. A related choice concerns whether to invite the involvement of supply-chain partners in the learning provided as a way furthering common practices and approaches. This is an approach that has been taken by ABN Amro, where CU staff routinely deal with requests from clients of the bank for training and development in

areas such as global financial markets and loan products. This is intended in part to strengthen relationships between the bank and its clients, and in part to enable the CU to become an independent profit centre. It has the additional role of providing a feedback mechanism to the bank on its products. Finally, some initiatives focus on improving the supply of labour – they train *potential* employees.

- The nature of the contribution: some CUs are programme-focussed - that is, their role is centred on directly addressing particular learning needs. Often however the central contribution relates more to providing some form of learning infrastructure. This may be technological, such as 'putting in the plumbing' for e-learning, or it may be in terms of generating a company-wide competence framework in order to provide a consistent terminology and shared reference points for staff development programmes across an industrially and geographically diverse group of business. Finally, such a contribution may involve managing the sourcing of learning services from providers perhaps appraising, negotiating with and accrediting selected consultants and universities.

*Form:* Clarifying the nature of the CU's central contribution is closely tied in with decisions about the form it should take. Many CUs are more or less 'virtual'. Learning@Intel, for example, is said not to appear on any organizational chart and is said not to have any single point of hierarchical accountability. However, most of the fifty or more entities that comprise Learning@Intel are much more tangible and familiar organizational units firmly located in corporate space. These include services and programmes reporting to corporate human resources, notably Intel University Operations, which provides company-wide booking and housekeeping services and the College of Employee Care Practices. But most are major geographical or business unit training operations based in sites or on a separate campus. In this context, Intel's virtual university concentrates on coordination through ad hoc working groups of those directly involved, sharing processes, tools and methods for learning, and essential standardisation to ensure consistency with manufacturing specifications.

By contrast, other CUs take a more familiar organizational form as a distinct entity with a bricks-and-mortar site reporting either to the board directly, or to corporate human resources. A related choice concerns the extent to which a company will rely on external providers to supply or support corporate learning activities, or alternatively cultivate and draw on its own expertise in the form either of its own full-time learning specialists, or through regular contributions by senior executives and professional experts.

*Funding and governance:* CUs are commonly funded through some combination of central corporate support and payments earned from business units. Typically central funding is targeted on infrastructure development, or as pump-priming to expedite the creation and testing of new programmes. Thereafter however many CUs are expected to earn their living within a managed internal market. The situation is more complex with industry-wide or collaborative initiatives that may involve several partners or that are funded in whole or in part through a corporate affairs budget. In

CUs, as elsewhere, financial dependencies always concentrate managerial minds and they are central to ensuring the accountability of the initiative and to embedding within the wider organization.

That said, the oversight arrangements for CUs often embrace other contingencies and stakeholders. Some companies have experimented with making a CU role – e.g. as Dean of a Faculty – an aspect of the role of senior executives or Directors. The purpose here is not just to ensure an alignment between CU supply and business needs but to make a statement to all managers and professionals about the importance of activities aimed at cultivating talent and knowledge. Arrangements for Advisory Councils involving both internal sponsors and external partners and experts are also common. Such formal arrangements for multi-level governance are more common and elaborate in the public domain, but CU initiatives also have to negotiate space within a jungle of professional and regulatory bodies, staff and employers groupings, and existing training providers – all of whom may be both obstacles and resources, depending on the issues in question.

### ***Diversity - and convergence?***

The downside of outlining - as we have done - the range of important choices is that it results in a profusion of possibilities. It is then hard to discern underlying trends and to grasp the broad contours of what may be happening in corporate training and education. For this a higher-level map is needed. To this end, we suggest that it is useful to think of contemporary CUs as varying on two dimensions. The first concerns the nature of the learning: this axis ranges from a narrow training focus (imparting information, developing specific vocational skills), through broader forms of education and professional development (including a socialization into organizational values and practices), and finally on to those that encompass forms of research as well as higher-level teaching and learning. In knowledge terms, the dimension ranges from the transfer of explicit well-codified information, through to knowledge sharing and creation.

The second dimension concerns the spatial organization of the CU, specifically whether it is focused on a specific facility that people attend (the campus model), or whether it is primarily distributed. Thus it may be either 'virtual' (such as BAE Systems VU) or employing a mix of media, including print, and providing support locally, perhaps through a network of learning centres.

Combining these two dimensions highlights four different types of CU; figure 2 illustrates these and indicates what kind of 'output' we can expect from each.

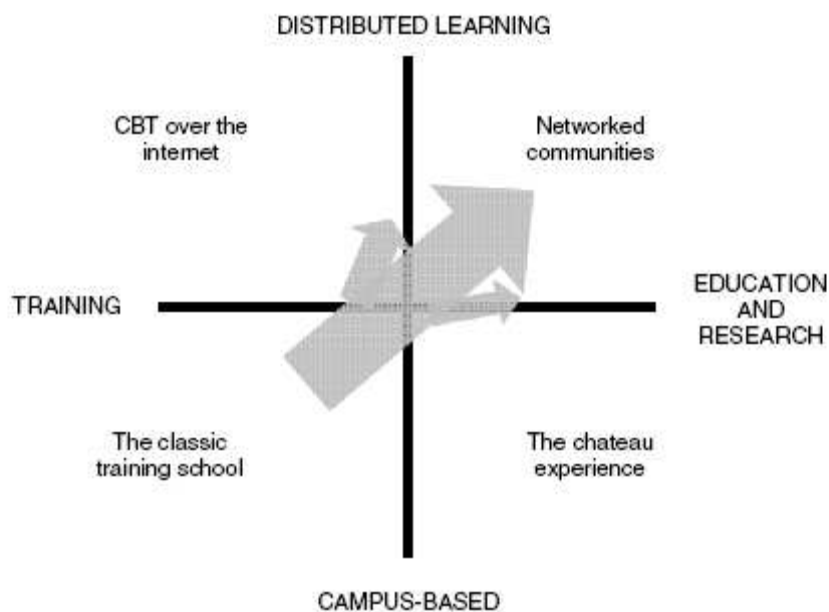


Figure 2: A typology of Corporate Universities

The most familiar type represented here is the classic company training school or college, based on the 19<sup>th</sup> century model of corporate education and socialization. This type continues to form a large part of the CU landscape, upgraded in various ways to raise the status and profile of training both inside and outside the organization - McDonalds Hamburger U can be seen as an exemplar of this type of CU. They are heavily focused on delivering the skills needed for consistency, quality and efficiency in core operations. Such initiatives are often represented as compensating for the shortcomings of secondary educational systems, as at one of the original CUs, Motorola U.

A second type of CU – encapsulated as ‘Computer-Based Training (CBT) on the Intranet’ - is much more recent, but has been the focus for very considerable investment in particular industries and contexts and provides the basis for much popular press coverage of CU initiatives. The reason is obvious: whenever large numbers of staff have to be regularly re-trained (to use new software tools, for example, or to comply with new legislation), or updated (for example, on the features and terms of the latest products they sell), the costs of providing such training on a face-to-face basis have been considerable. By switching to electronically delivered training, companies may save on staff travel and accommodation costs, particularly when they are internationally distributed. Managers have also found it easier to provide the training consistently in a timely manner with less disruption to work schedules (not least because delivery of training in this way enables it to take place outside work-time and -space). Debate continues over the scope for this method of delivery in the longer term, particularly whether and how far it can be used for ‘softer’ topics less amenable to right and wrong answers, or how far it can develop beyond its pedagogic origins in programmed learning. Nevertheless, that there are important contexts in which it can be highly cost-effective is no longer in question. The Shell Open University provides an example of reducing training spend in a highly distributed organization that needs to pass on information quickly; a second is Unipart, where (it is said) you can learn in the morning and apply it in the afternoon through using dedicated desktop computers, linked to the Unipart U, provided on every shop-floor.

The third type of CU - designated the 'chateau' or 'country house' experience - was also a familiar feature of the corporate landscape before the term CU became common. Management, leadership and executive development has traditionally taken place in well-appointed rural locations away from corporate headquarters, but in recent years such expensive initiatives have had a renaissance. They are now seen as one way of addressing a major corporate challenge – how to promote cohesion across highly differentiated international businesses, especially those that have grown through acquisition and merger. The importance and difficulty of building a common understanding and effective management teams out of diverse national and corporate cultures cannot be overstated. The reinvention of the management college as the incubator of a shared corporate culture, through intense face-to-face development activities and the creation of cross-organizational networks, may be a result of the increased frequency of multinational mergers. Being semi-detached from the pace and pressure of mainstream corporate life, such facilities may also provide a social space where the normal codes are to a degree relaxed, and assumptions can be questioned. To this extent they may also have a role as corporate 'think tanks' where senior figures or rising stars can take time out to analyze, debate and think through emerging challenges, in relation both to internal issues faced by the organization and also in relation to wider concerns over for example the natural environment or the location of production. High-profile examples of this sort of CU are the Rüschtikon facility in Switzerland owned by Swiss Re (see <http://www.ruschlikon.com>) and Boeing's Leadership Development Centre in the US.

Finally there are the CUs that exist and operate as networked communities. They embrace a wide range of learning (technical and professional as well as business management) that is supported in diverse ways (combining e-learning with face-to-face elements, mentoring, action learning, placements, and so on). Their form and focus change frequently in response to emerging professional needs or shifting perceptions of strategic priorities, particularly as it appears that restructuring has become a normal rather than an exceptional occurrence in corporate life. The Cap Gemini University has several of these features, having played different roles at different points in the twelve years of its existence. While the campus near Paris remains the hub of the corporate university, CU staff are distributed around the world. Increasing use is made of e- and blended learning, and professional up-dating in a very fast-moving industry is provided through an on-line magazine. Great emphasis is also given to fostering communities and networks among the different sorts of professionals that work in the company. The UK's National College for School Leadership is another case in point: it has a well-appointed central facility, but great effort is given to facilitating and supporting continuous distributed learning.

As the arrow on figure 2 suggests, if there is an underlying trend in the development of CUs, it is towards the last of these types: a CU that may possess a central facility but need not remain forever identified with or limited to it.

## **Conclusions**

In this article we focus on Corporate Universities as important and strategic corporate education initiatives. The article sets out to provide a roadmap through the various territories that CUs inhabit. In particular, we have pointed towards a number of strategic and formative decisions concerning the function, the form and the funding of CUs through which a CU is located, shaped and oriented. It is important to stress, however, that these will rarely be one-off decisions; they will be revisited – typically every five to seven years, if not more frequently - causing the CU to evolve either by providing a new strategic focus or by adding additional functions. In addition, some of the choices concerning the form of the initiative – for example, how much to do in-house, and how much to buy in; whether or not it is important to have a branded campus or centre - may swing back and forward (because there is no stable 'best' solution).

Moreover it is particularly important to note in policy terms that CU equivalents exist in the public as well as the private sector, and at times CU-style initiatives can be situated to address national or sector needs. This article illustrates the range and variety of initiatives currently flying the CU flag in its diverse symbolic, organizational and managerial aspects. However, this is not to suggest that 'anything goes' and everything works. Our research emphasizes that the strategic choices available to policy-makers and managers exploring this territory have very real material effects, in terms of cost to the host organization, the long-term success of the initiative, and the effectiveness or utility of it.

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