Business these days is about change; not the coins in your pocket, but the normal evolution of circumstances that over the course of the century has gone from slow motion to fast forward. For this reason, Leading and Managing in Changing Times is the first course in CU Denver's Executive MBA program (XMBA), said Wayne Cascio, addressing the Global Executive Forum.

"Much of the course is designed to give students some understanding of how the world is changing, the trends that are going to shape the future, and where they fit into it."

Through self-assessments, students gain insights into their strengths and weaknesses, getting to "know thyself first."

Leading and Managing in Changing Times develops the context within which leadership has to be exercised. Today's leaders have to provide vision, direction and inspiration. "The vision is giving people a sense of purpose. People who can't articulate a vision will never be successful," Cascio said.

If the leader has the vision, can someone else provide the direction?

Yes, said Cascio. "The important thing is that the leader has the vision, and has to provide some inspiration to get people on board, going in the same direction."

Leadership, old and new

There was a time when 3C logic ruled organizations:

- Command from the top
- Controls, rigid and bureaucratic
- Compartmentalized information where workers jealously guard their knowledge instead of sharing information.

The problem with 3C logic is that it limits employee initiative and severely slows down an organization's ability to respond to change. "So the old 3C has got to give way to something else," said Cascio, citing Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, as an example of the "something else."

Welch's focus is on breaking down the barriers that separate people, functions and departments. "In his annual letter to shareholders, Welch talked about the three great challenges for his company as it moves into the 21st century.

"The first one is speed, the need to be faster in a world where nothing is predictable except the increasingly rapid pace of change."
Developing leaders through the XMBA program

Wayne F. Cascio

"The second one is stretch, raising the bar every year. So instead of coasting on what you did 10 years ago, you will have to come up with a plan for what you're going to do differently next year. And if you can figure out how to reach this objective too easily, you're not stretching.

"The third challenge is making the organization boundary-less. Welch said the quickest way to get yourself fired at GE is to refuse to share information.

This underscores the changing values within an organization and the new role of leadership. "Years ago, the way you made yourself valuable was by not sharing information. Now the fastest way to get yourself fired is to refuse to share information."

General Electric under Welch's leadership stands in sharp contrast to another well known organization. At the end of the Cold War, Cascio was asked to help the CIA reorganize for a new era free of the communist threat.

"The CIA, above all, was run by command, control and compartmentalized information. The managers didn't share anything with anybody across division lines. It was very difficult to make decisions without running into conflict and overlaps.

"The ultimate solution was to find ways for managers to get together and talk about what they could share and what they couldn't share, and why they couldn't share it. That became the blueprint for the new organization of the CIA."

Small is better, is today's mantra. It's about big companies trying to act like small companies so they can be agile enough to move quickly when changes in the marketplace demand an immediate response.

Another advantage of "small is better" is being able to get closer to the customer. "If we can respond to customer wants, ultimately we're going to win," said a member of the Forum.

Thriving and surviving

The people who enroll in the XMBA program are primed to soak up all they can about organizational dos and don'ts. They are mostly middle level executives with about 10 years of business experience. "Somebody thought they had potential and was willing to pay to sponsor their participation in the program," said Cascio.

The program starts with a three day orientation during which students are introduced to the XMBA Network and CU Virtual. The XMBA Net allows people to communicate with each other, just as in any Internet program. CU Virtual is an Intranet which provides chat rooms where people in different courses can talk to each other and to the professors electronically.

With CU Virtual, students can download lecturers' notes before they even come to class, gaining time to develop the questions to pose to instructors.

"People are not always accessible physically, but they can be available electronically," said Cascio, adding that this technology has greatly improved students' access to information.

How to thrive and survive in the Executive MBA program is also covered in the orientation. "It's how to balance your work life, home life and academic life." Spouses are invited to attend this session.
Developing leaders through the XMBA program

Wayne F. Cascio

It's a jungle

The orientation helps students get grounded in what Cascio calls "a two year jungle." It's a jungle where your most powerful means of defense are effective writing and communication skills. "We constantly hear from executives that they need people who can write, express themselves, stand up in front of a group and make a presentation," said Cascio.

Instead of lecturing about this, Cascio asks students to talk about the worst presentation they ever saw. "Everyone has something to contribute." Out of this discussion comes a set of guidelines for students to use when making a presentation.

"It sets the tone that this is an important thing and we're going to be paying attention to it throughout the program. Because by the time it's over, we want students to be able to make a presentation and write effectively."

The orientation continues with a talk by professors in marketing and operations management. Students learn a little bit about cases -- how to analyze a case, write it up, and present it. "So much of the XMBA program involves cases in so many courses, we need to give them a little insight early on."

A whole day is devoted to data analysis, math skills and remedial work. The objective is to find out what the students don't know so they can be given help "before they get too deep into the program."

For some people the orientation will be longer than three days. "If they don't know how to use a computer program, a spreadsheet, or if their math skills are lacking, they're going to have to get a lot more help because otherwise they're just going to fail out of the program."

The last part of the orientation is an outward-bound exercise.

International emphasis

XMBA candidates attend classes for four terms in the first year, four in the second. Each term runs eight weeks, with a break from June to September.

In the second year of the program, the emphasis is on international business. Working with faculty coaches, students begin doing team assignments relating to the countries they will visit during Term 8. In preparation for the trip, which is a requisite for graduation, students are grouped according to their area of interest. Telecommunications and entrepreneurship have always been popular, said Cascio.

The trips are intensive 10-day study programs that expose students to business operations in other parts of the world. The agenda includes meetings with company executives, government officials, providers and customers. Students gain firsthand knowledge of customer wants and expectations in the coming years.

During a trip to Prague in a previous year, students were able to meet with many entrepreneurs who were trying to start up businesses. "To meet these folks and find out what they're all about, what they would have done differently, is very helpful."

Said Cascio, "Students come back from these trips feeling confident that they can compete in the international marketplace. They never met overseas competition before."
Developing leaders through the XMBA program

Wayne F. Cascio

This year the group is going to Berlin and Poland. "We usually try to go to an emerging market and a developed market," said Cascio.

Every course in the second year is directed toward international business. Cascio teaches Managing People in Global Markets, in Term 6. "We talk about recruitment, selection, how to manage performance, compensation issues, labor issues, and unions throughout the world."

Next year, CU Denver will launch an 11-month MBA program that will run without a break for the entire program. Full time attendance will be required.

The new organization: Trends for the future

- Dominant themes: Turbulence and opportunity
- Far more competitive environments: "It's war out there."
- Accelerated rate of change with a much shorter time frame for adapting.
- Movement from order, stability, and predictability to constant change, chaos, and markets that change overnight.
- Need for high performance, client-centered learning organizations which can manage and develop people, provide superior service and quality, and quickly adapt to changing times.
- Small is better.
- Constant organizational restructuring to achieve radically decentralized, streamlined, flat structures freed of red tape; flexible enough to respond with lightning speed to opportunities and needed changes; and designed to motivate employees to be and give their best.
- Significant change in the role of managers, with a greater emphasis on leadership skills, people skills, and skills in managing change, and being a team player and team builder.
- Far greater emphasis on entrepreneurs, intrapreneurism, and innovation in an attempt to stay competitive, and overcome obstacles
- Greater emphasis on teamwork, collaboration, networking, interdependence, and developing relationships that improve your ability to compete.
- Technology driven
- Information and knowledge explosion.
- Divergent workforce with changing demographics and motivators.
- Personal lives that will be more turbulent than work lives.
- A time of striving to resolve the tensions between needed actions and obstacles, and discovering the proper balance in utilizing new methods.
Developing leaders through the XMBA program

Wayne F. Cascio

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