

Introduction

With the growing demand for integrated, blended and aligned approaches to support organisational change, partnerships are being generally recognised as a most effective way to develop integrated solutions. Management schools, corporate universities and other players increasingly work as partners to meet demands for lifelong learning. Everywhere, the alliance phenomenon continues to grow as more and more organisations in our global, fast-paced economy rely on partners to achieve their goals. A major growth in educational alliances was seen in 2000. Apart from school–company alliances, more and more business schools go into partnership to offer optimum solutions to companies. For instance, London Business School and Columbia University, INSEAD and Wharton Business School, the Sumaq alliance of Instituto de Empresa and eight partners in Portugal and Latin America, or the global alliance for executive education between IMD and MIT – to name just a few.

At the same time, alliances continue to fail at an alarming rate, and increasingly results below expectations are reported. Ideally, within an educational alliance relationship, new services for a ‘total customer solution’ are being offered, covering for instance programme-direction support, tailored research, counselling and consultancy. But international cooperation also takes place under other formulas, such as exchange programmes, consortium approaches or multi-campus institutions. An example of one of the long-running initiatives – since 1995 – is RNEMBA, the executive MBA partnership programme between University of Rochester in New York and Nyenrode University in the Netherlands.

But what is an alliance? The dictionary states: an action or state of being associated; an association formed for mutual benefit.