

Managing Online Management Education: A Community of Inquiry upon Experience (Col-E) Perspective

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The quote by T. S. Eliot in *Four Quartets*: "We had the experience but missed the meaning," is often used by [Professor Henry Mintzberg](#) in the context of management education. Mintzberg argues that one of the shortcomings of management education is that learning becomes meaningless when removed from the experience of managing. [Mintzberg](#) (2018) contends that management is a practice and can seldom be taught in a classroom setting; it can only be learned by doing. This paper critically reviews Mintzberg's propositions in the context of online management education and proposes a refined approach called - A Community of Inquiry upon Experience, Col-E in short.

Dilemma of Management Education

While critiquing management education, Mintzberg [famously stated](#), "There is plenty of business education but hardly any management education." The essence of his criticism rests in the logic that management is often taught primarily using a set of abstract formulae, case histories and flow diagrams that are disconnected from practical experience. These may be useful only if tested and put into use in the practice of managing. He also suggests that management is an art and craft rather than a science or profession. Hence, he suggests that to make management education meaningful, practicing managers should bring the craft of managing into the [classroom](#) by sharing their real-world experiences.

However, traditional face-to-face classrooms of management learning have some limitations. The traditional approach in management education is generally distanced from the workplace and demands a temporary disconnect of the managers from managing, while learning management. However, online management educational platforms offer solutions to address these voids.

Online Management Education

Online management educational platforms allow managers to stay on their job while sharing their experiences in live settings. The learner is not removed from the context of managing in this case. Hence the practice aspect of management can also be easily integrated into the development of authentic assessments in the context of online learning. Furthermore, online environments allow managers to effectively network, collaborate and learn with a broader network of peers from different regions, industries and backgrounds. This enhances the learning experience by exposing managers to a wider range of perspectives and experiences, collaborating in much more diverse peer networks, and allowing for greater flexibility in participation.

Participating in online classroom discussions is similar to a live television news discussion programme, where reporters, victims, experts and observers share live experiences and multiple perspectives on a complex issue at hand. The discussion is moderated (or facilitated) by journalists in the studio to develop a comprehensive story, gain a deeper understanding and identify meaningful actions to take. The participants learn from each other's experiences to get a clearer picture of the developing story with the help of the moderator's timely intervention, summaries, and further clarifications. Multiple audiences (including those who are live, online, offline, onshore and offshore) can actively participate in the discussion. They have the ability to reflect on the past, present and future all at the same time to enrich the discussions. This analogy highlights the viability of an online platform in creating an effective learning environment without losing the context of managerial experiences and without being deluded by the overdose of irrelevant abstract ideas.

The analogy also underlines the essence of the [constructivist theory of learning](#) that holds that "...learners are active participants in their learning journey; knowledge is constructed based on experiences". The constructivist theory also emphasises that learning is a social activity. Hence, we proposed a new approach of online management education, combining the scope of social and experiential aspects of management learning.

A Community of Inquiry upon Experience (Col-E)

The community of inquiry (Col) is a notable learning philosophy that aids and enhances the effectiveness of online management education.

A [community](#) "is often used to refer to the cognitive or emotional connections established between physically separated learners." This is an essential condition in the online management education space. A [sense of community](#) has been defined as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together". An online management education cohort is a learning community that establishes cognitive and emotional connections while sharing managerial experiences.

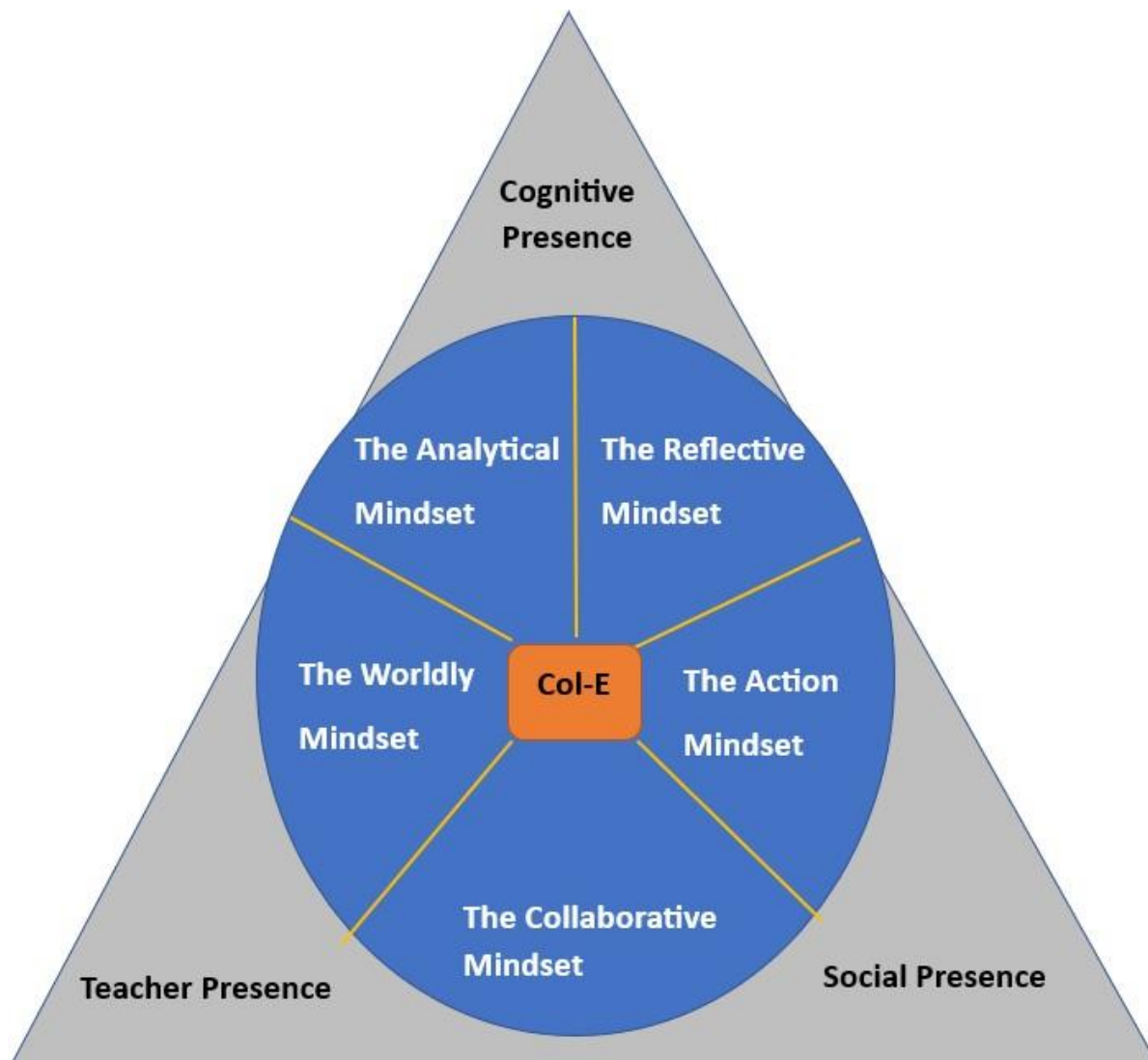
[The community of inquiry model](#) has three essential dimensions, cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence, according to [Garrison](#) (1999). Cognitive presence is about how the participants construct meaning through communication. Participants could share the nuances of their experience that could be debated, discussed, and critiqued to draw meaning from them. Here, the discussion of each participant's experience is the focus, which can be related to the existing theories and frameworks facilitated by the teaching presence. [Anderson et al.](#) (2001, p. 5) defined "teaching presence as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realising personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes." Therefore, the facilitator's role is to contextualise the discussions to theories and practices, summarise the discussion to make sense of each experience and compare and contrast the experience using frameworks and models from relevant disciplines. Social presence is defined as "the degree to which participants are able to project themselves affectively within the medium" (Garrison, cited in [Aragon 2003, p. 60](#)). Among other things, social presence helps to obtain affective behaviours among participants by promoting positivity through gestures, smiles, humour, and, most importantly, personalised experiences. Sharing personalised experiences again is key to creating an effective community of inquiry.

Sharing managerial experiences at both personal and social levels plays a crucial role in establishing a successful Community of Inquiry upon Experience (Col-E) in online management education. Hence, we call it the Community of Inquiry upon Experience (Col-E). To ensure that this type of Col-E has the efficacy to develop the unique skills and competencies required of managers, it is important to carefully craft the cognitive and social processes within it using an established framework in management education. Hence, we propose a few additional requirements for Col-E besides the cognitive, teaching and social presence, consistent with [Mintzberg's](#) innovative and proven management education design.

The additional requirements are collectively termed *Managerial Mindsets* by Mintzberg. Developing these managerial mindsets is the essential focus of the online management education programme. According to [Gosling and Mintzberg](#), these mindsets cut across the traditional discipline areas, such as Marketing, Finance, People and Operations, and also overcome the false dichotomy between management and leadership. The managerial mindsets are "The Reflective Mindset-managing self; the Analytical Mindset-managing organisations; the Worldly Mindset-managing context (in contrast to global, which implies a kind of conformity, worldly means coming to appreciate other worlds to better appreciate one's own); the Collaborative Mindset-managing relationships; and the Action Mindset-managing change."

The [managerial mindsets](#) could be developed in all the business disciplines through the interaction of the managers. Instead of being separate categories, these mindsets can be viewed as threads that are skilfully woven together to create a unique sturdy cloth for each manager. Through the online platform, they can more effectively share, discuss, debate, question, analyse, and evaluate managerial experiences within a curriculum framework designed to facilitate such online activities, similar to the analogy of the TV discussion program described earlier. As depicted in this figure, the managerial experiences are shared, and the mindsets are developed against the backdrop of the community of inquiry. Hence, the community of inquiry upon Experience (Col-E).

Figure: Col-E Framework for Online Management Education



Source: Created by Nair & Chandrasekara (2023).

Conclusion and Future Direction

Mintzberg's criticism of management education is that management cannot be taught in a classroom because it is a practical craft. Hence, he has been a proponent of innovative approaches to facilitating the managerial experience of the participants in management education. One of his most popular approaches proposes five mindsets that management education should strive to develop: Reflective, Analytical, Worldly, Collaborative and Action mindsets. Online management education provides a platform that facilitates this approach by allowing managers to stay on the job while sharing their experiences in live settings, regardless of location and time windows, more seamlessly and efficiently. We suggest that this facilitation of managerial experiences is done in the context of a learning approach called a Community of Inquiry (CoI) with three fundamental elements: cognitive, social, and teaching presence. Combining the scope of the above two approaches, we propose that the key to

online management education is the creation of a Community of Inquiry upon Experience (Col-E), where participants share their managerial experiences and collectively learn from this exchange facilitated by teaching, social and cognitive presence online.

We hope this proposed approach and our future research and development of the framework will assist management educators and educational designers in rethinking, refining and transforming existing online educational platforms to better equip managers with the competencies they need to succeed in today's complex and dynamic business environments. Moreover, we hope the proposed approach will refresh the [ongoing discourse](#) around the need to reform the curricula in response to the growing prevalence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in teaching and learning. [AI can't replace managers](#) or the teaching and learning of management. We hope our work will encourage management educators and educational designers to move beyond the current AI-centric debate and take a fresh look at what it means to be a manager in today's AI-enabled society. We can then refocus the educational reforms towards developing true managerial skills essential for success by developing interwoven managerial mindsets through the Community of Inquiry upon Experience (Col-E).



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