
New challenges and opportunities of Continuing Education Programs in Lebanon

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Abstract. By establishing regional continuing education centers across Lebanon, a country characterized as a fragile state with an unstable political environment, a private university's continuing education (CE) unit faces new challenges and opportunities. Following a methodology aimed at minimizing known uncertainties, three central themes had been acknowledged to underscore the resolution of a higher education private institution in strategically expanding its outreach programs. The first relates to the university's adaptation, as an organization, of an effective administrative arrangement in response to the nature of the new external environment it is now engaged in. The second concerns the uncertainties associated with choosing strategic regional allies as partners in the expansive CE strategy to best serve the communities. The third involves strategic knowledge management challenges and related strategic solutions to attend to client's demands. By tackling the known uncertainties associated with the new external environment, it is argued that the university's ability to bring in social returns could well be enhanced. We conclude with shared lessons that would guide decision makers, strategic planners and university administrators with respect to steps and approaches as they may face in similar situations.

Key words: Continuing Education, Life Long Learning, Strategy in Education, Entrepreneurship, University Administration, Strategic Planning and Alliance.

1. INTRODUCTION TO CONTINUING EDUCATION

Lifelong learning and continuing education are two labeled sides of the same coin. The underlying philosophy is rooted in the paradigm that investment in education or human capital is an important source of economic growth [4]. In practice, CE programs act as a pathway and comprises of a platform, linking the individual's achievement to date with a chosen career path. In reality, a division of Continuing Educations Program, as part of a university setting, partners with various stakeholders from the professional communities to leverage in the program delivery process. The partnership zone aims at sharing knowledge, experience, ideas and resources, and it focuses on building skills, on increasing knowledge and on developing abilities of the participating individual through specifically designed programs, called continuing education programs. In its entirety, the partner list varies but generally includes links to international organizations, professional associations, industries, businesses, local government, primary and secondary education, in addition to health and social services.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON LEBANON AND CE IN LEBANON

Lebanon is a small Arab country with a culture marked by strong western influences that date back to the dawn of the previous century. It is the most heterogeneous of all Arab countries with a population consisting mainly of Muslims and Christians, (19 officially recognized religious sects). The political system follows a mandate of confessional distribution of power based on religious affiliation [1]. After the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil wars, Lebanon has emerged after a series of conflict and wars, with a multi-confessional society. Given the