

Artistic flair is good business

Managers need to find their creative side, write **Jennifer Merritt** and **Louis Lavelle**.

Where do you send a manager to learn how to be creative? This question is becoming an important issue for top executives who find themselves in a business world where creativity and innovation are increasingly at a premium, and skills in administering organisations have less value.

Some American business schools think they have found the answer: teach prospective business students the art of design.

That's why Margaret Miller, a senior economist at the World Bank, came to be in an executive management course at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, wearing heavy leather gloves and vision-obscuring glasses.

She was trying to figure out how a person with a physical impairment would wrap a gift.

The goal was to see the experience through new eyes and learn creativity. To foster this sort of thinking, Stanford is establishing a new Institute of Design that will teach design thinking and strategy to business and engineering students.

Business schools have been trying to inject design thinking into their courses for well over a decade, with mixed success.

Many have worked with the Corporate Design Foundation in Boston to develop design courses. These business schools tend to offer a single elective or executive MBA class in conventional product design.

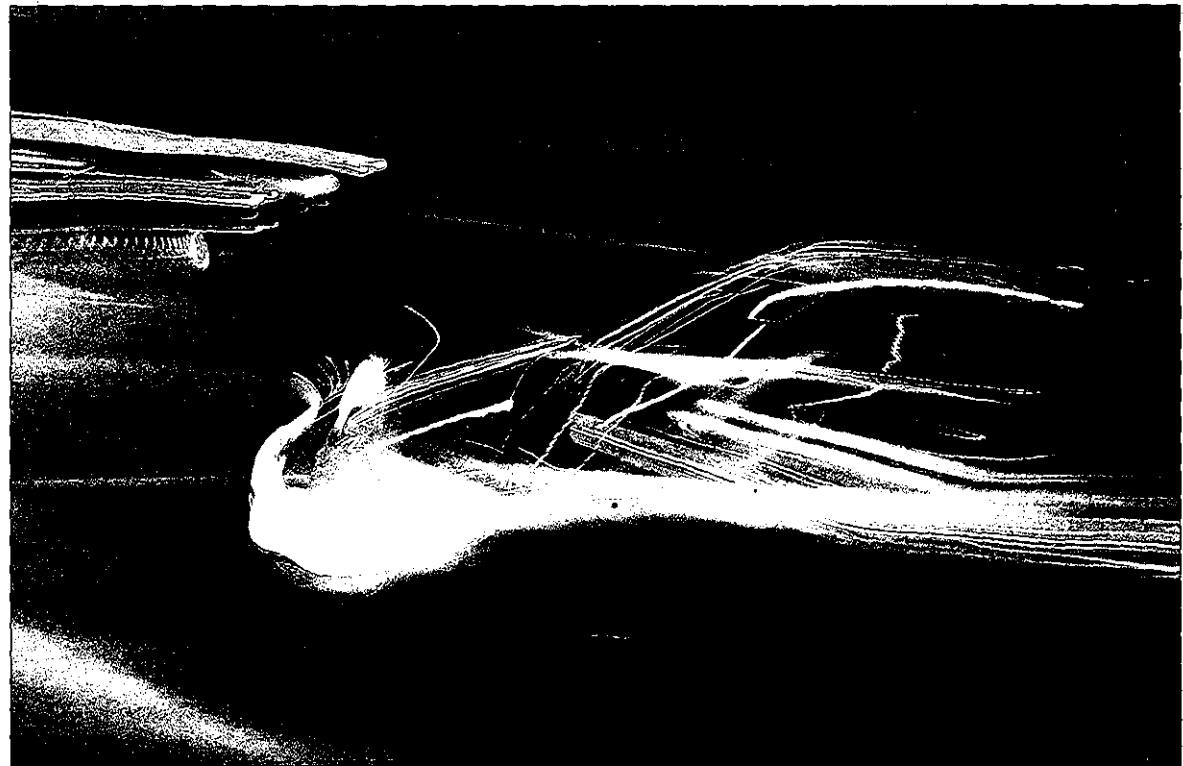
Harvard Business School's course in managing the innovation process, Northwestern's product development and design, and Georgetown's developing new products and services, are all extremely popular among MBA students.

An elective at the University of Michigan's Stephen M Ross School of Business, for example, has had students developing improvements to cars for years.

But business schools are now trying to go beyond the single elective in product design by linking with design schools.

One of the best programs in the US is the integrated product development track for MBAs at Carnegie Mellon University's Tepper School of Business.

Designers, engineers and marketers mix it up in the classroom to develop prototypes of useful



Design skills can put business leaders in the driver's seat.

Photo: ROB HOMER

products that are commercially viable. MBAs more accustomed to financial analysis and bottom-line issues are pushed to think more creatively.

"Innovation is critical in management; you have to innovate to compete and survive," says Carnegie Mellon's dean Kenneth Dunn.

At the Haas School of Business at the University of California at Berkeley, Sara Beckman, teaches a course called design as a strategic business issue. For many MBAs, it's

the first time they have ever worked with non-business people on projects.

"The analytical MBA focuses on solving a problem, but the design process focuses on problem-finding," says Beckman.

Many companies are going directly to top design firms to set up customised executive-education sessions.

Most of these involve getting the chief executive and top management out shopping for the

things their company sells. It's a game of "be your customer" that, despite its simplicity, can have enormous impact.

Samsung has learned a great deal about design by attending various sessions at California's IDEO and other consulting firms.

Learning how to be creative is one of the great managerial challenges ahead. It was once obvious where managers should go for training. That's no longer the case.

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