Introduction

There is wide agreement among business school faculty and administrators about the necessity to provide a global view and perspective to all management students, particularly those in Executive MBA (EMBA) programmes. All business today is global by definition: competitors from new and emerging markets are laying claim to an increasing global market share in a broad set of industries; consumer requirements are more diverse and exacting across different markets, imposing harsh demands of variations in product or service attributes and value propositions; supply chains are considerably more complex and extensive, including many more countries and requiring strict observance to cost, quality, and ethical issues; the source of innovation can reside in organizations far from those one knows best or normally interacts with; and the role of governments and other institutions is ever more prevalent wherever we operate or seek customers.

Although this is true for most business students, a relevant MBA programme for senior executives cannot escape the obligation to include a significant exposure to leading business practices and models that occur in markets across the globe. Regardless of what industry they may work in, what position they hold in their organization, or in which country they reside or operate, senior executives are constantly facing decisions that call for a sharp appreciation for global environmental factors and competitors.

How to deliver such content in an effective and economical way is no small challenge. Younger students – undergraduates or typical full-time MBA candidates – have considerably more time at their disposal, for example, to master a foreign language, go on an exchange programme, or spend a year in a foreign
internship or study-abroad programme. Furthermore, no school can possibly cover all important markets in the course of the typical 18-month programme that characterizes most EMBAbs. Nor do all Executive MBA participants have the same interests or preoccupations given their diverse industry, geographical, and functional background and responsibilities.

**Content versus experience**

The importance of providing direct experiences that illustrate the complex nature of international business practice has long been accepted as critical to the pedagogical requirements of our field. Over a decade ago, D. C. Kayes (2002) argued for preserving experience-based approaches to management learning to include the relationship between personal and social knowledge. Shortly thereafter, Earley and Patterson (2004) introduced the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) as a significant break from the conventional wisdom of focusing on cultural values for cross-cultural education. The need to incorporate experiential techniques in such training was evident from the start. Yamazaki and Kayes (2004) expanded on this approach by offering a taxonomy of skills necessary for cross-cultural learning based on experiential learning theory and explored their implications for management development in international business situations. Later, Ng et al. (2009) further developed some of these ideas by integrating research on experiential learning with the basic underpinnings of the CQ literature to propose a model on how leaders translate their international assignment experiences into learning outcomes. Common to all of these approaches was the belief that we need to get the students ‘out of the classroom’ and into a world that is complex, foreign, strange, and unpredictable in order for them to confront their biases and assumptions.

Figure 16.1 presents one view of how different strategies pursued by most international business programmes, whether at the graduate or undergraduate level, arrayed in terms of experiential and conceptual/analytical goals. It is our contention that for more senior executives, particularly those in EMBA programmes, the introduction of experiential activities relative to primarily theoretical or conceptual material is considerably more important than for younger students. EMBA participants are, for the most part, relatively senior executives with more than 10–15 years of professional experience. The technical aspects of content courses, so essential to the undergraduate and younger graduate student, are less critical to an executive who has been toiling in the field for over a decade and who had gained considerable experience in most aspects of his or her business. Therefore, the most successful EMBA programmes tend to include a high percentage of experiential, knowledge-sharing activities in their courses or pedagogical activities that are designed to challenge embedded or traditional views of management as well as to foster the breaking