

distinguishing innovations is enabled by online technologies, they are not simply the product of superior software or hardware. Each feature also requires sophisticated human capital that must be developed slowly and with difficulty over a period of years: expanded skillsets, a distributed team of experts that has learned to take collective responsibility for a program and its students, carefully developed curricula, trusting relationships with distinctive institutional partners. Because each feature depends so heavily on these challenging human elements, it can take a long time for a program to become distinguished. Fortunately, potential competitors must also take years to respond to these challenges. Because each of these six features is built on a complex mix of new skill sets and relationships, there is no short cut to becoming a leader.

5. NEXT STEP: EMPIRICAL TESTING

This article has suggested that quality improvement can sometimes also improve marketability - a hypothesis that some may think flies in the face of their own experience. One of the next steps in the discussion of this hypothesis by the field of online learning is to investigate the extent to which distinguishing features such as those described in this article do seem to attract the interest of potential students.

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