

Berkeley Innovative Leader Capabilities

As a general management school, Berkeley-Haas has a curriculum that is strong in all areas, including Strategy, Finance, Marketing, Accounting and Operations. There is a difference, however, between the knowledge and skills of a capable general manager versus those of an innovative leader. A signature strength of Berkeley-Haas is our emphasis on transformative capabilities that take a person from general manager to innovative leader. Our curriculum delivers these capabilities in addition to the general management foundation. They include the capability to:

Frame problems
Experiment to learn
Navigate uncertainty
Influence without authority

These correspond loosely to the phrase “Think big, experiment small, learn always, and execute smart.”

1) Frame problems: The future will reward solving problems, and addressing opportunities, using a more disciplined approach “upstream” at the problem-finding and problem-framing stages. Telling someone to think outside the box is not helpful if they don’t know where the box is. This capability includes recognizing implicit assumptions, distilling core issues, and being intentional about choosing systems thinking, critical thinking, design thinking, or other modes to uncover new solutions. Curricular extensions are many and include articulating problem statements, observing customer behavior in structured ways, identifying interests of stakeholders, and understanding systems-level interactions.

2) Experiment to learn: Enterprises recognize the growing value in testing new business ideas with smaller, cost-effective experiments. This supports sound decision-making and continuous learning in the world’s rapidly evolving business environments, whether in start-ups or established corporations. Curricular extensions are many and include experimental design and inference, looking for unintended consequences, rapid prototyping of business models and solution types, valuing information, and moving beyond fear of failure (ability to put out an idea, get feedback, change it, and try again).

3) Navigate uncertainty: Managing a messy future demands a deeper understanding of uncertainty’s sources, reducing uncertainty that is unproductive, and making intelligent decisions under uncertainty that remains. Most business decisions are made under some form of uncertainty. While the human mind performs well when uncertainty isn’t present, mistakes in thinking become prevalent when it is introduced. Curricular extensions are many and include behavioral principles for how people understand (and fail to understand) uncertainty, principles for how organizations address risk and make decisions in the face of risk, biases in decision-making, structured tools for decision-making, managing uncertainty about which business model is best, real options, and managing employee responses to risk.

4) Influence without authority: Markets are increasingly rewarding flatter organizations that distribute authority and rely less on command and control, particularly given demographic shifting toward Millennials. This capability includes leading organizational change, meaning-making (showing how people’s efforts translate into larger results that matter), and effective feedback and coaching. Curricular extensions are many and include leading change via strategic use of networks, methods of interpersonal persuasion, drivers of motivation and influence, and links between influencing and problem framing (for example, in bringing people to a shared understanding).