

Bridging the Gap Between the Classroom and the Real World



“Blue 360 software, a flexible, user-friendly 360 degree feedback system designed for easy integration with current systems and rapid deployment”

Matthew McGuire,
Senior E-learning Developer / Platform Manager

CLIENT:
Babson College

CHALLENGE:
To save college faculty and administrators time, reduce costs, and gain more control of 360 degree reviews for business students.

SOLUTION:
Blue® 360 software, a flexible, user-friendly 360 degree feedback system designed for easy integration with current systems and rapid deployment.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE CLASSROOM AND THE REAL WORLD

If you don't apply learning, it doesn't tend to last.

This universal problem provided a focus for Professor James Hunt when he was faced with the challenge of teaching in Babson College's newly re-designed Fast Track blended MBA program, being launched this fall on both sides of the country.

The new Fast Track program is a blended course for professionals who want to stay in their jobs while earning their MBAs. The students do 60 per cent of their coursework online and meet every six weeks for intensive two-day sessions.

"Traditionally, the academic experience and work experience have been held as quite separate. We're trying to bring them together and leverage one experience for the benefit of the other," says Hunt.

One tool that fits perfectly with this program's format is a new, online 360-feedback review process that happens on-the-job, giving students' managers and peers an opportunity to assess their performance.

When the surveys are completed, the college will print reports with the results. Students will receive their feedback at Babson College with the support of individual meetings with Professor Hunt, and class discussions.

As they progress in creating a development plan for themselves, students will also take part in online group forums.

While the 360 review process is used often in the business world, it is rare in an academic setting. The fact that technical skills get more emphasis in most MBA programs, rather than the soft skills being measured by Babson's 360 review, is most likely a function of tradition more than anything else, says Hunt.

Yet, research proves that soft skills— the ability to know oneself and relate to others in a healthy, productive way— are essential for success. Hunt points to the body of research on Emotional Intelligence to prove his point.

"If you look at engineers who get the most patents, it is the ability to use technical skills that really counts, which requires soft skills," he says.

“If you ask CEOs, they will tell you they are looking for leadership and communication skills, teamwork skills, the ability to work cross-culturally in a diverse environment, and to lead change. These skills are more important in many respects than the technical skills.”

What makes the 360-review process a good fit for Babson’s Fast Track MBA program is the fact that the feedback the students will receive from their workplaces ties directly into the concepts taught in class.

“To apply what is learned in the classroom and get feedback on it is a powerful opportunity,” says Hunt.

In order to make this opportunity happen, Babson College’s seven-member tech team needed to find a 360-degree tool that was quick to implement and easy to manage. They found it in Blue, from eXplorance.

“We don’t want to get into the business of managing a huge survey system. We want a system that we know is reliable, so that we can just publish the reports and not worry about managing it too much,” says Senior e-Learning Content Developer Matthew McGuire.

The faculty is very excited about the new system, he adds. Babson’s initial plan is to use Blue exclusively for the Fast Track program, but the directors of the college’s other programs and executive education centre are very interested in the project.

In the meantime, Professor Hunt says he is hoping his students will benefit from the process through a greater knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, and a better ability to hold effective discussions about their personal development with their bosses and peers on the job.

