

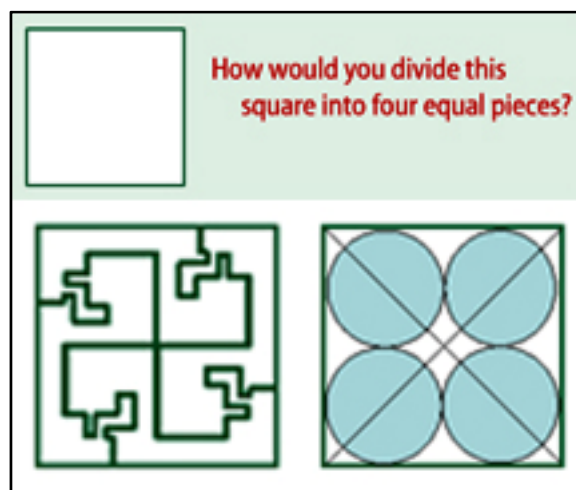
## Use Case: Successful use of Wikis in Babson’s Fast Track Blended MBA Program

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In September 2006, Professor William Stitt and Professor Mark Rice of Babson College collaborated with the college’s Curriculum Innovation and Technology Group to develop four online learning assignments that successfully incorporated the Learning Objects wiki tool for sharing images and ideas.

The assignments are part of a blended course titled *Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, which is the first course in Babson’s Fast Track Blended MBA Program. The class stresses creative, imaginative thinking – a theme replicated in subsequent course offerings throughout the program and a hallmark of Babson’s leading entrepreneurship curriculum.

In this series of assignments, students focus on different aspects of lateral thinking, a problem-solving approach used to develop new ideas and possibilities. Assignment topics include *Generating Alternatives, Challenging Assumptions, Suspending Judgment* and *Setting up Provocations*. The overall objective is “to make deliberate, focused, lateral thinking an attitude and a habit of your mind,” says Professor Stitt. The wiki tool helps students meet that goal in several ways. First, students are given a *geometric warm-up exercise* in which they suggest creative, graphical solutions to the seemingly simple question: “How would you divide this square into four equal pieces?” Students can upload as many images as they want, with the only “rule” being not to duplicate answers. One class of approximately 50 students generated more than 85 unique solutions, two of which are depicted here:



After completing the warm-up exercise, students undertake a *challenge exercise*, which requires them to post short written passages that explore several ways to look at a given situation. For examples, students asked to explore the features and benefits of a basic #2 pencil. In both exercises, students view and critique their classmates' submissions.

**The Challenge:**

**Come up with as many features and benefits of an ordinary #2 pencil as you can think of.\***

Describe each feature and benefit as follows:

- Feature:** The pencil is yellow.
- Benefit:** It's easy to find on a desk of white paper.

Generate a series of features and benefits. Each set should be 30 words or less.

**Your Task**

**Challenge Exercise**

**Geometric Exercise** **Challenge Exercise**

**Directions:** Click on the **add** button. Insert a bullet below and type in your alternative approach to the problem. Remember that your answer should be 30 words or less. You should not include duplicates on this list so be sure to post only new alternative approach statements. When you have added your entry click the **Save** button.

**Please note:** New items should be added to the bottom of the page.

**Feature:** A pencil is round in shape. **Benefit:** This makes it easy to hold.

**Feature:** A pencil uses lead to write with. **Benefit:** This way you can make corrections by erasing.

**Feature:** A pencil has an eraser on the end. **Benefit:** You can easily use the eraser to correct your mistakes.

**Feature:** Pencil is lean and slick. **Benefit:** So that you can put your hair up.

**Feature:** Eraser on a pencil. **Benefit:** When you lose your writing stopper.

**Feature:** Group of Pencils. **Benefit:** Decorative center piece.

**Feature:** Sharpener, then Resharpen it. **Benefit:** To be efficient.

The wiki tool is an ideal vehicle for these dynamic, collaborative assignments. The comment feature of the wiki is a seamless way for students to review each other's work and offer feedback. Students can easily post and view the images and text-based solutions. Students broaden their own perspectives when they compare solutions with their peers. As one student reports:

*"I love this exercise - I have to admit that the first answer I was going to submit was a quantitative calculation based on the data given in the example (geek at heart). However, when I started reading other people's submissions, it completely opened up my mind to the zillions of other possibilities!"*

Student response to a Challenge Exercise [wiki]

In addition to opening students' minds to new possibilities, the exercises generate encouraging comments. This results in a sort of camaraderie that carries over into group work throughout the Fast Track MBA program. The comments also include constructive criticism, giving students a forum to voice their opinions in a respectful way.

Both the geometric and challenge portions of the assignments are housed in a single wiki with two pages. Graphical navigation buttons at the top of each page create a user-friendly interface for accessing each portion of the exercise.

**Session 1: Generating Alternatives**

**Challenge Exercise** (unpublished)

**Geometric Exercise** **Challenge Exercise**

- Unless middle managers who have been laid off and are seeking employment should not be employed due to their lack of innovation.
- Middle managers unable to innovate effectively to allocate the day-to-day work that they face will lose that opportunity to add long term value to their companies.
- Middle managers need to delegate the day-to-day work they can do so that they have time to identify and drive the present innovations that will define their firm's future.
- Get exposure to the different parts of the company to learn its capacity and limitations.
- Develop a mentor-mentee relationship with a senior level manager with whom you can exchange ideas, suggestions, and thoughts.
- Keep a weekly journal of situations, solutions, ideas, and insights that can be discussed with superiors at regular intervals.
- Gather together with other middle managers whenever possible. Use social time for discussing innovative solutions, recent thoughts on the regions.
- Post work problems that "bug" you on your position bulletin boards... solicit input from others on how they are working through their similar problems.

**Page**

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Professor Robinson

**Geometric Exercise** **Challenge Exercise**

The success of these assignments is apparent in the progression of entries from the first assignment to the final one. The exercises are spread over the first four weeks of the course. The assignments improve students' abilities to apply lateral thinking techniques to their decision-making processes. Students' later postings include more innovative ideas than those in earlier weeks.

This assignment has been given to four Fast Track MBA cohorts over the past eighteen months and will be highlighted in the upcoming OBTC conference at Babson College this summer.