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Brian Quinn

Introduction

For several decades a Masters in Business Administration (MBA Degree) has been a valuable qualification for obtaining elite jobs and professional advancement in the western business world, particularly in North America. Interestingly, for many years Japan considered such degrees to be basically useless due to the lifetime employment system by which an employee generally spent his entire career at one corporation while devoting himself to learning one business management style, namely, that of his own company. This system indeed seemed to work well until the meltdown of the Japanese economy starting with the bursting of the Japanese “Economic Bubble” in 1991. Thereafter, Japan began to reevaluate many aspects of their education and training systems for young business employees. As a result, newly established MBA programs have recently begun to spring up all over Japan, consisting of both Japanese language based and English language based programs run by both Japanese and foreign universities. As of April 2003, no fewer than 45 MBA graduate school programs had been established at Japanese universities. In addition, 5 MBA programs had also been established by such foreign universities as Temple University (USA) and McGill University (Canada). (“MBA Graduate Schools in Japan” Website: International. Gradschools.com) In keeping with this trend, Kyushu University also established its own MBA program in April 2003 under the name of “Kyushu University Business School”.

Unlike most other graduate school programs at Kyushu University, the Kyushu University Business School (QBS) is designed to accept both full-time business employees, who range in age from 22 to 45 years of age, as well as regular students who have just completed their degrees. Successful applicants to QBS need not have a degree in business or economics. Students have been accepted with undergraduate degrees in such fields as law, science, mathematics, English, medicine, engineering and sociology. Students should have at least two years of working experience, however, about 20% of all new students are accepted directly after graduating from undergraduate programs. In addition, about 15% of all students are foreign nationals, mostly from China and Korea. This percentage is also expected to increase dramatically as the QBS MBA program becomes better known throughout Asia over the next few years. Due to the make-up of the student body, classes are held Monday through Friday from 6:20 to 7:50 pm and from 8:00 to 9:30 pm. In addition, classes are also held on Saturdays from 1:40 to 3:10 pm and from 3:30 to 5:00 pm. This compact schedule thus allows for 12 ninety-minute classes per week. Each course meets 13 or 14 times per

semester.

As in most MBA programs established so far in Japan, the QBS MBA program is Japanese language based. However, about 10% of the courses are taught in English, either by native-speaker professionals or by Japanese professors who have broad experience either working or studying in English speaking countries. In addition, the QBS curriculum established two English language courses as follows: Business Communication (required) and Intercultural Communication (elective). The first English course is taught by a native English speaker, while the later course is taught by a native Japanese professor of English.

This paper will attempt to elucidate the unique linguistic needs of the eclectic group of students studying in these newly established MBA programs in Japan, while also suggesting various ways to overcome some of the special challenges faced by both the native-English and Japanese staff when teaching such students in English. The focus of attention will be on the Kyushu University Business School since it is considered to be representative of many other MBA programs that have been established outside of the Kanto region in Japan.

English Proficiency Dilemma

One of the most difficult problems facing all MBA programs in Japan is clearly establishing the English proficiency level that all students are expected to have when starting their graduate studies. Both Japanese society and the business world expect all MBA graduates to have a high proficiency in English. Unfortunately, the range in English ability among students ranging in age from 22 to 45 is extremely wide with some students having a TOEFL score of over 600 while others have a score around 380.

The main goal of Japanese language based MBA programs is to accept intelligent individuals who either have proven themselves in the business world or who offer great promise as future business leaders. For many businessmen in Kyushu, such qualifications are totally unrelated to their English proficiency level. In addition, the vast majority of company employees in Kyushu rarely need to use English in their daily working lives. As a result, younger students tend to have a higher English proficiency than individuals who have been working 10 or 15 years. QBS presently accepts about 50 students per year to the program and the two English courses are taught as large-group classes. It is extremely difficult and ineffective to teach an English class with students who have TOEFL scores that vary from 370 to over 600. Due to this state of affairs it is necessary to establish a basic proficiency level for all students intending to enter an MBA program.

Selecting Proficiency Test and Required Proficiency Levels

The debate over which proficiency test is most appropriate and what score levels should be established continues in Japan with no definitive conclusions yet to be made. It is a fact, however,

that almost all universities in North America and numerous other English speaking countries rely on the TOEFL test when selecting foreign students. Numerous other excellent English proficiency tests exist such as the TOEIC, Cambridge, and EIKEN tests. However, most of these tests are not widely recognized. For example, the TOEIC test is generally only recognized in the Asian Pacific Countries of Japan, Korea and Taiwan. In addition, the EIKEN test (The Japanese English Proficiency Test) is not recognized anywhere outside Japan. It is therefore essential that all business schools use the TOEFL test to measure English proficiency so that all graduates will be able to smoothly work or study overseas after graduation.

The standard score for foreign students to enter as regular full-time students at North American Universities is a TOEFL score of 550, while a TOEFL score of 600 is required to enter most graduate school programs. In addition, many major Japanese firms require a TOEFL score of 600 for an employee to be favorably considered for a long-term overseas assignment (3 to 5 years). Therefore, an ideal MBA applicant should have a TOEFL score of 550 as a basic requirement for entry to the graduate program. In addition, all students should be required to attain a TOEFL score of 600 by the time they graduate from the 2-year program. In this way, all graduates would immediately be able to either work for an international firm based in Japan or to qualify for overseas assignments at any major Japanese companies. Unfortunately, only 5 of the 50 students of the inaugural QBS MBA program had a TOEFL score of 550 or over upon admission in April 2003. The average TOEFL score of the 50 students was 470, including 15 students with a TOEFL score of less than 450. Kyushu University Business School established no English proficiency requirement in the first year since they wanted to ensure that a sufficient number of students could be accepted. However, after much discussion and debate, a minimum TOEFL score of 520 will be a requirement for all students applying to QBS from April 2004. This score is still somewhat less than ideal, however, it will be established as only a temporary level. By 2008, QBS plans to make a TOEFL score of 550 a basic requirement for acceptance to the program. In addition, a TOEFL score of 600 should also be required by the time students graduate, however, this requirement has yet to gain consensus approval and is therefore still under discussion.

The main advantage of establishing a TOEFL score of 550 at Kyushu University Business School is to ensure that every student is able to follow all courses taught in English. In addition, such students will be capable of reading and discussing a wide range of business related texts and case studies without having to continuously rely on Japanese translations. Such a requirement would also help establish QBS as an excellent training ground for internationally minded business people. The primary disadvantage of such a language proficiency requirement would be that a large number of otherwise qualified individuals would have to be rejected every year. However, it must be remembered that QBS has no time limits on applying for admission. Therefore, highly motivated individuals should take it upon themselves to obtain a TOEFL score of 550 by the time they apply the following year. If after one or two years, such an applicant has indeed obtained a TOEFL score of over 550, then the selection committee would look very favorably indeed on their application.

Some MBA programs in Japan have established a TOEFL score requirement of 500, however,

at this proficiency level the students can neither sufficiently comprehend English reading assignments nor understand lectures given in English. It is also important to note that many Japanese professors use textbooks, handouts and case studies obtained from Internet sources in English to supplement their courses even when teaching MBA courses in Japanese. If students only have a TOEFL score of 500 they will be unable to keep up with the course work.

As a result of the above situation, there really is no alternative but to require a high level of English proficiency of all students before they enter an MBA program in Japan due to the course requirements and societal expectations after graduation.

English Curriculum for MBA Studies

Most Japanese language based MBA programs at Japanese universities have failed to put sufficient effort into the planning of the English curriculum of their programs. Many business schools indeed have appropriate TOEFL score requirements (though, unfortunately several still do not!), however, most programs offer few, if any courses for “English for Business Studies”. Most Japanese faculty members believe that a good TOEFL score is sufficient for English. As a result, few MBA programs have a full-time native-speaker staff member responsible only for the Business English curriculum. What such Japanese faculty members fail to realize is that a good English proficiency score does not signify good business English, business vocabulary or competent discussion skills. MBA students need an integrated Business English program that provides connected courses for all 4 semesters of the program. Ideally, business English Courses should be available twice per week consisting of such courses as, Business Communication, TOEFL Test Taking Skills, Intercultural Communication, MBA Basics in English, Business Vocabulary, English for Business Studies, and English Business Case Studies. These courses should ideally be taught by one full-time native speaker staff member. Such a full-time staff member would be able to coordinate the programs for both 1st and 2nd year students. It is also important that such a full-time native-speaker staff member has extensive office hours for students who have particular difficulties and thus may need extra guidance. Due to the fact that most students also work full-time, it is virtually impossible for students to meet with part-time lecturers who only come to teach one or two classes and then leave immediately after teaching their classes.

Kyushu University Business School unfortunately follows the above described trend and therefore has no full-time Business English staff member. Instead, QBS has one native-speaker staff member from another distant campus teach one class the first semester (Business Communication) and one Japanese professor of English, from the same distant campus, teach one course the second semester (Intercultural Communication). No Business English courses exist at all for 2nd year students. The general philosophy among the Japanese faculty is that the students should learn English on their own. This thinking is unfortunate since the students lose an excellent opportunity to improve their English skills during the 2nd year of the program.

Model English Curriculum for MBA Students in Japan

I would next like to outline an ideal curriculum to help meet the English linguistic needs of students in an MBA program in Japan. As mentioned previously, MBA programs at Japanese universities should have one full-time Business English staff member who designs, coordinates and teaches the majority of classes in the two-year program. There should be two Business English courses available to all students each semester. These two ninety-minute classes provide a minimum opportunity for students to improve their knowledge of Business English terminology, to increase their comprehension on both listening and reading levels, and finally allow them to dramatically improve their discussion skills in English. The following curriculum is divided into 4 semesters, namely semesters 1 and 2 in the first year of study and semesters 3 and 4 in the second year of study.

The MBA program should consist of 8 courses in all (2 per semester) as follows:

1. **Business Communication (1st semester)**
2. **Business Vocabulary (1st semester)**
3. **MBA Basics (2nd semester)**
4. **Intercultural Communication (2nd semester)**
5. **English for Business Studies I (3rd Semester)**
6. **Business Case Studies I (3rd semester)**
7. **English for Business Studies II (4th semester)**
8. **Business Case Studies II (4th semester)**

The above 8 courses are described in detail as noted below:

First Semester Business English Courses

FIRST COURSE: Business Communication

This course is designed for students at an upper intermediate level who need to improve their skills in the key areas of business communication: taking part in meetings, telephoning, negotiating, presenting and socializing based on extensive pair-work drills. Additional hand-outs are used to provide practice in essential communicative language skills through a series of realistic situations in the world of work. There is also a strong emphasis on listening. In addition, the students are presented with a wide range of authentic reading passages from a variety of sources which are closely related to the theme of each unit. Class discussions are designed to get students to think about what makes communication effective. This course gives students a chance to connect what they have studied with their own daily experience, either as a student or as a professional working in business. This skills gained from this course are highly useful for both those preparing to start

work and for those already in work This course provides students with realistic controlled and open-ended activities so that they can build up their fluency and confidence based on pair-work practice.

Business Communication Syllabus (Approximately 14 class meetings)

1. **Cultural diversity and socializing (1)** Building a relationship: Cross-cultural understanding, welcoming visitors, small talk
2. **Cultural diversity and socializing (2)** Culture and entertainment: Cross-cultural understanding, inviting, accepting or declining, eating out
3. **Using the telephone (1)** Preparing to make a telephone call, receiving calls, taking and leaving a message, asking for and giving repetition, secretarial barrier
4. **Using the telephone (2)** Cross-cultural communication on the telephone, setting up appointments, changing appointments
5. **Using the telephone (3)** Cross-cultural communication on the phone, problem solving on the phone, complaints, ending a call.
6. **Presentations (1)** Presentation techniques and preparation, the introduction
7. **Presentations (2)** The main body of presentation, using visual aids, holding the audience's attention
8. **Presentations (3)** Listing information, linking ideas, sequencing, the end, summarizing and concluding, questions and discussion
9. **Meetings (1)** Making meetings effective, chairing a meeting, establishing the purpose of a meeting
10. **Meetings (2)** The structure of decision making, stating and asking for opinions, interrupting and handling interruptions
11. **Meetings (3)** Asking for clarification, delaying decisions, ending the meeting
12. **Negotiations (1)** Types of negotiations, preparing for a negotiation, making an opening statement
13. **Negotiations (2)** Bargaining and making concessions, accepting and confirming, summarizing and looking ahead
14. **Negotiations (3)** Types of negotiators, dealing with conflict, rejection, ending the negotiation

SECOND COURSE: Business Vocabulary Course Syllabus

This course is an essential building block to enable all MBA students learn and master the most important vocabulary items that are encountered in the business world. Such vocabulary topics should cover a wide range of business topics including jobs, people and organizations, production, marketing, finance and the economy and business culture. In addition to learning such terminology, extensive practice should be provided in class for students to master the business skills required for

successfully conducting meetings, negotiating and presentations. Some of the major vocabulary areas that all MBA students need to master include:

1. Jobs, People and Organizations

Work and jobs

Ways of working

Recruitment and selection

Skills and qualifications

Pay and benefits

People and workplaces

The career ladder

Problems at work

Managers, executives and directors

Businesspeople and business leaders

Organizations

2. Production

Manufacturing and services

The development process

Innovation and invention

Making things

Materials and suppliers

Business philosophies

3. Marketing

Buyers, sellers and the market

Markets and competitors

Marketing and market orientation

Products and brands

Pricing

Distribution

Promotion

The Internet and e-commerce

4. Money

Sales and costs

Profitability and unprofitability

Getting paid

Assets, liabilities and the balance sheet

The bottom line

Share capital and debt

Success and failure

Mergers, takeovers and sell-offs

5. Finance and the Economy

Personal finance

Financial centers

Trading

Financial indicators

6. Business Ethics

Wrongdoing and corruption

Ethical Standards

Sexual Harassment

Code of ethics

7. Personal Skills

Time and time management

Stress and stress management

Leadership and management styles

8. Culture

Business across cultures

Distance and familiarity

Dress

Entertainment and hospitality

Cross-cultural communication

9. Business Skills

Meetings

Types of meetings

The role of the chairperson
 Expressing points of view
 Agreement and disagreement
 Discussion techniques
 Presentations
 Preparation and introductions
 Main body of presentations
 Closing presentations
 Dealing with questions
 Negotiations
 Types of negotiation
 Bargaining
 Preparing to negotiate
 Negotiating scenarios
 Negotiating styles
 Proposals and counter-proposals
 Confrontation
 Dealing with problems
 Deadlock and mediators
 Agreements and contracts

All of the above business vocabulary items can be thoroughly covered and drilled in one 14 week course. The difficulty level is upper intermediate so that such items can be well understood by all participants. After the completion of this course, the students will be ready to regularly apply their newly acquired knowledge in other courses.

II. Second Semester Business English Classes

THIRD COURSE: MBA Basics in English: Course Syllabus

The primary goal of this course is to allow students to gain a basic working knowledge , in English, of all key business functions: from marketing a product or reading a financial statement to managing an international workforce or setting corporate strategy. The course will methodically cover the 5 main areas of business including marketing, accounting and finance, human resources and organization, strategy and finally vision. Approximately 3 weeks should be devoted to each topic as noted below:

1. Marketing

What is marketing?

Marketing analysis

Segmentation, targeting and Positioning

The marketing mix

2. Accounting and Finance

The income statement

The balance sheet

The cash flow statement

The time value of money

3. Human Resources and Organization

Corporate culture

Performance-based systems

Discrimination in the workplace

Business ethics

4. Strategy

Industry analysis

Competitive Advantage

Global strategies

Synergy/Diversification

5. Vision

IT and business

Entrepreneurship

Corporate Governance

Leadership in the 21st Century

To summarize, the essential goals of the MBA basics course is to enable all students to increase their knowledge and appreciation of the various different business functions while using English to both understand and discuss wide ranging philosophies and concepts.

FORTH COURSE: Intercultural Communication Course Syllabus

The main objectives of this course will be to try and bring the real world of international business into the classroom. The textbook uses numerous cross-cultural business situations to show how various countries and cultures react differently to business situations. Authentic materials will be used to try and achieve a better intercultural understand of business practices regarding business strategies, cultural issues, selection, training and development of employees, and, finally, try to analyze the special talents and traits of the successful international manager. Approximately 3 or 4 weeks should be devoted to the teaching of the following 4 business study areas:

1. International Business Strategy

Company structure
The global company
Global production
Entering a foreign market
International Mergers
Business in the 21st Century

2. Cultural Issues

Corporate cultures
Global careers
Management attitudes in Japan, Asia, North America and Europe

3. Selection Training and Development

The value of MBAs
Recruiting internationally
Selecting International managers
Training across cultures
International management development

4. The International Manager

Thinking global, acting local
Routes to top management
Overseas postings
Returning home (reverse cultural shock)

The goal of this course in intercultural communication will be to foster a greater sensitivity in all students regarding business in a global environment while using English to discuss international business topics and issues.

III. Third Semester Business English Classes

FIFTH COURSE: English for Business Studies I

This course is the first of a two-semester course for upper-intermediate and advanced level students who need to understand and talk about the key concepts in business and economics. Each class is based on a core reading text to explain the topic of the week. There are authentic interviews for listening comprehension and various activities for systematic vocabulary development. Related case studies are also used with extensive opportunities for students to take part in role playing, discussions and writing exercises. Each class should be devoted to reading language and concepts found in books, newspaper and magazine articles and websites on business and economics. In addition, a strong emphasis is placed on students developing their listening comprehension in the fields of business and economics. Finally, students are provided with numerous opportunities to express business concepts, by reformulating them in their own words while summarizing, analyzing, criticizing and discussing a wide array of ideas. A model syllabus is noted below:

Syllabus (Approximately 15 class meetings)

1. The three sectors of the economy

The economic infrastructure: extract from *Nice Work* by David Lodge

Manufacturing and services: interview with J.K. Galbraith

Manufacturing and services: interview with Denis MacShane, MP

2. Management

Management: an art or a science?

Meetings: *IBM* by Robert Cringely

The retail sector: interview with Steve Moody, store manager

3. Company structure

How are companies organized?

Competition and communication: a talk by Jared Diamond

Comparisons: Big and small companies

4. Work and motivation

Work and responsibility

Motivating staff: interview with Steve Moody, Store manager

Motivation: readings

5. Management and cultural diversity

Cultural attitudes

Managing multinationals

You and your culture

6. Recruitment

Filling a vacancy

Job applications: A curriculum vitae/resume

Women in management: interview with Gill Lewis, human resources manager

7. Labor Relations

Labor unions: interview with Denis MacShane, MP

The printers' union: an extract from Notes from a Small Island by Bill Bryson

Industrial relations

8. Production

Production decisions

Quality: interview with Alan Severn, quality manager

Quality: should we recall this product?

9. Products

Product policy

Developing a new product:

Interview with Jogishwar Singh, company director

Vending machines

10. Marketing

Defining marketing

The importance of market research: interview with Steve Moody, store manager

Market research

11. Advertising

Ways of advertising

Radio commercials

Scripting a radio commercial

12. Promotional tools

Promoting a new product: interview with Jogishwar Singh, company president

Promotional strategies

How many Ps?

13. Accounting and financial statements

Types of accounting: interview with Sarah Brandston, accountant

Company accountants

Financial statements: Nokia

14. Banking

Personal banking

The banking industry

Getting a loan

15. Stocks and shares

Issuing stocks and shares

Stock markets

Ethical investments

SIXTH COURSE: Business Case Studies I

This course will use case studies from various sources including several that are available from Harvard University's web site. This class gives students a regular opportunity to read and understand various business philosophies based on actual case studies. The studies covered in each course will be flexible depending on the tastes and needs of the participants. The primary goal is to give students extensive practice in reading authentic case studies that are used by native speakers in other MBA programs in North America and Europe.

IV. Fourth Semester Business English Classes**SEVENTH COURSE: English for Business Studies II**

This is the second half a two-semester course for upper-intermediate and advanced level students who need to understand and talk about the key concepts in business and economics. Each class is based on a core reading text to explain the topic of the week. There are authentic interviews for listening comprehension and various activities for systematic vocabulary development. Related

case studies are also used with extensive opportunities for students to take part in role playing, discussions and writing exercises. Each class is devoted to reading language and concepts found in books, newspaper and magazine articles and websites on business and economics. In addition, there is strong emphasis on students developing their listening comprehension skills in the fields of business and economics. Finally, students will be provided with numerous opportunities to express business concepts, by reformulating them in their own words while summarizing, analyzing, criticizing and discussing a wide array of ideas:

Syllabus (Approximately 15 class meetings)

1. Bonds

Defining bonds: extract from *The Bonfire of the Vanities* by Tom Wolfe
 The use of bonds/Types of bonds
 Interview with Richard Mahoney of J.P. Morgan bank

2. Futures and derivatives

Defining futures and derivatives
 The dangers of derivatives: a talk by Lillian Chew, financial journalist
 Extract from *Liar's Poker* by Michael Lewis, on bond trading

3. Market structure and competition

Market structure: market leaders, challengers and followers
 Competition

4. Takeovers, mergers and buyouts

Mergers and acquisitions: discussion and interview with Max Pocock, company director
 Buyouts
 The Vodafone/Mannesmann takeover

5. Efficiency and employment

Labor market flexibility: interview with Kate Barker, economist
 Job security: article by Robert Taylor
 Economic change and employment

6. Business Ethics

The social responsibility of business
 Ethics and the law

7. The role of government

What are governments for?
 Two views on the role of government: by J.K. Galbraith and Milton Friedman

Government and industry: interview with Julian Amey, export promoter

8. Central banking, money and taxation

Central banking: interview with Gabriel Mangano, economist

Taxation (and how to avoid it!)

For and against taxation

9. Exchange rates

From fixed to floating exchange rates

Floating exchange rates versus a common currency: interview with J.C. Lambelet, economist

10. The business cycle

What causes the business cycle?

Economic theory and the business cycle: interview with Kate Barker

11. Keynesianism and monetarism

The business cycle and government intervention

Inflation and unemployment: interview with Kate Barker

12. International trade

The growth of international trade

Free trade and unemployment: interview with Ajit Singh, economist

The banana wars

13. Economics and ecology

Ecology and the individual consumer

Measuring eco-efficiency: interview with Marc Keiser, ecologist

Pollution and market solutions: article by Leyla Boulton

14. Information technology and electronic commerce

The dangers of information technology: article by Ian Angell

E-commerce: interview with Chris Peters, cinema manager

The Palmtop shop

15. Entrepreneurs and venture capital

Market opportunities and venture capital: interview with Ed Coombes, corporate financial advisor

Equilibrium and entrepreneurship

EIGHTH COURSE: Business Case Studies II

This is a continuation of the previous semester's course that will also use case studies from various sources including several that are available from Harvard University's web site. This class will give students a regular opportunity to read and understand various business philosophies based on actual case studies. The studies covered in each course will be flexible depending on the tastes and needs of the participants. The primary goal is to give students extensive practice in reading authentic case studies that are used by native speakers in other MBA programs in North America and Europe.

TOEFL Preparation and Testing

As previously stated, all students accepted to an MBA graduate program in Japan should have a TOEFL score of 550 as a basic requirement for acceptance. Thereafter, students should be actively encouraged to strive to attain a score of over 600 by the time they graduate from the two-year course of study. The best way to both motivate the students and help them to achieve this goal is to, first of all, offer the TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program) at least twice per year. The TOEFL-ITP can be administered at each university and the cost is relatively inexpensive (test fee about ¥3000 per person). The best times to give the test would be in September and March every year, namely at the end of the first semester and the end of the second semester. In this way all students who have not achieved a score of over 600 can have 4 opportunities to increase their scores. Such tests in themselves provide a powerful motivational stimulus to the students. These regularly scheduled tests should be mandatory for any students without a TOEFL score of 600. Those with scores of 600 or more, of course, can be exempted for such testing programs.

In addition, all MBA programs should provide TOEFL Skills courses either during the semester or as intensive courses during the summer and spring breaks. I recently completed a 14 week TOEFL Skills course in which 35 MBA students participated and the students raised their scores by an average of 35 points. Such TOEFL Skills courses could be taught by either full-time or part-time staff. Unlike the regular Business School curriculum, it really does not matter if the teachers of such training seminars are regularly available to the students. Such TOEFL Skills classes must provide appropriate level training in Listening, Structure and Reading. It really is essential that the Business School provide these courses since the students cannot be expected to accomplish such skills on their own while both working and studying full-time.

Conclusions

The explosion of newly established MBA programs at numerous Japanese universities should have a profound influence on the future of Japanese business in the coming years. Even though most of these programs will continue to use Japanese as the main modicum of communication, it is essential that the English skills required by Japan's future business leaders neither be ignored nor underestimated. Japan needs to hire stable full-time Business English staff members who can develop integrated programs to help business school students acquire the skills that they surely will need to face the business challenges of the 21st century.

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