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Executive Learning in Revolutionary Times

An industrial revolution is upon us. This time round, the backdrop is cyberspace. As we venture deeper into space, today's executives, value creators and governments will need new skillsets - and revolutionary mindsets to match. Executive learning is changing.

21st century business leaders face unprecedented entrepreneurial, emotional, intellectual and professional challenges. In a new world of constant change and global value chains, the rules of leadership and followership are being re-written almost by the day. Geographical boundaries, language, and time zones no longer hold back the entrepreneurial explorer, be they corporate or individual. The dynamics, in short, remain very dynamic, fluid, and totally unpredictable. In this new world of liberated information, competitive threats and strategic opportunities present themselves in the most unlikely scenarios. It can also be argued that business leadership today is more a matter of reflection and revolution. Today's manager must become not only reflective leader, but also a revolutionary one. Sadly, these may not even be enough to survive and thrive in this global digital dimension.

One simple, primary question arises from all of this: what is the new-century leader to do? How do they employ an agile mindset to transform their complex human capital into sustainable economic, social and environmental value for all their stakeholders? How do



they harness their inner emotional and entrepreneurial capital to persuade followers to not only stick with them, but operate consistently at peak performance? How do they engage with new ways of thinking and seeing, to widen and deepen their own skill sets. As business schools and think-tanks continue to produce new research-led management ideas, how does today's entrepreneurial leader make sense of this new digital industrial world?

The industrial landscape has changed almost beyond recognition over the last forty years. Government policy has tried to keep in step. The new UK Industrial Strategy, seeking to make the UK ‘the world’s most innovative economy’ has five, forward-looking foundations - ideas, people, infrastructure, business environment, and places. While not as ground-breaking as it could be, the strategy recognises that “the world is changing in fundamental ways“. New ideas include planning for a rapidly-aging population, and driving new innovations in technology across the UK. Overall, the policy must be welcome news for industry. Going forward however, industry will need clear strategies and deliverables, to take advantage of the opportunities the policy framework offers. How do executive educators connect with this new industrial policy? How do UK business schools develop new programmes with high-growth firms, to explore the opportunities presented by the Industrial Strategy together?

Executive learning is changing, and rising to the challenge. Offerings from several universities focus on growth and internationalisation. Perhaps focusing on these two buzzwords is timely and critical, at a time when UK business leaders must transition from relying on steady and predictable European Union markets, to finding their way in a highly-competitive and less predictable global market. Focusing on growth and internationalisation may however not necessarily be adequate to grapple with the sophistication of pre-emerging markets across Asia and Africa. Additionally, with new backdrops, including climate change and the new sustainability awareness, agreements and regulations, executive learning is now a multi-dimensional challenge in itself, even for the most innovative of business schools.



Brunel Hive Executive Learning emerged from a business school’s vision to enable and empower new-world business leaders on issues beyond growth and internationalisation. Reflecting Brunel University’s ‘Engaged Scholarship’ mission, the programme is driven by Brunel’s rapidly-growing reputation as a ‘university for a changing world’.



Early feedback is very positive and encouraging. The programme explores how leaders from diverse backgrounds develop and re-invent themselves to stay ahead of new entrepreneurial, management thinking and practice. Brunel Hive Executive Learning draws on world-class business research, hands-on contributions from executives-in-residence, and real-life case studies from participants. Delivered through a blend of masterclasses, webinars, residential workshops and informal networking events, the programme is flexible, innovative and challenging. For instance, by examining critical and practical issues on digital transformation, and its impacts on sustainable supply chains, all set within the framework of new opportunities presented by the new Industrial Strategy, this executive learning programme breaks new ground.

A new industrial revolution may be us. To borrow a phrase, today's leaders may need to "make decisions at the speed of thought". They will need to constantly devise and deliver business models which satisfy multiple stakeholders, far beyond their shareholders, and geographic boundaries. As business schools also re-invent themselves in a tech-enabled world, key items on the top of the curriculum will surely include emotional intelligence, carbon footprints, the future of work, ageing communities and socially-focussed millennial markets. As the Brunel Hive case study content develops, we will contribute to the leadership toolkit of growing companies, helping them to link cutting-edge research to their sustainable, new-world, value propositions.

Times, indeed, they are a-changing.

The Brunel Hive Team