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## **Leadership Education of the Future: A Vision for Business Educators**

*Albert Einstein famously remarked that you can never solve a problem with the same consciousness that created it. Given the structural shifts and changes in the global environment and society, international business educators will need to also re-think their existing approaches to managerial education. In their insight piece, the two authors share ideas on how international business educators might need to start thinking outside of the box, like bringing futurologists to the classroom, cooperate with science fiction writers to unlock creativity and introduce storytelling to unlock imagination. They discuss three types of leadership training – namely: team leadership training, ethical leadership training and intellectual leadership training.*

Whenever we think about the future, our brain depicts it as something ephemeral and shrouded in mystery. Sometimes we can even experience a fear of uncertainty reminiscent of a walk in a dark forest. In today's business discourse, we repeatedly hear how it is scary, if not unbearable, to live in an unknown future. Yet, one could also problematize this by saying, what is so new about that? Uncertainty is an immanent intrinsic element of our lives, and the future has always been unknown and, in a way, elusive. However, in the last half-century we, as a society, have developed a set of dominating values of comfort, wealth priority, and consumerism, supported by overproduction and overconsumption that somehow gave us a soothing but deceptive feeling of certainty about our future. It seems that we are entering a different time where the values humankind believed in are drastically changing and we can already feel it, especially with the birth of the AI era. Hence, it is about time we gathered ourselves and started envisioning our life tomorrow, as Peter Drucker once noted, "the best way to predict the future is to create it".

It seems that, often, when we talk about envisioning reality, the word vision feels like a "black box". How should we open it and what should we expect? A good exercise to begin building the vision is based on a deductive approach, which helps us sketch the general contextual ideas and then to focus on the specific societal elements, businesses, and individuals. Having this picture in mind, we can then shape the ideas of how business educators should respond to the contextual changes of the future, and what actions should they undertake. That is how we will structure this insights piece, by firstly discussing the major thoughts permeating the global environment. We will then point out how the global environment influences society, business, and people, and will wrap up the topic by imagining the future of leadership education.

## **I. The starting point**

### *Context*

History and the real world show us how humanity continuously succeeded in adjusting to the “new reality” and levelling up to the next stage of “well-being”. An almost eternal question is how society and people stay in charge of life and manage through the “dark” times and periods of significant reconfiguration we face nowadays. The latest scientific and technological progress constituted by merging the infotech and biotech solutions has shaken the entire world system and society to their core. Today, we again find ourselves at the crossroads of arranging our work and private lives in a new kind of (life) order.

Although the discussions about transforming a human into an invincible superhuman started more than 60 years ago, we have only recently truly started to experience how transhumanism enters our daily lives. As J. Huxley rightfully said, “Once there are enough people who can truly say that, the human species will be on the threshold of a new kind of existence”. So, we have reached an inflection point when generative AI has entered onto the scene, and we now observe the beginning of the transfer of human consciousness to artificial media and the establishment of a partnership between man and machines – the marriage of organic and non-organic intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence is becoming a zeitgeist of a new kind of postmodern times we are entering into. On top of that, we have other global issues which need to be addressed, such as climate change, the widening gap between rich and poor, the disappearance of the middle class, and many other “wicked” problems. In all this chaos, one thing is certain – as business educators, we have to grow and develop managers and leaders who can make this leap happen with a positive impact on mankind. It is up to us – society, businesses, and educators – to shape the new reality and come to a new level of “wellbeing” as humanity, not just individuals.

### **Influence on Society, Businesses and Individuals**

Today’s society is characterized by a dialectical relationship between scientific and technological progress and the way it impacts life through push and pull mechanisms. So, when thinking about how contextual tendencies would influence us, the question then becomes: Are we moving away from Voltaire and his reform based on individualism and intellectual freedom? Are we returning to Rousseau, who emphasized society’s importance in establishing property, the rules of law, moral equality, and freedom, back to a close relationship between individuals and society (the social contract)?

Rousseau’s concern was related to what Karl Marx later elaborated in his alienation theory in terms of the estrangement of people from aspects of their human nature. In such a paradigm, the loss of memory and inability to see the impact of our actions and a purpose serve as excuses for apathy and negativism, and this is what we can observe in modern society. The fast-growing power over and place of technology in human life has intensified the effect of the phenomenon of information society, and post-modernism influences on the day-to-day thoughts, aspirations, and motivations of individuals, resulting in a loss of meaning and purpose. People are losing the ability to self-reflect and see the meaning of their daily lives.

It should therefore come as no surprise that in the last couple of decades, people have found themselves on the margin or outside the mainstream tendencies and changes, which causes a loss of material life conditions, increasing poverty leading to the development of mental health issues, depression, and, in some cases, aggression.

With information ubiquity and biotech advancements entering the environment, the situation has become ever more complex. For businesses, these shifts can bring to the table the necessity for disruptive transformation, including rethinking current business models in terms of active implementation of hybrid intelligence into management and operations, as well as social responsibility and ethics for replacing people with AI. People, on the other side, would need to think about deepening their skills and expertise or reskilling to avoid the negative effects of technological integrations and displacement. In terms of society, we might face a growing number of “drop-outs”, widening the chasm between rich and poor, resulting in societies suffering from an unbridgeable backlog.

The pending question is how to prevent the realization of these negative effects and instead ensure a fit-for-purpose symbiosis of technologies with society, business, and individuals that would create a better life and a bright future. We suggest that the beginning of this change lies in the advancement of business education and innovative teaching, which is why in the next section we discuss how it can be achieved.

## **II. Envisioning**

### *The Business Education of the Future*

To avoid negative scenarios, we should take action right now, and help people to adapt and thrive in the new world. Business educators should be on the frontlines of such efforts.

The crucial point is that business schools and business educators have to be able to ask the correct questions that needed to be addressed. Yet, asking the questions is not enough. After thinking about the right kind of question, we need to also think through potential approaches to solving or resolving them, taking into account unintended consequences. Can we say that business schools HAVE the “right” answers to all these challenges? The answer is certainly NO. Nevertheless, business schools and educators are the ones who should question the previous assumptions about business organization and life, promoting people in the classrooms to openly discuss, reflect, and think. Examples of some of the current questions that should be addressed are:

#### *Global issues*

- How should we manage climate change?
- What effect does the disappearance of the “middle class” have on the society?
- What is the effect of the disappearance of services from smaller communities?
- How can we get out of the vicious circle of overproduction and/or overconsumption for a more meaningful life?

#### *Business issues*

- How can we establish successful hybrid intelligence in a company?
- Can leverage be thought without warnings of negative influences?
- How can we perform a sustainability transformation? Is it a free choice or an obligation?

- Why is a “lack of leadership” a generally supported statement, and how it can be explained with examples from participants’ practice?
- How can we ensure that employees feel the meaning and purpose of work?

Besides asking the “why” and “how” questions, business schools, and educators should facilitate the finding of the solutions for coping with global and business challenges. In essence, we have to start by re-imagining the management and leadership that we practice and transforming business education in such a way that it addresses not only business-related content but also philosophical, sociological, and anthropological ideas and insights for a deeper understanding of how to lead people into the future.

To do so, we do not necessarily need to agree with Rousseau’s concept of the ideal teacher who is dominant in the learning process. It is clear that we need business educators who are ethically and intellectually respected and who can develop managers and leaders with agency, capable of facing the challenges of our times.

### **What should business educators teach in tomorrow’s world?**

As we noted before, business educators need to become change agents, since they are in many ways the ones who nudge the transformation mindset of businesspeople, managers, and leaders who take business education for self-development and innovative insights.

The goal of business educators should be to change a business mindset from creating a vertical type of communication system in organizations, where we can see strict leader-follower subordination relations, to a flatter, decentralized one, allowing the establishment of a horizontal organizational structure that supports collaborative leadership.

Collaborative or shared leadership transforms the core of organizational relations, particularly within teams, by empowering each member to take a lead in a matter depending on a contextual challenge that a company is facing, and, in this way, teams would be based on leader-leader relations. The effect collaborative leadership can have on the company is tremendous. It can nurture creativity and agility, as well as help to transform a corporate culture into becoming adaptive and supportive.

If establishing collaborative leadership is to become a desired goal, business educators need to alter the content and types of sessions they are offering. In this regard, we share some of the ideas of what sessions we think would be helpful for that:

**Team leadership sessions:** You will probably say: “We already have ones”. However, we are talking not only about educating managers and leaders to work with teams but actually bringing teams with their leaders to work through the actual questions together. Besides that, sessions would need to address the global, business, and leadership issues that we have already mentioned through open discussions and dialogue. That would help the teams to further think and share new ideas and solutions for challenges when they come back to their workplaces.

**Ethical leadership sessions:** Business educators have to bring participants to the roots of ethical upbringing. Ethical leadership sessions should be planned with the idea to

change the mindset from being individualistic to a collaborative one, as our goal is to move away from having teams of individuals to having teams that function as one whole. The ethics of the ancient Silk Road can perhaps offer the foundation of such principled leadership, prioritizing the spiritual over the material, common over private, and service to the country over possession of material things. Additional to the philosophical understanding of ethics, it is vital to include discussions of the current relevant matters, for example, diversity, inclusion and the ethics of AI.

**Intellectual leadership sessions:** As business educators we have to help participants to be open-minded and become able to think not only at a general level but also at an abstract one. We need to help them envision the future based on high values and different pursuits, thus forming pure intellectuals. Intellectual leadership would also facilitate the rediscovering of creativity through aesthetic and philosophical matters. All that can be achieved by a non-standard approach to running various sessions, like, for instance:

- Inviting a futurologist for a discussion on how to think about the future from a different angle.
- Offer a story-telling class to help participants open up their imaginations.
- Cooperate with science fiction writers for unlocking creative writing abilities.
- Offer arts and leadership sessions for shaping reflective and critical thinking.

Overall, the team, ethical and intellectual leadership conceptual sessions should help participants develop a set of skills and competencies necessary for the future, including:

- 1) Multi-functionality,
- 2) a high level of adaptability and flexibility,
- 3) finding solutions when knowledge about the situation is limited,
- 4) self-sufficiency,
- 5) understanding and seeing the real-world picture, and
- 6) an intuitive understanding of people.

Furthermore, such sessions need to be small, allowing the participants to reflect and communicate in the class freely and often. In this way, such sessions can become more focused on developing concrete skills or competencies.

In conclusion, the suggested approach can help develop collaborative leadership which can help shape managers and leaders of the future. They will help create and shape the values, make sense of and give sense to an uncertain future, and broaden frames of reality for others to co-create and inhabit.

**Link to the source:** <https://tesig.aib.world/leadership-education-of-the-future-a-vision-for-business-educators/>

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