

UCT course to kick-start innovation

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To kick-start bold new thinking, action and innovation in South African businesses, the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is running a course this September to help organisations shake off pessimism and inertia.



Course director, Jon Foster-Pedley

According to Jon Foster-Pedley, director of the short course called Creatagey, the greatest risk for businesses is not the recession, but their response.

“When you're going through hell, it's best to keep going. The answers lie in action. It is in action that companies break the patterns, discover new fields and markets, and start to experiment with new thoughts and solutions.

“There is caution, and this necessary at times, but there is also a great risk in too much caution. At the end of the day in a competitive marketplace, if you are not innovating and differentiating yourself, someone else will be to your detriment,” said Foster-Pedley.

The UCT GSB course, which runs from 7 - 11 September and is offered by the School's Executive Education unit, will challenge people to think outside the box and enable them to unlock unprecedented levels of creativity and innovation. The course is designed for those who are interested in innovation and believe that most people and organisations have great - and often unused - creative potential. “This is for people who wish to practice creative strategy and be more imaginative,” said Foster-Pedley.

The latest global innovation survey by *Business Week*, released this April, shows that innovation is far from impossible - many companies are finding new ways to innovate in a tougher environment and the leading firms in the innovation stakes are approaching the present with ambition, optimism and a determination to shift their game up a gear.

Vijay Govindarajan and Chris Trimble, of Tuck School of Business in the US, point out in the feature that, “it is a tough time to think big. How do you make innovation happen? The details can be difficult, but the starting point is simple. Innovation is inspired by ambition (and) begins with optimism.”

Procter & Gamble (No. 12 in the latest *Business Week* innovation survey) and Vodafone (No. 25) are teaming up with outsiders to share costs and embarking on “open innovation” (collaborating with partners to solve business problems). This is evident in Vodafone's new web portal called Betavine, which any developer can use to create and test mobile applications. Through it Vodafone gets the inside lane on the latest trends and is able to ensure that exciting new software applications are compatible with its network.

BlackBerry maker Research in Motion (No. 8 in the *Business Week* rankings), is actually increasing their R&D staff now and also looking at the healthcare market - they are looking into hospital communications with companies such as Cisco and IBM who are already in this space, and into companies that supply health-care equipment. Tata (now ranked at 13 in the survey) is another firm forging ahead with innovation and its approach is through intragroup cross-pollination, sparking ideas through internal consultation and sharing. It has designed and launched the \$2 000 minicar, the Nano, and is developing a follow-up, low-priced electric car, amongst other products.

Is there a secret ingredient to becoming an innovative company?

Well no, says Foster-Pedley. But there are clear ways in which to increase innovation and new disciplines to practice.

"You need to create the foundation for 'daily practice' that can deliver innovation. While many organisations have people who are very creative, everything does not come together to create a movement. To create an energetic innovation movement (E) you need to focus on MC²:

"Making Meaning - a leader of innovation must always, always focus on keeping the purpose and vision on everyone's minds, showing the meaning of work and the larger purpose.

"Caring Consistently - Irvin Yalom, professor at Stanford School of Medicine noted that people's engagement and motivation continued to climb, the more focused attention, respect and empathy they received. And engagement and motivation are the fuel for action.

"Committing Courageously - innovation means entering new territory. The outcomes are undefined and mistakes may be made. Nobody creates something new unless they are prepared to make mistakes. The art is to learn to catch them early.

"It is not enough to simply have brilliant and talented people and ideas - this must be complemented with competent management and discipline on the business side, or the best ideas can end up with spiralling costs or in the business waste bin. Or even worse, a competitor may usurp your product or service with sharper management and a smarter strategy," said Foster-Pedley.

He added that the first important step to building a more innovative business is learning how to effectively become more innovative in one's own work, life and strategies, as well as gaining a grounded and balanced view of how to assist one's organisations to be more original and dynamic.

"Your first innovation needs to be on yourself," said Foster-Pedley.

For details on the UCT GSB course Creativity, contact Junita Abrahams on 021 406 1323 or sms "Create" and your email address to 31497. Applications close 24th August.

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