

UCT programme opens door to strategy

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The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is running a novel course this April that aims to take strategy to the people. The motivation – says course director Jonathan Foster-Pedley – is to improve thinking at every level of business, turning all staff into strategists and enabling companies to do more with less.



“For too long strategy has been the domain of the authoritative (white, male) executive. In fact, most people are a little bit scared of strategy,” said Foster-Pedley. “But this is an increasingly sterile and unproductive place for it to stay. Thirteen years into the new South Africa – an exciting place to be – it’s time our business thinking on strategy changes to reflect the realities of the world around us.

“The new-look strategy is young, funky and multi-ethnic. It’s within the grasp of ordinary people and it’s powerful!”

According to Foster-Pedley, the bottom line of the course is that you don’t need to be old or the boss to be a strategist. The challenge for today’s business is to seek ways to develop the capacity of their people to think strategically and then to harness that thinking into a collective “intelligent mind”.

“Successful innovative companies like Apple and Google and even our own SARS all display this ability to think intelligently about how to overcome challenges and create extraordinary products and services,” said Foster-Pedley.

“The good news is that all companies can emulate this success and the place to start is by improving strategic thinking across the board. Thinking more strategically enables you to move from a place where you react to symptoms and fight fires to a place where you can address the source of problems or obstacles.

“This is especially relevant in an emergent economy context where scarce resources combined with stiff global competition make it vitally important to minimise waste caused by inaccurate thinking.”

The UCT GSB course takes a dead simple approach – giving participants a basic toolkit of strategic models designed to help them get into the habit of thinking laterally, to look at a situation in a number of different ways and to create possibilities.

“There is nothing difficult or secretive about strategy,” insists Foster Pedley. “More than anything it is a set of habits and like any habit it can be developed by practicing it. A big part of what we do in the classroom is therefore create a space where people feel comfortable about starting to practice using these new ways of thinking.”

Foster Pedley says that just about anyone at any level of an organisation would benefit from attending the course.

“We have a wide cross section of people signed up for the course, from CEO level to junior levels, people from corporates

and entrepreneurs. Anybody who wants to think more strategically can benefit from the programme.

“We think that this reflects the democratic approach we have to strategy. For too long strategy has been locked in an ivory tower where it is used to control, intimidate and disempower the average person. It is time to let it out and let it live in the thoughts and actions of more people. Strategy is a powerful tool and it belongs to everyone.”

Contact (021) 406 1346 or email tracym@gsb.uct.ac.za for details. The course website is www.gsb.uct.ac.za/smart.

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