

Get the strategic edge with UCT course

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The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) will run a course this October that teaches the tools for attaining a greater 'strategic edge'.



The course, Smart Strategy, offers a toolkit that gives individuals a sound grounding to think and act more strategically and so more creatively and innovatively to meet the challenges their organisations face. The tools provided will be practical, focusing on achieving results.

According to Jonathan Foster-Pedley, Director of the Smart Strategy course, the art of strategy is something not well understood.

"Some think it's a mystical ability that few are blessed with. Nothing is further from the truth. The reality is that anyone can become a master strategist. Becoming one though requires discipline and application - there is no quick-fix," he said.

South Africa is in great need of these smart strategists at all levels both in the public and private sector, said Foster-Pedley. They are the people who will make a dramatic impact on South Africa's socio-economic development.

"In the public sector, spending on the symptoms of problems and not on the causes is one of the areas of concern. Improved strategic abilities are needed here to break existing patterns of doing the same things over and over again with less than satisfactory results. When one looks at the electricity crisis, a lack of strategic thinking and discipline has been the key reason for the current crisis, including the way in which Eskom directors' performance incentives are geared towards short-term objectives.

"In the private sector, these strategic abilities are also needed to develop innovative firms that can make their mark with original offerings in the face of increasing global competition."

The programme runs over three days from 27th - 31st October in Cape Town and is designed for people who are learning about, practicing and interested in strategy in an organisation, whether it be public or private sector. This includes managers, professionals or entrepreneurs with or without formal strategy training.

It aims to give attendees a rounded understanding of strategy and of the skills and confidence to become effective strategists in practice in the years that follow. It will develop the ability to see challenges more systemically, to understand how to focus on root causes and high leverage actions and to be able to diagnose, design actions, put them in practice and learn quickly from the results.

According to recent studies, one of the key challenges to achieving the strategic edge in organisations is that of changing people's perceptions. A recent Harvard Business School article, for example, argued that many managers have difficulty altering their perceptions. "These managers' stereotypes - their assumptions about how the (business) world works or should work - get in the way," said Luc de Brabandere, a partner in the US-based Boston Consulting Group in the article.

De Brabandere contrasts Hewlett-Packard (HP) and Dell. "HP has long held the stereotype that, to stay competitive in an uncertain world, you need to maintain a lot of inventory. Dell broke that stereotype when it decided that having no inventory was a better way of dealing with uncertainty. The result was Dell's revolutionary - and highly successful - business model, which cuts out distributors and warehouses and lets computer users buy 'off an assembly line' rather than off store shelves," he said.

Other firms such as Apple, Google, Toyota and Virgin have led the way with similar high levels of strategic creativity that has led to unparalleled innovation and consequently, market leadership.

"This, however, does not happen overnight," said Foster-Pedley. "For any manager or leader, the process has to start with a personal transformation, one that eradicates complacency and contentment with the existing ways of doing things. Being more proactive and desiring to make a difference is critical to becoming a much more capable strategist."

The course is being offered by the UCT GSB Executive Education unit, which has a global top ten rating in 2005 and 2006 from the Economist Intelligence Unit, and in 2007 was listed by the International University Consortium for Executive Education (UNICON) - the leading global body for the advancement of executive education - as one of six leading business school innovators.

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