

UCT GSB helps leaders master modern complexity

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With business leaders feeling the crunch under increasing pressure, the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is offering a course to help leaders reinvent themselves for the 21st century's growing challenges and complexity.



According to Chris Breen, UCT Emeritus Associate Professor and Director of the course Embracing Complexity and Diversity, it is designed to give leaders powerful complexity skills.

"With these skills on-board, leaders are more aware of their own taken-for-granted assumptions and more tuned into what is going on at each moment in their firm and in the market. Leaders become more open to different ideas and solutions instead of cutting these off, and they learn how to turn the diversity of people they have around them into a powerful asset," he explained.

Breen has distilled the leadership lessons from the component he directs on the UCT GSB's Executive MBA programme, which unlocks new levels of awareness and performance in senior executives. His area of specialisation is teaching, learning and researching from a complexity thinking paradigm.

According to Breen, during tough economic times such as the current global economic slowdown, companies find themselves needing to make rapid changes, reorganising staff and resources and perhaps even taking extreme measures such as downsizing. "In past periods of economic uncertainty, leaders have used a no-nonsense command and control approach to tackle the challenges of a changing environment.

"This, according to emerging research, however, may not be the best way forward today. The top-down, mechanistic approach that assumes there is only one way may just do more harm than good."

The main reason the command and control, "hard skills" only approach is no longer enough, he said, is that organisations have become so dominated by this approach that many have become increasingly inflexible and obsessed with organisational charts as the backbone of accountability, processes and procedures.

"The work of author Margaret Wheatley highlights just how things can go wrong with this approach in her article on the lessons to be learned from Hurricane Katrina, *Leadership Lessons for the Real World*. The poor response from authorities to the crisis showed why more responsive, more tuned-in leaders and organisations are needed rather than those rigid and bureaucratic in nature," said Breen.

Complexity skills are a parallel set of skills to leaders existing strengths and it empowers them to act for a specific situation from a much wider set of choices.

Breen's style of teaching is not to present a set of PowerPoint slides and lecture a set of theoretical constructs or a

packaged product. His approach to teaching saw him awarded the UCT Distinguished Teacher Award in 2000.

"I teach by means of a series of interactive exercises where participants are asked to engage seriously and in a committed way, without distractions from cell phones, internet etc, with each other and the material and reflect on their own actions in the moment," he explained.

The course runs from 9 - 11 September and 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.

For more information, contact Dudu Mahlangu (021) 406 1268 or .

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