

# NEXT AGENDA™

What's new in executive education?

Spring 2023



ChatGPT – honestly, who had them on their radar 6 months ago? Launched November 30, last year, OpenAI's **ChatGPT is now everywhere**, in the press, on social media and – increasingly – on the agenda of many business leaders.

One year back, as we published our Spring 2022 edition of NEXT AGENDA, our focus was on the impact of the Russian/Ukraine conflict and the expected, approaching end of the COVID-19 pandemic. At least in terms of the latter some good news – we made it, we are **back together again** – in person!

Now, Microsoft eyes the chance to finally beat their arch nemesis Google (through their invest in OpenAI and with their search engine Bing), Europe seems to have managed their winter energy supplies well (with gas prices going down), Meta Platforms are planning to charge fees (time to revise Zuckerberg's metaverse strategy?), Tesla has reduced prices by 20% (leaving their rivals bewildered), according to NASA 2022 was the fifth warmest year on record (and the UN warns that "humanity is on thin ice – and that ice is melting fast"), inflation and interest rates are still up and some places still increasing (pressuring private economies and corporate share prices), US and China relationship reaches a new low – and now implosion of Silicon Valley Bank (was remote working the real reason?)...

Continued change, everywhere – with more to come!

And for **business educators**? With recent years' focus on format, i.e. going online, pressure has increased on providing innovative, in demand, content. It is time **to put content first**...

## SHORT SUMMARY – of the world we live in 2023

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For business educators, as many other industries, finally out of the pandemic deviously feels like “we are back to normality”. As in 2019, a life without restrictions, back together!

Looking at the headlines, you can even argue it is true – or at least not all wrong. Yes, some of the business topics from before the pandemic are back – they were not gone but had to be put aside a few years. Now back, they come in redefined or reinforced form. Talking and listening to many business leaders, these are the issues they will mention as current key concerns and priorities....:

**Sustainability:** Since the outbreak of the Russian/Ukraine conflict, it is **no longer** a question of finding **purpose**, working towards meeting UNs 17 SDGs and doing good for a better world. It has become **a question of survival**, requiring businesses to radically rethink existing – and innovate new – business models. And then transform!

**Digitalization and New Technologies:** Still high on the agenda as many companies – and countries – still struggle to transform towards the digital age. Initially often a question about digitalizing processes, it is now – finally – about digital businesses. Most importantly, with **“new” technologies**, like AI, increasingly **applied**, the need and pressure to pick-up speed, adapt and change is immense. And (again) transform!

**Globalization and Geopolitics:** The world as we have known it for the last couple of decades is out of order. Supply chains are broken, market access threatened, social instability increasing, risk of recession recorded, and political stability questioned. Substantial, global and long-term investments are being put on the test and questions like **costs efficiency vs. dependency and uncertainty** are back on the agenda.

**Risk and Opportunities of Disruption:** During the pandemic, many companies’ main priority was simply to survive, to “get out on the other side” and to keep their organizations intact. Businesses and companies that just “made it” have lost their financial cushion. An increased risk for them – and an opportunity for others. **Accelerated change to come!**

**Brainpower:** Managing today’s business agenda requires talent. And while less a key priority during the pandemic, topics like **DE&I** and **Future Work** are now **back on the agenda**. Not necessarily with the same perspective, but with the same ambition – attracting and keeping talents, and optimize use of available human resources. At the same time many businesses struggle with the organizational aftermath of the pandemic and increasing labor costs pressure.

Most of the world’s new business pioneers, entrepreneurs and leaders or “disruptors of our time” of course have additional or more-dimensional perspectives. Constantly looking for ways to disrupt existing and create new markets, they are the ones to look out for. In particular those, who are now experiencing headwinds – how will they react?

Conclusively, the questions most business leaders start (and end) the day with are:

- Where and what is my future market?
- How do we innovate and transform to get there?
- How do I lead, through uncertainty, performing and transforming at the same time?

And while these questions may not be new, the answers and the action required often are!

For business educators, trying to put themselves in the place of their customers – and think ahead – this is where **content innovation becomes relevant**.

## LOOKING BEYOND – the obvious

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Apart from the above-mentioned key questions, other – smaller, bigger, related – are also, if not already, making way into the minds of business leaders. Here just a few examples:

### Adding to Future Markets:

- **Making sense of Megatrends:** Foreseeing the future is – knowingly – difficult. Creating a future mindset, a culture where organizations embrace the new and unknown, salute curiosity and reward courage is a good place to start – but not always enough. **Learning to work systematically** with megatrends can help. Megatrends are the most powerful forces shaping our future world. They give guidance, structure and help making sense – and many organizations are increasingly in demand of an internal systematic approach and skills. More inspiration at e.g. [Dubai Future Foundation](#) and [Future Today Institute](#).
- **The fragility of icons:** Meta Platforms (Facebook), Netflix, TikTok, Alibaba and many more – in recent years icons and showcases for how to lead and win in a digital economy. We know for a fact that products, services and businesses have (life) cycles, but the mere thought that disruption may happen to leading disruptors or that politics and new crises can define radical turning points – that can add to uncertainty, when (other) business leaders try to navigate to the future, clinching to perceived constants. A blind spot, that business educators need to address...
- **The usefulness and ethics of AI:** For businesses and business leaders, who have recognized the power of applying AI, a whole range of questions about the correct and ethical use comes up. By definition, **AI learns by example!** If applied in internal and external processes and communication, obvious questions arise; how can we avoid bad or discriminating behavior, how can we influence and manage AI “decision-making” – is our data consistent and how do we communicate our use of AI? AI is no longer a topic for IT and data scientist, it involves **all parts of the organization**. Useful inspiration from [Reid Blackman](#)...

### Adding to Innovation and Transformation:

- **System errors and paradoxes of innovation:** Life consists of paradoxes and even the (intentionally) best of systems fail. Forbes recently published an interesting article about the [Twelve Paradoxes of Innovation](#) – examples like these, and many others, often come up when talking to innovative business leaders. Innovation, transformation and managing current business requires structures and systems (often in parallel) and they can fail – or at least produce counter productive results. Denial is one approach, but short-lived. It can be extremely resource demanding to solve and produce conflicts – helping businesses to identify, adjust and manage adds significant value.
- **The power of questioning:** A common problem and conflict in any innovation process (even a kind of system error) is about questioning... When do we question, who and what do we dare to question? The wrong question at the (supposedly) wrong time is a classic – or “why didn’t you ask me that sooner?” Having a productive, democratized question culture can be decisive for successful innovation and transformation processes. Useful inspiration from [Pia Lauritzen](#)...
- **Brand, PR, storytelling, fake-news:** “Greenwashing” is not something you want to be accused of! In particular not, if you have just spent significant sums transforming your business. Internal and external communication has always been important, but complexity – also in this area – has increased. Online, social media, risk of fake-news and shitstorms, the challenge of telling transformational stories and maneuvering politically correct are just some of the disciplines to master – at an increasing pace.

## Adding to Leadership:

- **Dealing with personal performance, constant reinvention – and stress:** We expect quite a lot from business leaders! We expect them to envisage the future, find purpose, develop new markets, lead in uncertainty, be resilient – to **perform and transform at the same time**. Probably the biggest leadership challenge (please also see NEXT AGENDA, Fall 2022 and below) of our time. And then there are the personal aspects, how do you **reinvent yourself** on an ongoing basis, how do you manage stress and personal uncertainty, manage peak performances, how do you define or redefine your personal purpose, and how do you ensure good health and life quality?
- **Managing transformation:** Leading transformation is not like managing existing core business. At its heart, transformation processes involve managing a wide range of projects, which again requires a different organization and other skills. Hence, the Rise of the Project Economy! According to [Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez](#), one of the world's leading experts on the subject, in fact: "The **most significant disruption** of the 21st century is not technology, Artificial Intelligence or Big Data, but it is the way organizations and countries will be managed – **through projects**." Transformational businesses, small and big, recognize this and work to adjust structures and skills.
- **Closing the gender gap is serious business:** According to the [World Economic Forum](#) gender parity is essential for economic recovery, growth and innovation progress. Partly neglected during the pandemic and with more women than men leaving jobs during that time, businesses and society stand to gain and profit from a quick return to pre-COVID focus. **A leadership task**, not only because it seems right, but **because it makes economic sense!**

Some of the above do not necessarily qualify for specific learning opportunities – although some do! More importantly, business educators should consider – if not already the case – to include these perspectives in existing and new programs.

In *our* programs – where it fits – we include these, and other, perspectives, making our programs stand out and ensure a relevant, rich learning experience with high impact.

## **THE BUSINESS AGENDA – for business educators**

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Talking to deans, leaders of business schools and universities, EdTech and other education providers around the world, it is clear that now (2023) is not like before (COVID).

The COVID-19 pandemic *did* change the market environment – and the winners were EdTech / online providers! Most business schools came through the pandemic in fairly good shape, but it doesn't change the fact that opportunities were lost to others.

In a prosperous, fast changing and growing market, everyone is – and should be – concerned and focused on defining their future market space. At the 2023 EFMD Global Annual Deans & Directors General Conference the key theme was: "What if...? Reimagining the role of business schools in 2030" – leading to many thought-provoking, reflective and even visionary discussions.

In our view, and when discussing this with business educators in general, **we do not believe in "winner takes all" scenarios**. Nor do we believe that market players, long term, will benefit from trying to be something, which they – deep in their DNA – cannot be. That said, it doesn't mean that change is not required – it simply means that each player should focus **on capitalizing on their specific strengths and assets**, not trying to copy others.



Imagine, just for a second, we were not talking about education, but the mobility industry and the customer is looking to be able to go from A. to B. Provocatively, you could argue:

- Professional Services (now in education) will advise on how to get there, best
- EdTech online providers will present a great app with various mobility options (produced / serviced by others)
- Business schools will produce a mid-sized car – ready for delivery in 8 months

They are all solutions – and all justified. The core of this example is the “means of transportation” – in the **world of executive education and development that is the “content”**. And translated to the above-mentioned education providers, the challenge is:

- Professional Services need more academia, research-based content to go with their practice-oriented competence – or else they risk continued to be perceived as consultants (packaged in new revenue-stream models)
- Online providers need more inhouse produced, own-label, unique content – or else they risk ending up as sales platforms (which is not necessarily a bad business)
- Business schools need to be better at offering relevant, on-demand content faster and to a broader (segment-wise) market – or else they risk losing their unique institutional relevance...

In other words, **content is king!** Content combined with the adequate format (program structure), depending on the audience and specific access to market. There is room – and market justification – for everyone!

In discussions with these groups of market players, it becomes clear that while “the newcomers” see chance and more opportunity, traditional players see risks. And in our view, the latter is wrong – both in terms of mindset and approach as well as factually.

Business schools, universities and other institutional players have significant potential, they “just” need to step up... Here – mainly not new, mentioned earlier – a few tips:

- Rethink market definition – look to identify new needs and new segments
- Rethink proposition – look at ecosystems and community integration
- Rethink content “production” – look at collaboration opportunities
- Rethink content “packaging” – understand segments’ / customers’ different needs
- Rethink sales and marketing – seek new channels and new partners
- Finally, take a business perspective on your organization and proposition

As always, happy to discuss in more detail...

## **A FEW IDEAS – for new programs**

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Rounding up this NEXT AGENDA edition, we would like to present a few programs, which meets current demands and could add value to your portfolio – customized to your organization, audience and structure...

### ⇒ **Performer-Transformer Leaders**

Today’s business leaders are caught in a substantial leadership dilemma – managing today or leading towards tomorrow. This program helps leaders move beyond, to shape their own agenda, empower their organizations – and perform, while transforming!

High-paced, high impact – in person – program of 4 consecutive days.

⇒ **Exploit & Explore for CFOs and Finance**

Ensuring that innovation becomes an integrational part of a company's DNA requires all key players, leaders and stakeholder to be on the same team. This program goes beyond the focus on great ideation – it aims at making innovation really happen!

High impact, skill-based – in person – program of 3 consecutive days.

⇒ **Making Transformation Happen**

Making transformation happen requires a different management approach compared to running day-to-day operations. The program is designed to help participants drastically increase management efficiency, reliability – and transformational delivery.

High impact, skill-based – in person / online – program of 2 or 3 consecutive days.

You can find more details to all three programs [HERE!](#)

That's all for this edition of **NEXT AGENDA**. *(Don't forget to read the appendix...)*

Thanks to all who have contributed. If you'd like to know more, discuss or even disagree – we're happy to talk! And if you have insights and ideas which you'd like to contribute, do not hesitate to reach out to us!

You can find more about our programs and approach at [www.GlobalXED.com](http://www.GlobalXED.com). You can also join our [LinkedIn community](#) for regular insights, updates and exchange.

Let's talk about how we can achieve more together!

With best wishes

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**NEXT AGENDA** is a fast and inspiring overview of what's new, hot and next in the world of learning and development for business people. How can you meet changing business needs, enable the application of new practices, and stand out in an increasingly crowded market? We bring together the best ideas from thought leaders, books and reports, companies and practitioners.

## Appendix: NEXT AGENDA – as written by ChatGPT

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In the course of writing this NEXT AGENDA, we played with the idea of just outsourcing the task – to ChatGPT. Knowing that ChatGPT is limited to accessible data “only” up to 2021, we quickly decided to leave the idea behind... Still, we won't deprive you of our test:

**US:** What is new in executive education?

**ChatGPT:** Executive education, which refers to professional development programs designed for senior executives, has undergone several changes and trends in recent years. Here are some of the latest developments in executive education:

1. **Focus on Digital Transformation:** As technology continues to transform the business world, executive education programs are increasingly focusing on digital transformation. This includes courses on digital strategy, data analytics, and emerging technologies like blockchain and artificial intelligence.
2. **Customized Programs:** Executive education programs are now offering more customized programs that are tailored to the specific needs of organizations. These programs may be delivered on-site, online, or a combination of both.
3. **Emphasis on Soft Skills:** While technical skills are still important, executive education programs are placing more emphasis on developing soft skills like leadership, communication, and emotional intelligence. This reflects a growing recognition that success in today's business world requires more than just technical expertise.
4. **Blended Learning:** Blended learning, which combines online and in-person instruction, is becoming increasingly popular in executive education. This approach allows executives to learn at their own pace and also facilitates networking and collaboration with other executives.
5. **Diversity and Inclusion:** Executive education programs are placing greater emphasis on diversity and inclusion, recognizing the importance of building more diverse and inclusive organizations. This includes courses on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and creating inclusive workplaces.

Overall, executive education is evolving to meet the changing needs of today's business world. By focusing on digital transformation, soft skills, customized programs, blended learning, and diversity and inclusion, executive education programs are helping executives develop the skills they need to succeed in an ever-changing business landscape.