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CONSORTIUM FOR UNIVERSITY-BASED
EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

Empowering Executive Education: Talent, Collaboration, Innovation

Impressions, insights, and takeaways
UNICON Team Development conference 2023
Hosted by Executive Education HEC Montréal

A Report by IEDP for the Executive Education Sector



Top recurring themes at this year's conference

- 1 The importance of purpose
- 2 Building trust at all levels
- 3 Accessing creativity at all levels
- 4 Putting ego aside to build win-wins
- 5 Flexibility, personal and organizational
- 6 The power of honesty and transparency
- 7 Growth journeys over career paths
- 8 Better understanding your people and your clients
- 9 Designing great, human-centric experiences
- 10 Alignment between generational and functional groups



Introduction

UNICON's Team Development conference was hosted this year by HEC Montréal at their newly opened, state-of-the-art, Hélène Desmarais Building in downtown Montréal—a city with a deserved reputation for creativity and innovation.

The building itself provides an inspiring environment for the annual global gathering of executive education leaders and teams, coming together for three days of networking, conversing, and learning.

The building's story is one of thoughtful collaboration, co-design, and sustainable development on a plot of historical and cultural significance, right next door to Notre-Dame Basilica.

For a group of attendees charged with designing, marketing, and delivering world-class learning experiences, the carefully designed spaces for interaction and reflection, the attention to accessibility, environmental sustainability, seamless technology use, and the flawless delivery by the HEC Montréal team, is a learning experience in itself. “We see this conference as an opportunity to reinforce our commitment to the field of Executive Education and to create opportunities for new collaborations,” said Federico Pasin, Dean of HEC Montréal, in his welcome address.

“There are more than 270 people attending today, a record for a UNICON conference,” declares Serge Lafrance, Director of Executive Education at HEC Montréal, “from 75 universities in 15 countries. This is a truly global exchange of knowledge.”

“The real value of UNICON lies in the deep conversations you will have that affect how you do business,” says Jean Choy, UNICON Board Chair and Associate Dean of the Michael G. Foster School of Business, University of Washington.

This year’s conference has a notable focus on practical, applied learning, with teams and individuals encouraged to seek actionable takeaways, and best practices around three frontline issues: talent, collaboration, and innovation, with industry leaders, renowned experts and forward-thinking professionals curated to inspire them, spark discussion, and encourage creative thinking.

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Day 1: Cultivating a sustainable workforce

Assessing the state of play in talent development within executive education

Kelly Bean, Executive in Residence in Executive Education and Lifelong Learning at the Miami Herbert Business School, and past chair of the board of UNICON, shared new insights from her qualitative, journalistic research, based on interviews with talent and L&D leaders in executive education:

- The two biggest recruitment challenges for executive education teams are business development and program design.
- The time it takes to fill a role is back to where it was pre-pandemic.
- A theme emerging for executive education teams is the use of the wider university as a talent pool.
- For retention, flexible work is now a make-or-break benefit.
- Continuing education benefits are strong, with discounted or free learning.
- Succession planning is rarely formalized currently, nor career path planning.
- The importance of purpose plays to a typical area of strength for universities.





Purpose and honesty in talent development

“Purpose is a cause, and having a cause is more powerful than having a mission,” said Fady Dagher, Chief of Police of Montréal, sharing insights from a distinguished 30-year career in the police force.

“70% of call outs today are social in nature, not criminal,” reveals Dagher. To tackle this new reality, recruitment and people development has to change. “Honesty in recruitment is key. We need to show people what their career will really be, the reality of policing today. That means a focus on community, inclusivity, and preventative policing.” To find the right talent for this new role, Dagher emphasizes the importance of evaluating both “the emotional side as well as the technical.”

“Purpose is a cause, and having a cause is more powerful than having a mission.”

Fady Dagher, Chief of Police of Montréal

Changing needs and expectations of the younger workforce

Laetitia Debout, Partner at KPMG Canada, and specialist in people and change, shared a range of insights:

- We are experiencing globally a knowledge transfer challenge, as baby boomers exit the workplace.
- Even with a cooling of the economy, there is no cooling of skills needs and talent shortages, with organizations struggling to find the talent.
- New core needs and expectations in the workforce include: social responsibility focus; a sense of impact and purpose; opportunities to learn and grow; and for employers to care for their employees' health and well-being.
- Automation will affect leadership pipelines with many entry jobs removed.
- If hiring for a single competency today, Debout champions critical thinking, "Working with AI, the ability to recognize biases, assess relevance, and spot fakes, is going to be key."

To address these changes the search is on for creative new ways to attract and retain talent. "How do we offer great employee experience?" challenges Debout, "can we provide a personalized experience to fit each employee's diverse needs?"



"How do we offer great employee experience? Can we provide a personalized experience to fit each employee's diverse needs?"

Laetitia Debout, Partner at KPMG Canada



“Promoting growth journeys means focusing on life experiences, providing varied work, and profound opportunities for growth.”

Frantz Saintellemy, President and Chief Operating Officer at LeddarTech

Growth journeys at LeddarTech

“We don’t talk in terms of ‘career paths,’ but rather, ‘growth journeys,’” says Frantz Saintellemy, President and Chief Operating Officer at LeddarTech, a leader in sensing and perception technology for autonomous vehicles. “Promoting growth journeys means focusing on life experiences, providing varied work, and profound opportunities for growth.”

Saintellemy’s approach to talent development includes:

- A recruitment pitch offering license to, “do here what you can’t do at Google,” i.e. emphasis on key points of difference in a competitive labor market.
- “We view ourselves as an Olympic team or a Champions League football team. Successful teams are not built around one or two star players. They need a style or identity, whether it’s defensive or adventurous, etc.”
- Key to the ‘growth journey’ approach is to, “not treat employees all the same way.”
- Central to recruitment is, “figuring out the ‘Why?’ Why would you come to LeddarTech?”
- Curiosity and critical thinking as a competency: “Today we know the answers exist somewhere, but are your people asking the right questions?”
- If hiring for a single competency, Saintellemy chooses, “Humility and empathy. In a polarized world the ability to put yourself in someone’s shoes and understand why they feel what they feel is vital. You may not agree but you can appreciate another perspective.”

Sustainable leadership: learnings from First Nations

“Leadership amongst indigenous peoples is about facilitating transition while safeguarding what is important in our culture,” said Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Québec-Labrador, adding that leadership in this context encompasses: righting the wrongs of the past; leading collaboration; leading through adversity; leading on social challenges; instilling confidence and self-esteem in others; and standing up for your beliefs to inspire others. Ultimately, Picard surmised, “Leadership is showing people you don’t need permission to do what you think is right.”

The First Nations Executive Education (FNEE) initiative with HEC Montréal is the first of its kind; a business school program designed to ensure indigenous peoples have the leaders they need to take them into the future. FNEE was founded by alumni of the HEC Montréal EMBA and is both “for and by the First Nations.” In its first two years FNEE has provided certification for over 500 participants. Picard provided a wealth of wisdom on the topic of leadership:

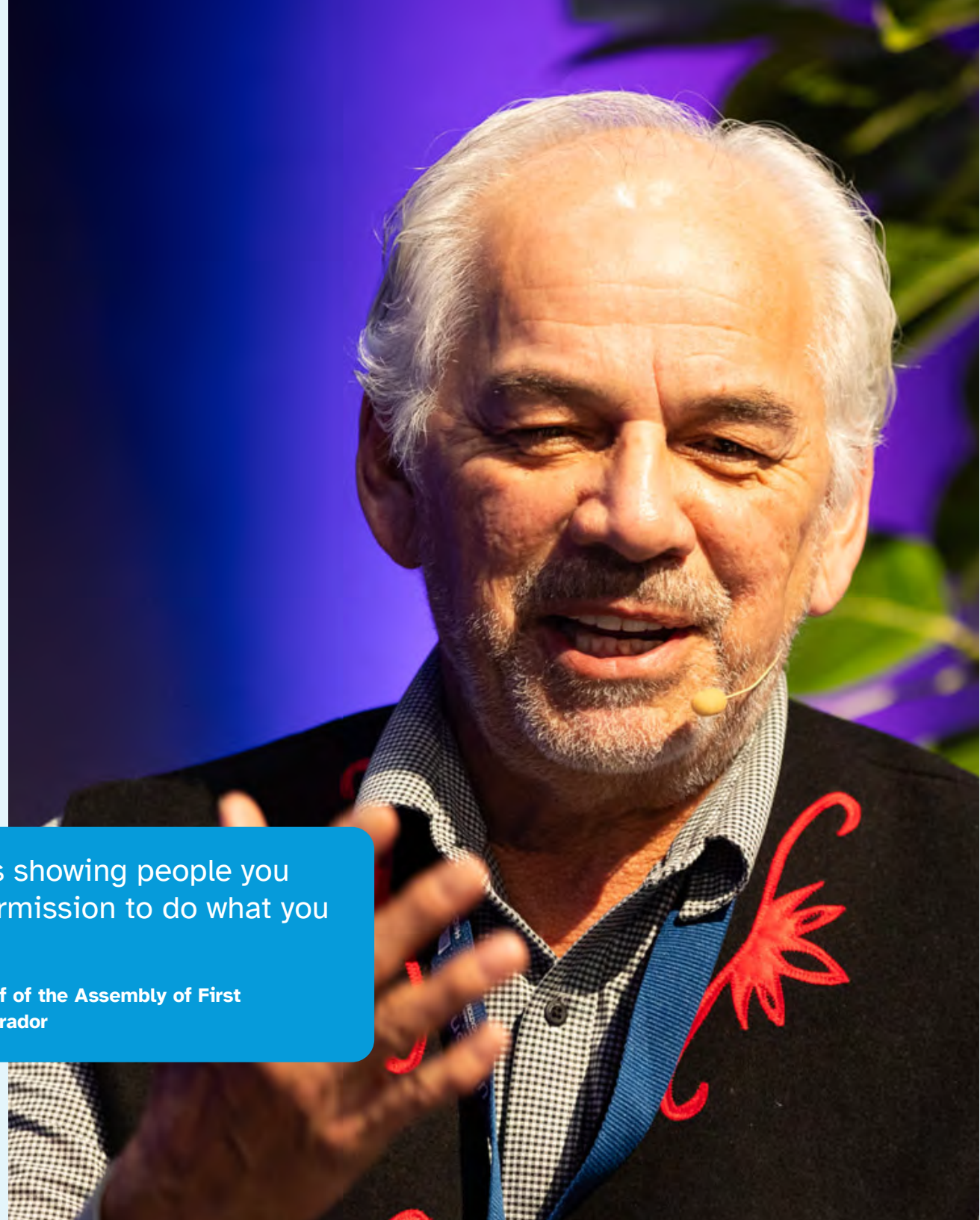
- “Leadership is also about instilling leadership in others.”
- “First nations leaders in the past were traditionally great organizers and decision makers and therefore often women.”
- “Indigenous peoples have always adapted to the environment. We say, the land owns us, we don’t own the land.”
- “Reconcile and heal yourself first, to help others do the same.”



Picard's story of leadership in the First Nations is a poignant one. "Over five centuries we have resisted attempts to extinguish our culture," he says, "attempts at forced assimilation, attempts to 'kill the Indian in the child.' It has failed. This is what gives me optimism. We managed to survive, safeguarding what was important. I am more optimistic now than even 20 years ago. I have a lot of faith in our people, in our ability to collaborate and not become isolated, but it requires leadership."

"Leadership is showing people you don't need permission to do what you think is right."

Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Québec-Labrador



Day 2: Collaborating for success

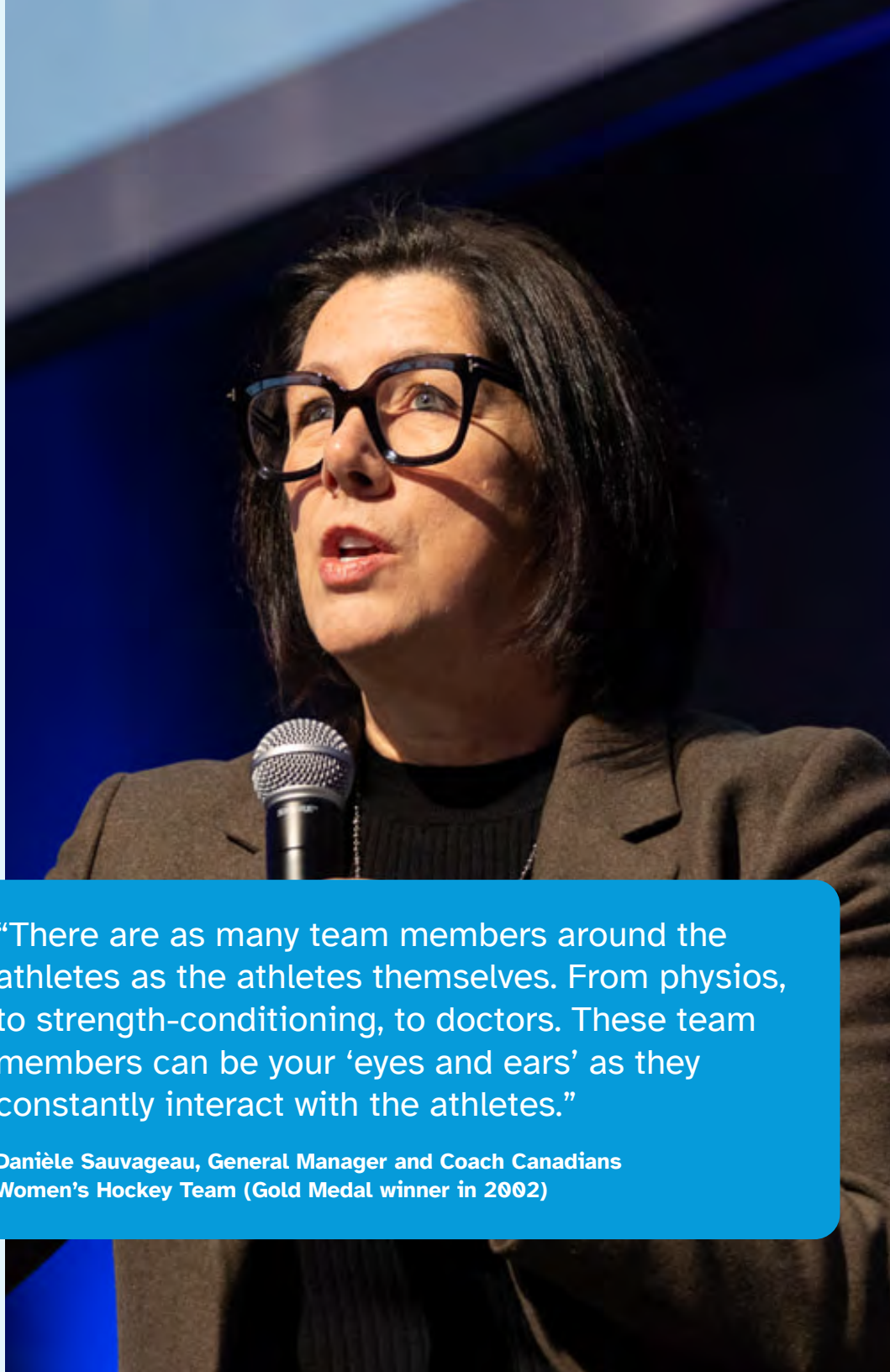
Collaborative leadership: learnings from top athletes

The world of elite sport provides a useful mirror to hold against the context of business school education, whereby high-performing athletes bear some similarities with high-performing executives: both groups with strong personal drive, often up-and-coming, and necessarily in need of a growth mindset.

Laurent Duvernay-Tardif, former professional NFL player and Super Bowl winner with the Kansas City Chiefs, characterizes what great team leadership means in top-level sport, “Team excellence requires a leader who can bring together people with a wide variety of skills and attributes, people from different backgrounds, diversity of cultures, and religions, and have them believe in one another and work for each other.”

Alexandre Despatie, the most successful male diver in Canadian history with multiple successes at the Commonwealth Games, World Championships, and Olympic Games, has another experience of teamwork, equally crucial to success.

“While it’s true a diver ‘stands alone on the board’”, Despatie explains, “it’s the team that got them there. The coach, the teammates, the manager, the physio. Collaboration is about building trust between that team.”

A woman with dark hair and glasses is speaking into a microphone. She is wearing a dark jacket over a black top. The background is dark with some blue lighting.

“There are as many team members around the athletes as the athletes themselves. From physios, to strength-conditioning, to doctors. These team members can be your ‘eyes and ears’ as they constantly interact with the athletes.”

Danièle Sauvageau, General Manager and Coach Canadians Women’s Hockey Team (Gold Medal winner in 2002)

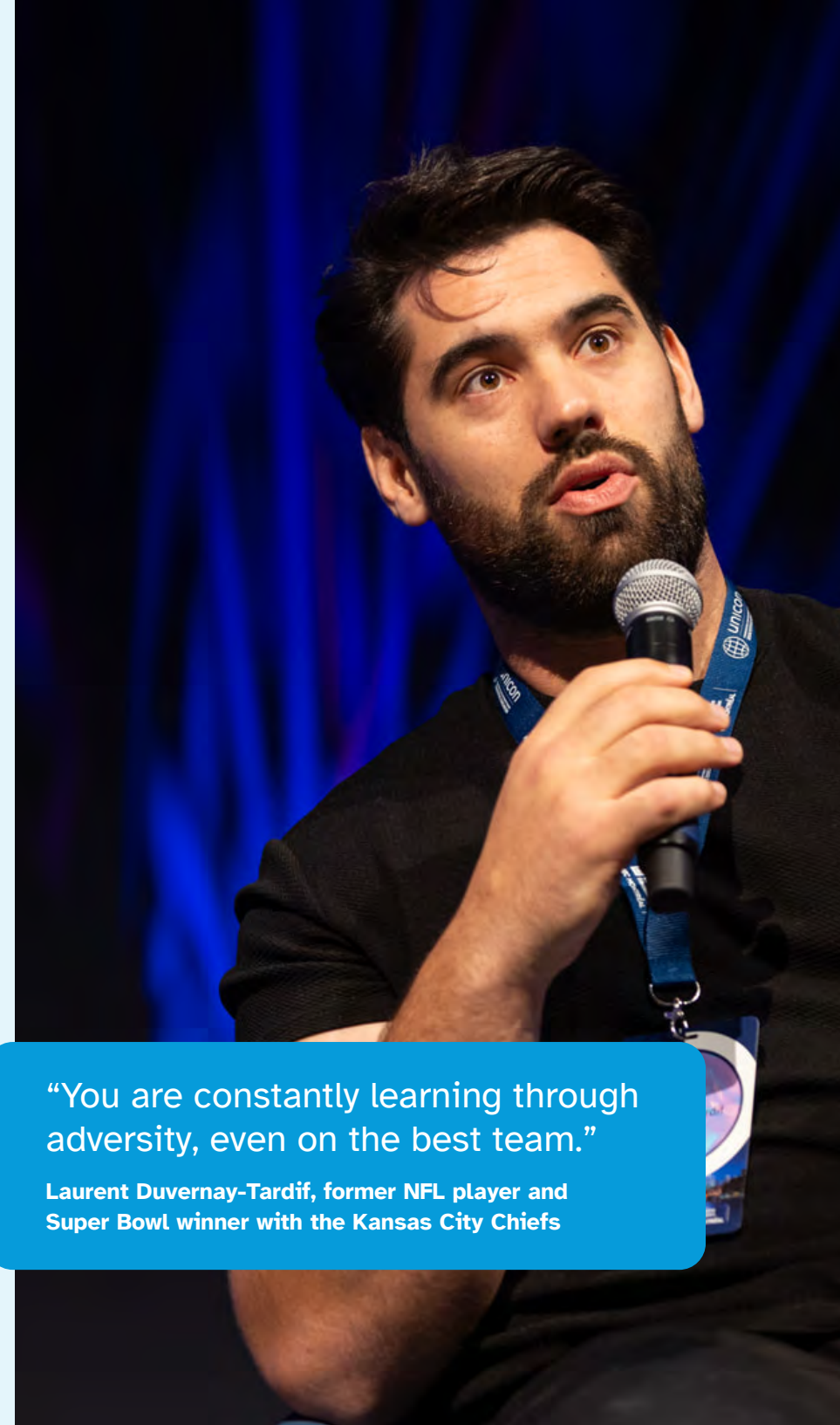
Danièle Sauvageau, a key figure in the hockey world and the general manager and coach who led the Canadian women's hockey team to its first-ever gold medal at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2002, has another view on collaborative leadership.

“The leadership role of the director in high-performance sports is to ‘connect the dots’ between different team members, while ensuring every decision taken is on behalf of the athletes,” she says.

“There are as many team members around the athletes as the athletes themselves. From physios, to strength-conditioning, to doctors. These team members can be your ‘eyes and ears’ as they constantly interact with the athletes.”

Chairing the panel, Sébastien Arcand, Professor at HEC Montréal, observed that, “between the three of you, you talk about ‘diversity’, ‘trust’, and ‘leadership.’ This strikes me as being a good model for collaboration.”

Duvernay-Tardif's experience is that team collaboration can be tested and forged in adversity. “In the NFL, even if you're a really good, elite guard—the position I played—10% of your plays will be mistakes. You have 40 seconds after those mistakes to pick yourself up, pick your teammate up from the dirt, figure out how to correct the mistake, and go dominate the next play. You are constantly learning through adversity, even on the best team.” At a more conceptual level, collaboration for Duvernay-Tardif, “means putting aside your egos to build win-wins.”



“You are constantly learning through adversity, even on the best team.”

Laurent Duvernay-Tardif, former NFL player and Super Bowl winner with the Kansas City Chiefs



“When you are coaching people it’s about preparing them for key moments, how will they react under stress? That stress response depends on preparation.”

Danièle Sauvageau, General Manager and Coach Canadians Women’s Hockey Team (Gold Medal winner in 2002)

Sauvageau also notes a word of advice to leaders and coaches, “We are all quick to offer help to others, but how ready are you to ask for help yourself?” (echoing Ghislain Picard’s advise to, “heal yourself first,” before helping others).

Duvernay-Tardif is aligned with Sauvageau on the concept of preparing people for key moments. “You need to prepare as if it were a game,” he advises, “What is the level of adrenaline going to be? Visualization isn’t just a matter of picturing yourself doing something, it’s imagining how you’re going to feel mentally. For example, stress gives you tunnel vision in the moment, you need the right mindset to see the whole field.”

For educators, Duvernay-Tardif shares an insight based on his post-football career in medicine. “Try to see what the person is trying to accomplish and teach back from there. As a medical student, we study epidemiology, but when you’re presented with a patient with a headache you have to track that symptom to a pathology. Teaching students to have an algorithmic approach to solving problems is what enables them to do that. Try to imagine them facing the end challenge when you teach.”

For Sauvageau, collaboration in the name of a cause is something that has been central to her life and career. “At the age of 13 I was told you cannot do the sport you love. I went to the local hockey rink. My two brothers were allowed to play but I was not. The sport was closed to me. I joined a movement to make that change, with many others who wanted it. How could we support women athletes excel and make a living from it? The women in sport movement is now massively successful, but it took forever! The key was getting the business side involved, that was crucial.”

Benchmarking: learn, compare, decode

Something highly valuable that UNICON has provided its member schools with for many years is benchmarking research, gathering data from business schools across the world, to allow comparative analysis and show market trends, by region and revenue size.

The university-based executive education sector is highly varied so ‘apples for apples’ comparisons are rare, but benchmarking provides a jump-off point for conversations and credible data for executive education leaders to, “make better managerial, business and commercial decisions,” as Serge Lafrance suggests.

The overall market picture from this year’s survey is a positive one with growth, dynamism, and resilience on show, along with the potential for further growth in years ahead. The ~\$19M average gross annual revenue recorded by participating schools is a ~\$3M increase on 2021-22, and is now higher than the previous peak of ~\$18M in 2018-19 – a trend that signals an industry-wide post-pandemic revival. Importantly, staff are feeling the benefit, with year-over-year staff compensation at its highest increase in five years (up 6.9%).

Having partnered with the Financial Times on a survey of Chief Learning Officers first in 2021, this year UNICON fed the FT’s CLO survey data into its own benchmarking with some eye-catching comparative results, between the voice of the client and that of industry. For example, providers’ perception of their competition skews heavily towards other university-based business schools (48%),



where the CLO survey data shows clients utilizing a wide range of learning partners with a lot of non-university provision in the mix, from consultancies, corporate universities, credentialing specialists, and in particular from learning platforms.

In terms of the most valued qualities in a learning partner there was significant agreement between providers and clients, with the top three qualities aligned (faculty expertise, reputation for high quality, and ability to customize). Interestingly, there was some divergence on cost-effectiveness, with clients valuing this substantially higher than providers, while diversity and breadth of content was less important to clients than was perceived by providers.

Perhaps most useful of all for executive education leaders is to identify the top priority learning themes for the year ahead from their clients. Here there was a perception gap. Both providers and clients agreed that leadership (the perennial top learning theme for any organization) was the priority for the next 12 months, but beneath that some divergence, with clients ranking change management 2nd, where providers reported this 5th in terms of the learning themes they were offering.

Presenting the results, Andrew Jack, Global Education Editor at the Financial Times, spoke about the FT's aim to, "bring the demand side in," and that they would continue to seek out, "new metrics and new ways to capture the richness, diversity, and value of university-based executive education."

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Building a collaborative mindset for executive education

Mark Lewis, Executive Director at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business Executive Education, describes how there is, “Collaboration at multiple levels in executive education from collaboration between institutions, within institutions, with clients, and with outside associations,” for this reason, Lewis says, “I view collaboration as an ecosystem.”

“Collaboration is about how you start,” Lewis observes. “You need transparency upfront between partners, strong communication, and the ability to walk away from a project that isn’t going to work. Primarily you need to align interests for a partnership with equity.”

Lewis sees two primary types of partnership, the strategic (purposeful, planned) vs. the tactical (based on an arising need or opportunity). Lewis notes that within those categories potential for a strong partnership will often stem from an area of capability strength on one side, aligning with a market position strength on the other.

Jean Choy, Associate Dean of the Michael G. Foster School of Business, University of Washington, advised that, “Collaboration is not an answer for everything. Sometimes you shouldn’t collaborate, sometimes it doesn’t make sense to.”



“Collaboration is very sensitive and there’s no formula to getting it right.”

Jean Choy, Associate Dean of the Michael G. Foster School of Business, University of Washington

Choy gives the example of a collaboration that took, “ten times as long and triple the cost,” where two departments were encouraged to collaborate on a project that could have been more efficiently delivered by one. “Collaboration is very sensitive and there’s no formula to getting it right. Each case is different,” Choy said.

On the topic of seeking ‘win-win’ partnerships, Choy observes, “What you gain from a collaboration need not be a 50/50 profit share. There are different objectives that can align. A partner might be looking to save time, or to gain publicity, or brand awareness, and if you meet those objectives, it’s still a win-win.”

Amita Krishna, Associate Director of Customised Programmes at Alliance Manchester Business School, spoke of the vital aspect of leadership to successful collaboration. “It’s a leader’s responsibility to create a culture conducive to collaboration,” said Krishna, “where people feel safe to share information outside the core team. That means a culture of respect, empathy, and psychological safety.”

Alain Gosselin, Professor Emeritus at HEC Montréal and the panel moderator, agrees, adding, “From researching collaboration over many years, it’s true that the state of collaboration is a function of many things but mostly it’s a question of culture and leadership. The challenge for us is that business schools have historically been more wired towards teaching competition than collaboration.”

Fostering creativity and innovation

In the final session of Day 2 attendees were treated to a rare audience with Daniel Lamarre, former CEO and current Executive Vice-Chairman of the Board at Cirque du Soleil, one of the most successful creative enterprises ever, and a self-professed “creativity evangelist”—a fascinating study for a group of executive education leaders so often challenged to find creative new solutions.

“Creativity is a process,” says Lamarre, “You need clear mandates, you need to define the sandbox, the business parameters, and say: within that sandbox you have total freedom. There are creative challenges wherever you look, in any kind of organization. From HR to finance there will be specific mandates where they can be more creative in a given process or service. There’s no better way to be creative than to put a problem on the table that needs solving.”

Lamarre distinguishes between two categories of creativity, “‘Big C’ creativity, the breakthroughs, the disruptive innovations. Great, but rare. Don’t forget about ‘little c’ creativity – the small ways you can be creative in everyday tasks or behaviours to make the organization better.”

On the importance of creating an environment that nurtures creativity, Lamarre recounts how the founder of Cirque de Soleil once hired Lamarre his own personal clown, Madam Zazou!



“Tap into the amazing network of creativity that is your organization. We each have everything in our mind required to be creative.”

Daniel Lamarre, former CEO and current Executive Vice-Chairman of the Board at Cirque du Soleil

“Twenty-three years later she is still with me. She was a symbol of what we stand for: entertainment. Madam Zazou reminded our employees what our core business was, our purpose. Find your symbol,” encourages Lamarre, “remind your employees what you stand for.”

Lamarre further encourages the audience to, “Tap into the amazing network of creativity that is your organization. We each have everything in our mind required to be creative. Ask the question, prompt ideas. We often say ‘be open to other ideas.’ That is right but you also need to make it clear to your people that you are open to their ideas.”

On the subject of creative partners Lamarre recounts the unique collaboration whereby Cirque de Soleil secured use of the much coveted and tightly protected Beatles music catalogue. “‘What’s the pitch?’ said Ringo, in a meeting following months of negotiation behind the scenes,” says Lamarre, “to which Guy Laliberté, the founder of Cirque de Soleil, replied, ‘There is no pitch. You are a creative force, we are a creative force. We are here to create something together.’”

Ultimately, Lamarre credits the success of collaboration to respect, “Be respectful of the capabilities of your partner. For us this meant the Beatles were in control of the music, while Cirque controlled the show.”

Day 3: Innovating for the future

Capturing digital value for executive education

Vatsala Sarathy, Managing Director of Technology, Finance and Operations at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, shares insights and experiences from the past few years of seemingly continual disruption and change. Sarathy's overarching message is that, "If you can look at constraints as opportunities it opens the door for innovation."

The pandemic forced constraints on every institution, team, and individual in the industry, and within those constraints innovation was practically an imperative. "We had a rapid, two-week mobilization of our switch to online delivery. Innovation requires teams to come together around a challenge," recounts Sarathy. "We had no doubt in our minds on what we were doing. Experiments were run but we had good, clear communications aligning strategy with execution," she explains.

Speaking on the same period from his own perspective, Eric Bergemann, Senior Director of Executive Programs at MIT Executive Education, observed that, "There's been a striking rebound of people really valuing in-person experiences.

Clients are coming back to face-to-face programming for those informal learning opportunities and informal engagement that we know is so hard to achieve in digital learning."

Bergemann recounts that while some business effects of the pandemic were predictable, plenty more were not. "There was some anticipated erosion as we shifted to online. We were hopeful about our Live Online experiences on Zoom being good, but different customers have different needs and many said they preferred the experiential qualities of in-person. Something we didn't anticipate was that so many customers who had not been to campus would join as Live Online attendees. Engaging with others online was a new and valuable experience, and they kept coming back."

Solenne Savoia is the manager of talent, learning, and executive education programs at the AI 4 Humanity team at Mila (the Quebec AI Institute), and offers her own unique perspective on capturing digital value, in the context of responsible AI.

"Responsible AI is a leadership issue," says Savoia, "similar to sustainable development, if leaders don't take this issue on, then it won't be a priority, because regulation is already so far behind the curve."

Describing her work at Mila, Savoia champions the need for cross-functional collaboration, “Marketing, legal, procurement, all the functions are involved in this issue, so diversity of perspectives becomes very important. All our programming is synchronous for this reason, to allow cross-functional interactions.”

There are some unique challenges around L&D in the AI space, as Savoia notes, “Keeping up with the speed of the topic is key. You need to update the program constantly to stay relevant and accurate. It’s a big challenge. We constantly look at how other industries are applying these tools. For example, in the gaming industry they are using digital technology to make games more inclusive, for those without mobility of the face for instance.”

With increased adoption of generative AI technologies Sarathy predicts the biggest change might be how we look at workflows. “By using these tools humans will have more time to think strategically. Not just leaders but strategic thinking at all levels. Are we ready for that as teams and individuals? I think the key skills for operations to develop are critical thinking, and data curiosity and literacy, to help make sure your tools are responsible and well-run. After that, it’s interpersonal skills for those with new time freed up to collaborate more widely and join strategic conversations.”

With technology giving people more time and space to reflect and be creative, to experiment, take risks and come up with new ideas, Sarathy believes it is time to, “Empower people to think outside the box and access ideas and creativity from all levels. It means allowing people to get their hands dirty with the data.

To do this you need well-maintained and regulated processes, strong guard rails, such as a single source of truth for your data.”

How do executive education leaders innovate with emerging technologies while working within a traditionally slow-moving institution? “Start small and think carefully about using cases that add value,” advises Sarathy, “not just, ‘the next cool thing.’”

For Bergemann, leadership and culture play a key role. “Peter Hirst is the Senior Associate Dean of Executive Education at MIT but he is also our ‘Chief Futures Officer.’ Peter sets a culture from the top on experimentation with emergent technologies and this is shared across the school. There’s a flywheel of innovation, a loop between innovation in executive education feeding into degree programs and vice versa.”

Thriving in turbulent times: be future ready

The final panel session of conference focused on the fundamental need for executive education to be future ready and prepared for further turbulence down the road.

“We had opened a brand-new campus in 2018,” recalls Marta Pimentel, Executive Education Director at the Nova School of Business and Economics, “our value proposition was focused on community. The pandemic disrupted this completely. When we returned our strategy shifted to creating immersive experiences. For example, we’ve partnered with the Portuguese football federation for an amazing program on the idea of corporate athletes, that is immersive both physically and mentally.”

“To go beyond our limitations and perspectives on how we build programs we wanted to push ourselves to the limit. It was an immersive, extreme experience,” explains Katarzyna Fonseca, Head of International Development, Executive Education at Nova School of Business and Economics, on the thinking behind Nova’s Kilimanjaro Peak Performance Leadership Program. “We focused on power skills such as determination, agility, mindfulness, and collaboration. We had a diverse team from different functions, faculty, and staff. We learned that our goals are higher and more difficult to reach each day. We need patience to get there, and to take one step at a time.”



“I asked ChatGPT, how would you describe turbulent times?” says Marco Serrato, Associate Vice President, Enterprise Collaboration at Arizona State University, “I got back a list: economic turbulence, recessions, technological disruption, pandemics, health crises, market competition, globalization, social and political change, environmental challenges, industry specific challenges... I thought, this sounds like what we are living through every day! For me the key to dealing with this on-going state of turbulence is anticipation. Not just reacting, but anticipating what might come next. We need to think about how we will serve executives 2, 3, 5 years from now, and use learner data to do that.”

Mike Malefakis, President of University Partnerships at Emeritus, shares some lessons on thriving in turbulent times from his experience as CEO at Wharton Executive Education at the time of the pandemic. “We really embraced the concept of Minimum Viable Product. Launching, learning, and improving continuously. By the end of 2021 we had delivered learning for 11,000 synchronous online participants, and 60,000 participants with more traditional asynchronous online, and our evaluations were on par with pre-pandemic levels. By making that really tremendous impact we went from a state of being completely unsure of ourselves to feeling confident we could thrive.”

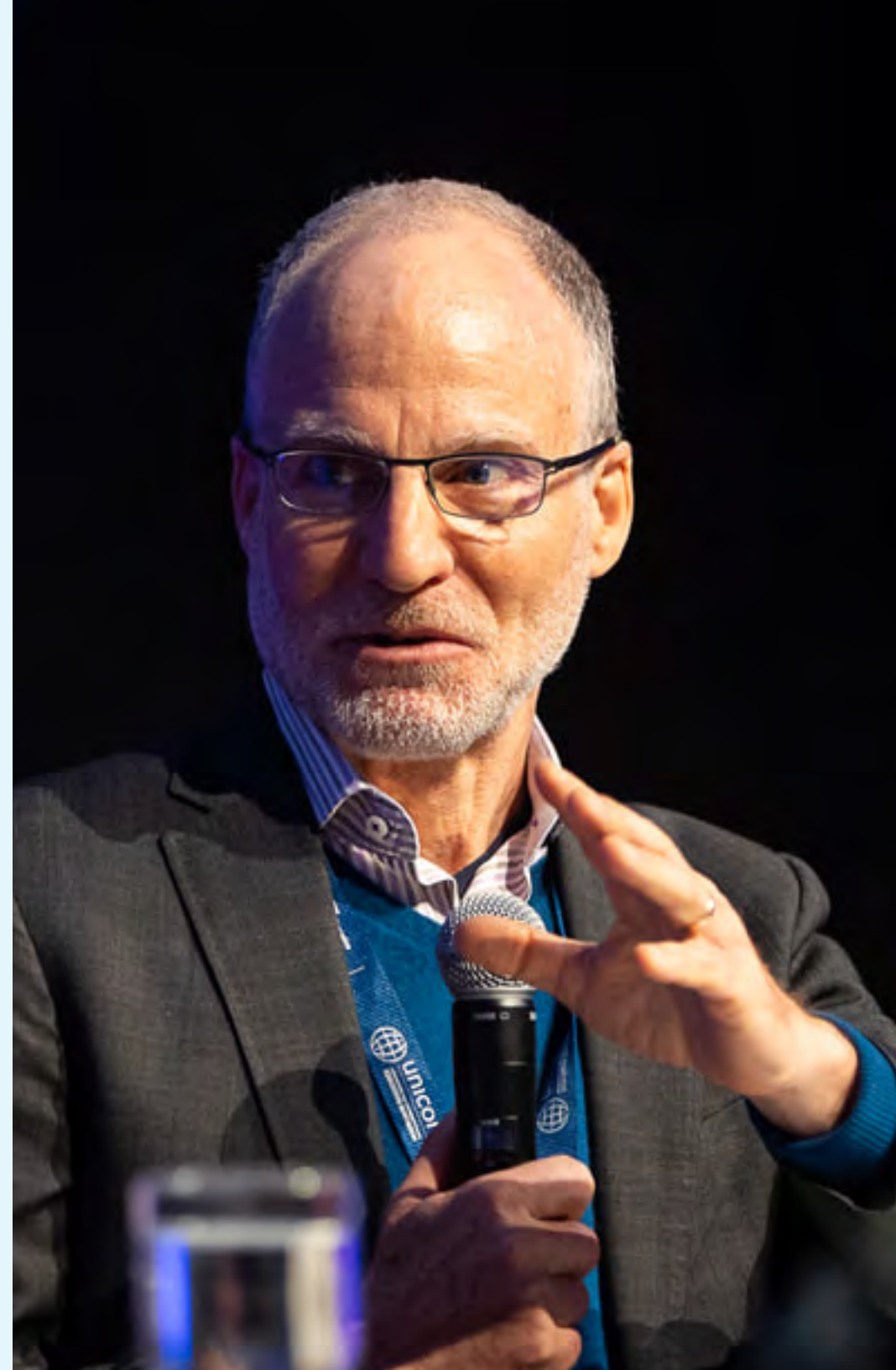


Speaking on the importance of seeking out and respecting diversity of perspectives, Malefakis suggests, “Create safe spaces for conversation and for dialogue exchange. Don’t ignore what you might initially feel are the ‘naysayers’ with negative feedback. Embrace it, that is critical. Avoid toxic positivity. You need people pressing against your own point of view and to leverage the collective wisdom of teams.”

Looking ahead Malefakis quotes Andy Grove, founder and former CEO of Intel, saying, “Only the paranoid will survive,” in relation to the rigorous scenario-planning that occurred throughout the pandemic. “Keep those practices up,” Malefakis advises, “those paranoid thoughts keep you on your toes.”

“The lifetime of skills is getting shorter,” says Serrato, “Skills and mindsets need updating continuously. The life-cycle of our offerings will be shorter too so we need to be leaner and more agile. For me this is a huge business opportunity. How are we communicating that narrative and value proposition?”

Malefakis agrees, adding, “The pace of change is so fast, if you’re doing this responsibly, you probably have to be redesigning your curriculum every 6 months and definitely every 12 months, or you’re really not serving your people very well.”



Malefakis sees another form of turbulence where university-based schools are especially well-positioned to help. “The splintering of societies and the paradigm of globalization into regionalization and opposing sides based on political viewpoints. We as educators have such an important role to play. We can give people the tools to talk to each other with completely opposing points of view and help heal a divided, polarized world. We’ve got the research on this. Our job is to make it more practical and accessible for people.”

Wrapping up, Melanie Weaver Barnett, Executive Director of UNICON and panel moderator, surmised three actions from the session, asking, “What immersive experiences can you put your own team in to support their development? How can you work with your teams to find out more about their unique qualities? And how do you build trust and relationships so when the time comes, we are able to pivot?”



The Exec-Ed Challenge

10 questions and prompts to apply key takeaways to your own context.

01

Frantz Saintellemy's recruitment pitch at LeddarTech emphasizes points of difference in the labor market (i.e. "do here what you can't do at Google.")

What points of difference can you offer as an employer, that are hard to find elsewhere?

03

Danièle Sauvageau and Laurent Duvernay-Tardif both talked about "preparing for key moments. "What the person is trying to accomplish and teach back from there... imagine them facing the end challenge."

Apply this lens to your own client personas. What are the key moments and challenges they will face? How can you design and market offerings to prepare them for these?

02

"Reconcile and heal yourself first, to help others do the same," advised Ghislain Picard, while Danièle Sauvageau had a similar message: "How ready are you to ask for help yourself?"

What are some concrete ways you can prioritize your own mental and physical well-being, in order to better serve your team?

04

There was some divergence between the benchmarking data and the FT's CLO survey, with cost-effectiveness a more pressing issue for clients than for providers.

Where can you deliver increased value to your client without effecting your required margin, to allow you to show greater cost-effectiveness?

05

“Don’t forget about ‘little c’ creativity,” said Daniel Lamarre, “the small ways you can be creative in everyday tasks or behaviours to make the organization better.”

What are some tasks and processes in your weekly workflow where you could define a specific mandate for creativity.

07

“The lifetime of skills is getting shorter and skills and mindsets need updating continuously. This is a huge business opportunity,” noted Marco Serrato.

Is this need for continuous upskilling something you focus on from a business model standpoint and/or in your messaging to the market?

06

Vatsala Sarathy predicts AI tools will create, “more time to think strategically. Not just for leaders but at all levels,” and asks, “Are we ready for that as teams and individuals?”

What skills should you and your team focus on in readiness to contribute effectively in more strategic conversations?

08

Marco Serrato predicts, “the life-cycle of our offerings will be shorter,” while Mike Malefakis agrees, suggesting the idea of, “redesigning your curriculum every 6 months or 12 months,” to keep pace.

How are you planning to meet this need in the market for continuously refreshed, updated offerings?

09

A recurring theme throughout the conference was the desire to better understand clients and participants, to align offerings, service, and experience to meet their needs.

What mechanisms do you currently use to listen to your clients? Are there some resources or channels you could leverage to gain more 'learner data'?

10

Striking throughout the concurrent sessions at conference was the convergence and complementarity between generational and functional groups on the top strategic priorities.

How might you leverage this alignment to implement a change or strategy? If this is not your experience, what are some concrete ways you can foster greater alignment?



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Impressions, insights, and takeaways
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