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CONSORTIUM FOR UNIVERSITY
EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

Generate the future of executive education in a hallucinated world

Impressions, insights, and takeaways from
UNICON's Team Development conference 2024
hosted by Nova School of Business & Economics

A Report by IEDP for the Executive Education Sector

Introduction

UNICON was founded 52 years ago as a global consortium for business-school based executive education and it has been fostering collaboration, connections, and innovation in the sector ever since.

Key to the value UNICON brings to its 122 member schools each year are the dynamic global learning conferences that it convenes, with this year seeing the first of its team development conferences to be held in Europe, by Nova School of Business & Economics, in Lisbon, Portugal.


Set over three intensive days of learning and networking, to a backdrop of the shimmering Atlantic ocean, more than 200 participants from over 70 institutions were hosted by Nova School of Business & Economics, a business school quietly bustling with an energy of internationalization and the joy of learning.

Founded in 1978, following the Carnation Revolution of 1974 which ushered a return to democracy for Portugal, Nova SBE has long been known for its forward-thinking, global perspective. In recent years Nova's championing of internationalization has driven remarkable growth, both in terms of revenues (in 2018-23 they saw 280%

revenue growth), and in recognition (in 2018 Nova placed 62nd in the Financial Times' Executive Education rankings, while today they sit 13th), and this is now one of Europe's leading business schools.

With 80% of the students and professionals studying at Nova being non-Portuguese the atmosphere is one of international collaboration and of celebrating global diversity. This is reflected at a strategic level where international collaboration plays a key role for Nova who partner in varied ways with schools at NYU Stern, Harvard, Stanford, Copenhagen, MIT Sloan and others.

As Pedro Brito, CEO of Nova SBE, remarks, "The Team Development Conference is an opportunity for attendees to be inspired and to discover new ways to elevate executive education." Executive Chair of UNICON, Melanie Weaver-Barnett, adds that, "Our conferences are about three things: the content, the learning, and the network. Your network especially can be an incredibly rich resource. You will meet friends and colleagues at UNICON, people who can help you solve problems, act as trusted confidantes, and with whom you might even launch partnerships."



Nova SBE
Executive
Education
& Business Transformation

Time to hallucinate

This year's conference theme, "the future of executive education in a hallucinated world," provoked a buzz of interest amongst attendees, who swapped interpretations and ideas on what it meant to them. Here are some of those diverse associations:

The Traditional Definition

"To seem to see, hear, feel, or smell something that does not exist, usually because of a health condition or because you have taken a drug." (Source: Cambridge Dictionary).

AI Hallucinations

AI 'hallucinations' are where artificial intelligence generates outputs that appear credible but are inaccurate and not grounded in real-world facts or data. This definition is newly reflected in the Cambridge Dictionary definition where it was their 'Word of the Year' for 2024.

Political and Social Hallucinations

Fragmented realities characterized by polarization, disparate sources of 'truth', misinformation, and echo chamber effects.

Digital Transformation and Disconnected Realities

Virtual, augmented and digital experiences distorting or blending with traditional perceptions of reality.

Innovative Thinking and Visioning

Hallucinating in the sense of envisioning new possibilities that look beyond traditional constraints to imagine bold new ideas and designs.

Experimental Design

Conceiving original, futuristic new products, models, processes and other innovations that push boundaries and disrupt existing markets and ways of working.

R&D and Moonshot Thinking

Pursuing ambitious, visionary projects that seem impossible but could yield transformative breakthroughs.

Unconventional Problem Solving

'Hallucinating' imaginative solutions using novel and innovative approaches to problem-solving.

Note that traditional definitions of 'hallucinate' that previously tended towards negative connotations (i.e. not grounded in reality, unreal) are shifting towards positive associations with imaginative, boundary-pushing new thinking - while still maintaining the original sense around the challenges posed by distinguishing reality from falsity.

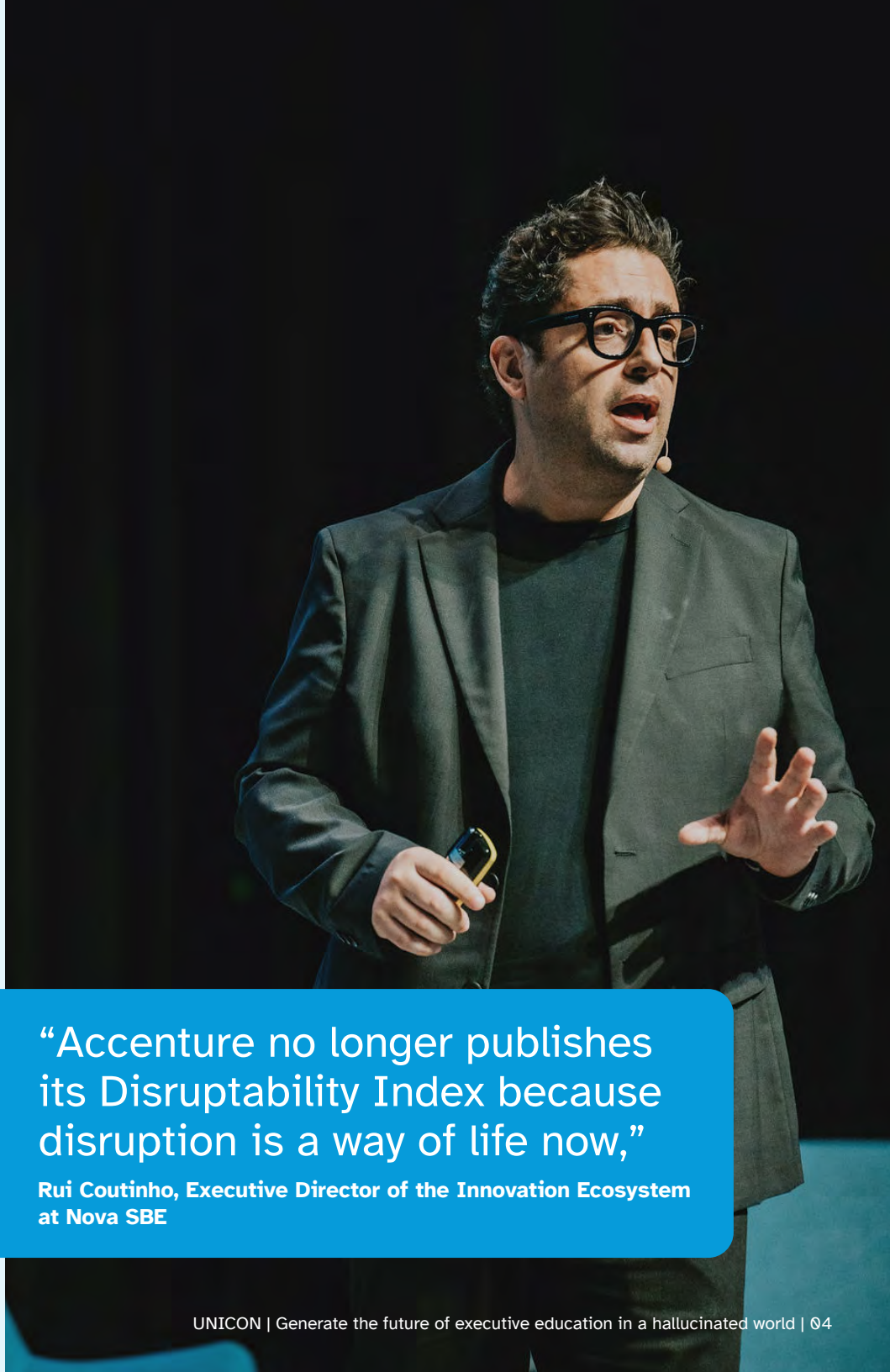
Day 1: Envision the hallucinate era

Nova SBE's definition of the 'hallucinate era' encapsulates many of these ideas: 'a period marked by rapid advancements in AI, political instability, digital transformation, and shifts in organizational thinking.' The first session of conference starts by asking: what does this new era mean for leadership, business, and education?

Rui Coutinho, Executive Director of the Innovation Ecosystem at Nova SBE and conference chair, suggests by the end of three days attendees should have actionable ideas around these challenges, "on what to do next Monday, next year, next decade!" As with all good problem-solving processes, step one is identifying the right questions to ask. "Success at the end of day one will be a set of questions, concerns, and issues to discuss and explore," he says.

Coutinho introduces the twin ideas of disruption and change management with a familiar quote from Jack Welch: "If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near." He asks: "How much time do we spend monitoring the rate of change on the outside of our organizations versus attending internal meetings?" A UNICON conference, of course, providing the perfect opportunity to learn from the outside.

After monitoring the outside comes one of the toughest challenges in business: change management. "We say we like change, but we don't," says Coutinho, "Biologically, culturally, socially, we are not naturally disposed to change."

A photograph of Rui Coutinho, a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a dark turtleneck. He is standing on a stage, gesturing with his hands as if speaking. The background is dark, and there is a blue light source on the left side of the frame.

"Accenture no longer publishes its Disruptability Index because disruption is a way of life now,"

Rui Coutinho, Executive Director of the Innovation Ecosystem at Nova SBE

Technology, Innovation & Digital Transformation



Panel Insights: What does the hallucinate era mean to you?

Panellist Catarina Gomes is co-director of Manicómio, a groundbreaking arts foundation in Lisbon, dedicated to supporting artists affected by mental health issues. For Gomes, the hallucinate era means finding new thinking for new challenges. For instance, the challenge of finding sufficient budgets to achieve impact. “The three top questions corporates ask us are: can you improve mental health and wellbeing in 45 mins? Can you show us how to do it internally? Can you make it cheaper?” she says. For an audience whose impact is closely connected to corporate training budgets and therefore susceptible to economic headwinds, the point resonates. “Can these kiss-and-fly strategies lead to better impact?” asks Gomes.

For Eric Bergemann, Senior Director of Executive Programs at MIT Sloan Management and board chair at UNICON, the ‘hallucinate era’ is inextricably tied to the artificial intelligence boom in business and education, which he outlines in four key areas:

Speed

“Tools like ChatGPT3 have emerged at speed. We see urgent requests from clients to bring them up to speed on this at three weeks’ notice. The speed is unlike anything we’ve seen.”

Growth

“The trend has driven growth for us both in terms of back-to-campus and digital. Clients are telling us: we’ve got to understand what’s going on.”

Magic

“Science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke said, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from

magic.” As educators we need to understand how these tools have been prepared and understand the ‘hallucinations’ of AI—which are getting better! They are getting more accurate.”


Resources

“The resources going into AI are staggering—the energy and data needed for large language models. This has wider implications. For instance, in Silicon Valley they are looking at nuclear energy, and having to address the historic perceptions of nuclear.”

The youngest voice on the panel, Nova SBE Masters in Management student Lara Luísa Corrêa, shared her perspective around how the ‘hallucinate era,’ as well as being a time of significant cultural shifts, could become the era of ‘post-complexity’. “We don’t like the word ‘complexity,’” she explains, “Gen Z are bold. Faced with the biggest challenges for generations: climate change, the poverty trap, totalitarian leaders, wars, inequality. The most relevant change is not only do we look at these problems, but we’re not afraid of the answers. We are not afraid of complexity.”

“Don’t run from complexity,” she emphasizes, “this generation knows how to come up with complex solutions. We have the tools to design exquisitely crafted solutions for each wicked problem.” She brings some examples of ‘daring questions’: “Could we move beyond GDP as the only sign of prosperity? Could we measure prosperity in the sense of purpose and fulfilment? Could we measure the happiness of the communities in which our organizations exist?”

Next, Jose Tavares, Professor of Economics at Nova SBE and an expert in global geo-politics, adds his perspective. “We have been born into societies where integration and change were a given, but today there is a greater than 10% chance the world could decouple,” he warns, in the context of trade wars and isolationist policies. “Liberal democracies are our most precious resource: freedom of expression, respect for difference. These things should not be taken for granted.”

A photograph of Rui Coutinho, Executive Director of the Innovation Ecosystem at Nova SBE, speaking on a stage. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a black t-shirt and glasses. He is holding a smartphone in his right hand and gesturing with his left hand. The background is a blue-lit stage with a pattern of light dots.

“Universities can be an installer of calm and thought on the subject of AI.”

Rui Coutinho, Executive Director of the Innovation Ecosystem at Nova SBE



“Gen Z are bold. Faced with the biggest challenges for generations: climate change, the poverty trap, totalitarian leaders, wars, inequality....”

Lara Luísa Corrêa student in Masters in Management

The thrust of Tavares’ message is optimistic, making the case for globalization persuasively. “Academia is the multiculturalism that worked,” he says, “built on merit and respect for difference.” While there is increasing inequality in individual countries, global inequality overall has decreased: “The wealth gap within a country like India has increased, but poverty levels have decreased. It’s a complex world.” On the big question of the day, artificial intelligence, Tavares offers that, “Universities can be an installer of calm and thought on the subject of AI.”

Building on this theme, Lara Luísa Corrêa recalls a recent interaction she had with artificial intelligence, “I was running behind on an assignment to complete a sensitivity analysis. I used ChatGPT for support but the answers didn’t make sense. I started challenging the assumptions that were built into the model, questioning what it was telling me. In short: this is what I expect from executive education. Currently we might see executive education as a way to absorb hard skills quickly. In 10-15 years we won’t be looking for knowledge per se, but rather how to identify the right problems to solve, how to filter the solutions that our large language models have given us. It’s that ability to critically assess problems and solutions.”

Mapping sources of disruption: collective thinking of the hallucinate era

In the first of two sessions designed to facilitate greater understanding of the forces of disruption in business and education, attendees worked through a series of group conversations, reflecting and sharing thinking while notes were captured by a team of observers. In the subsequent session the insights that were generated were shared and synthesized in novel ways, aiming to gain some unified perspective on these complex issues.

Tasked with the job of synthesizing, first it was the turn of Marco Serrato, Associate Vice President of Arizona State University's Learning Enterprise, and former chair of UNICON, and Josep Franch, Dean of ESADE Executive Education.

On the themes of sustainability and geo-politics, three things stood out to Franch as areas where disruption seemed likely: “people, portfolio, and market.” For ‘people’ the key factors were, “leadership; how we are exposed to change; mentorship; managing generational gaps; and collaboration.”

On the portfolio side, opportunities for disruption included: “interdisciplinary programs; sustainability embedded at the core of courses; and sustainability viewed as value creation opportunity, not as a compliance exercise.” On the market side the focus was on, “how business school research might influence the market on sustainability.”

Serrato’s synthesis suggested two key topics emerging around technology and innovation. The first topic, digital transformation, posed a series of questions: “how can executive education support audiences with the rapid adoption of data analytics? How can we respond speedily and efficiently to their needs? How can we increase speed-to-market while maintaining quality? What are the trade-offs?” Serrato also noted, “the life cycle of our offerings is shrinking,” giving the example that many new programs in executive education are geared around a foundation-level understanding of artificial intelligence, yet “a year from now, everyone will be AI literate. How do we anticipate what they need next?”



The second topic focused on the impact of AI on executive education's own operations and the questions this raises: "How do we ensure we have access to the right data to make good decisions? How do we upskill and reskill staff and faculty," and how to leverage the idea that, "what is happening in the corporate world is the same as it is for us in executive education."

Serrato and Franch's synthesis efforts (completed at pace during a coffee break) was followed by those of ChatGPT and a demonstration of how to refine and play with the data outputs that AI tools generate for us. The Nova SBE team prompted ChatGPT to synthesize insights using the same inputs (i.e. the observations collected by facilitators in the room). The real value of the AI tool was revealed when the team set about interrogating the data and pushing and stretching it interesting ways.



Key insights from Unicon's benchmarking report 2024

Presented by Nicholas Hamilton-Archer, University of Michigan's Ross School of Business, Cuneyt Evirgen, Georgia State University J. Mack Robinson College of Business, and Brian Mahoney co-founder of Percept Research

UNICON's annual benchmarking report is a 'must have' piece of industry research for business school-based executive education professionals, building on decades of experience from UNICON Research Committee members past and present, and that of their market research partner, Percept Research. The study fields comparative research of providers across the globe, inviting executive education leaders to explore the data and, "learn, compare, and decide," as Hamilton-Archer says.

Findings, insights and trends from this year's report were presented in an interactive session using Mentimeter to poll the room, quiz participants against the data, and enable live feedback and suggestions for future years.

"The study fields comparative research of providers across the globe, inviting executive education leaders to explore the data and, learn, compare, and decide,"

Nicholas Hamilton-Archer, University of Michigan's Ross School of Business



Headline findings

This year's benchmarking survey received its highest number of completed responses (107) - making the results highly representative and global.

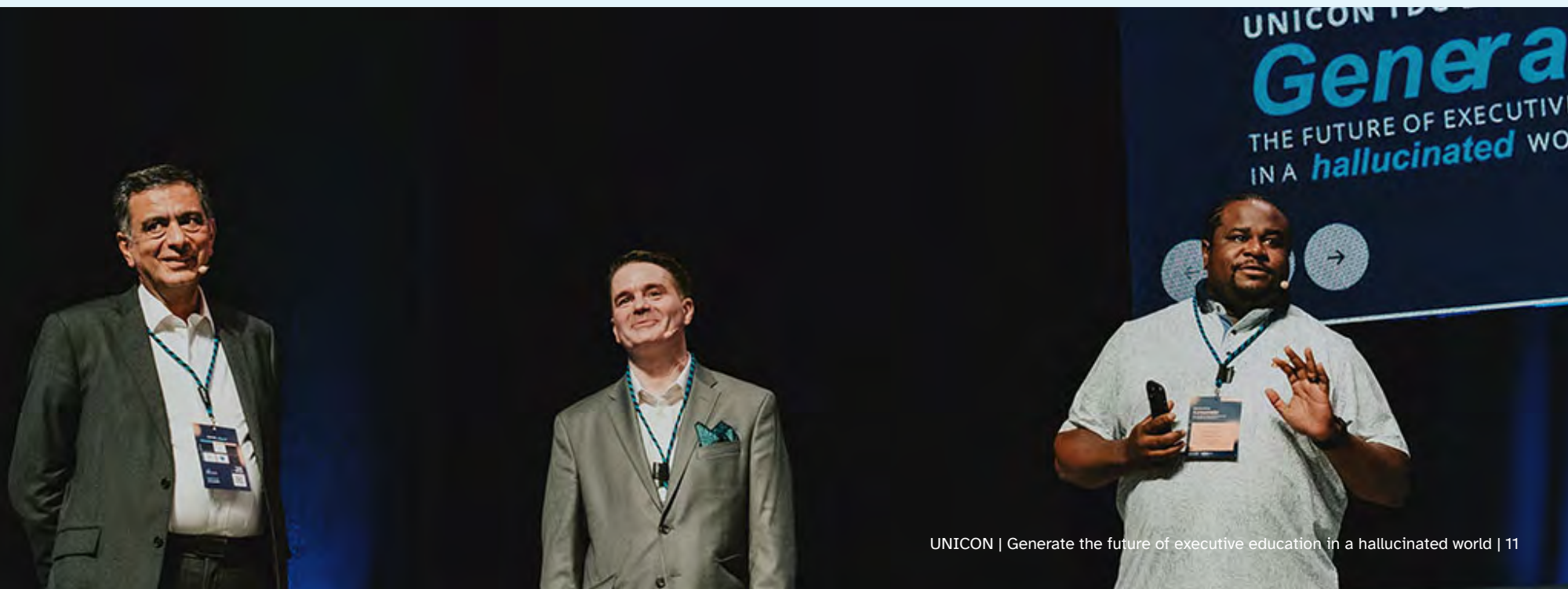
The average gross annual revenue of surveyed schools is up year-on-year again: "Getting back to the good old days."

Average revenue is now over twice that of 2020-21, marking a complete rebound since the onset of the global pandemic.

2024 is the second year where the Financial Times' CLO Survey results were used to compare 'voice of client' data with UNICON's 'voice of the schools'—allowing for interesting gap analyses to be made.

The biggest gaps between perceptions of 'top qualities in a learning partner' between client and schools were: a) on faculty expertise / reputation (54% for UNICON members vs. 24% for CLOs); and b) on the ability for partners to scale talent development solutions (just 14% for UNICON members vs. 46% for CLOs).

This year's data showed a dramatic shift back to face-to-face programming as the predominant learning modality across open enrolment and custom programs. Live audience feedback confirmed this finding and cited various factors including: networking; Zoom fatigue; human connection and interaction; community; better outcomes; remote workers wanting learning to be in-person; and peer learning.



Day two: Change management and leadership

Generate change simulator: An immersive change management game

The showpiece session on day two was an immersive, interactive game designed to simulate the conditions of change management in large organizations—parachuting attendees into the pressure cooker of a realistic business scenario, while experiencing first-hand what learners at Nova SBE do, and forming new connections with fellow participants along the way.

Pedro Brito, CEO at Nova SBE, designed the simulator and oversees its use across the business school where it is deployed for a variety of different learners, from senior leadership teams on custom programs, to degree students at various levels. “Anticipating and managing change requires a whole range of key leadership skills,” says Brito, “strategic planning and organization; decision-making; integrated vision; customer-centric mindset—as you will see during the game.”

The aim of the simulator is to help learners better understand the complexities of managing change in a dynamic environment. The exercise also acts as a mechanism for revealing insights about individuals, teams, and organizations taking part in the game—for example helping to map team dysfunctions; helping to identify aspects of leadership culture; or identifying behaviors that are hindering high performance. “The simulator forces out our natural behaviors,” says Filipa Castanheira, Professor of Organizational Behavior at Nova SBE and one of the facilitators who runs the simulation, explaining the value of the game and why she loves to use it in her classroom. “It’s an enabler of awareness. It gives us a true perspective,” she says, “but most importantly, it’s a game: have fun!”



“The simulator forces out our natural behaviors,”

Filipa Castanheira, Professor of Organizational Behavior at Nova SBE



“Welcome to the company, you are hired onto the management team at Generate Change LLC,” says the letter each participant receives to kick-off the simulation, revealing the role they were hired for across one of five teams: quality direction, risk management, business intelligence, data analysis, and corporate relations.

The game involves these five teams collaborating to achieve a common purpose—processing orders for ‘reports’ sent in by a client—a role played by a member of the Nova team, who is available in the room to dialogue with. Reports are completed only by attaining a set of data points and algebraic formulas dispersed amongst the teams, hidden in plain sight, and generally difficult to obtain.

An early stated aim of the simulation was to disorient, challenge, and generally flummox participants, presenting them with a complex task which no singular team could possibly achieve in isolation.

With this realization, participants began to collaborate—to move more freely around the room, to communicate, and eventually to organize processes and systems to complete the task, which could then be optimized.

During the simulation, behaviors were observed by the facilitators, not to evaluate or compare, but to draw out insights to feedback to the group in powerfully enlightening debrief sessions. The key behaviors being observed were: effective communication; collaboration; active listening; *Generate*; and trust—and within those a wide range of leadership competencies and challenges too: creativity; dealing with ambiguity; facing resistance; managing a lack of information; developing a shared vision; building trust and relationships; being agile; empowering others and trusting to delegate; accountability and psychological safety; time management and prioritization; managing stakeholders with conflicting demands; and monitoring mental health and well-being.

Panel insights: Corporate change management use cases

“How can we mesh-up with our clients and better understand their needs?” asks Melanie Weaver-Barnett, introducing a panel session designed to aid greater understanding of how executive education can support its clients in change management.

For panellist Isabel Vaz, Executive Chair of Luz Saúde, one of the largest healthcare companies in Portugal, the first guiding principle for change management is, “to have our people thinking outside the box.” She says that while the tools at their disposal are changing, the processes are largely the same, requiring innovative thinking in areas like optimization, automation, AI and data analytics. “The first principle is to re-engineer these processes with the aim of creating better customer experiences,” she says. For her second guiding principle Vaz stresses the importance of finding a cultural ‘north star’ to align people around and motivate them. For Luz Saúde this means, “an explicit focus on outcomes,” and treating patients with the same sensitivity as if they were business clients. The third principle is around, “the urgent need to prepare your people for coming transformations with concerted efforts in upskilling and reskilling.”

Vaz describes the massive scale of transformation facing her industry, “AI and data will change how we diagnose, how we teach doctors and nurses, and how we treat patients,” she explains, “on the other hand we need to provide the best outcomes at an affordable cost.” For Vaz the number one priority is culture. “There is a huge cultural transformation going on for physicians,” she explains, “Nurses and physicians today need to be ‘clinical engineers,’ they need to understand business processes, quality standards, efficiency. This is how you get the best outcomes and experience for the client.”



“How can we mesh-up with our clients and better understand their needs?”

Melanie Weaver-Barnett, Executive Chair UNICON

Within change management in healthcare Vaz identifies several specific opportunities for executive education and how they can support clients in the years ahead:

- **Leadership modelling behaviours** – supporting leaders set standards and culture, and foster engagement through the examples they lead in their actions and performance.
- **Understanding and conviction** – supporting leaders and teams with knowledge based in research and expertise they can act on with confidence.
- **Talent and skills acquisition** – developing people and capabilities around new tools and technologies, but also in evergreen areas like strategy and decision-making.
- **Incentives, structures and systems** – working closely with clients to develop more systemic organizational elements to support change and transformation.

Panellist, Miguel Abecasis, Executive Board Member at Fidelidade and ex-Senior Partner and Managing Director at BCG, is a leader in the

insurance industry with a background in strategic consulting: “We are at a point where whole industries are being transformed,” he says, “Motor insurance, for example, used to be straightforward, very transactional, with clearly defined roles. Now the whole mobility sector has been reshaped, from electric vehicles, to Uber. An insurance provider in this context requires completely different skills and mindsets from their people, and the right set of incentives to bring them together.”

Asked to describe what a ‘perfect collaboration’ with a business school might look like, Vaz says, “Help us prepare people for change. If we are being asked to develop new AI capabilities, for example, what are the new skills we need? What are the best use cases to learn from? How do I reskill people and prepare them to do other work when a year from now we won’t need their current role? This is a great purpose and opportunity to add value to society where business schools are perfectly positioned to help.”



“Motor insurance, for example, used to be straightforward, very transactional, with clearly defined roles. Now the whole mobility sector has been reshaped, from electric vehicles, to Uber.”

Miguel Abecasis, Executive Board Member at Fidelidade

Abecasis agrees, “We are facing a disruptive change to the role of business schools in society. Automation and AI means vast numbers of people will need to reshape and reskill to create value for society. There is a crucial role to play here to help avert a major social problem.”

Asked about what they look for in terms of ROI when partnering with business schools, Vaz and Abecasis offer different perspectives. “Ultimately it’s the quality of talent that business schools can provide and develop,” Abecasis says, “it’s important to note too that partnering with universities costs less than working with consultants.”

“For me it’s the retention metrics,” says Vaz, “for example, retention for us is 40% higher after training. This means less rotation, money saved from having to rehire, better employee experience and that means a better customer experience—so there are KPIs we look at.”

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Isabel Vaz, Executive Chair of Luz Saúde



Positive and peaceful leaders

The second half of day two shifts focus from change management as a whole to the leadership capabilities required to deliver successful change projects, whether internally within executive education, or for the corporate clients they are supporting.

Preparing participants for a World Café style session, Marco Berti, Professor in Management at Nova SBE, focuses minds with a series of provocations around ‘paradox theory’—highlighting various paradoxes inherent in change management, such as:

- The most well-intentioned change efforts often trigger unpredictable events. How do we anticipate and react to them?
- Change makers tend to focus on overcoming resistance to the change they are driving, but how do we preserve what is good, and not lose value in the change process?
- It is well-known solutions from the business world can sometimes complicate the problem they set out to solve. How can we guard against this?
- The way we organize business can promote over-simplification, or ‘functional stupidity.’ How can we avoid this?

Berti uses this framing to prompt the audience to think more broadly about the challenges faced by leaders today and the role executive education can play in tackling them. Setting the table for the World Café, which promises to generate collective intelligence around leadership styles that promote peace, positivity, and emotional intelligence, Berti introduces five business challenges that sit at the intersection of technology, politics, ethics, and sustainability:

#1 Counteracting Extreme Polarization

#2 Business for Peace

#3 Productivity without Exploitation

#4 Business and Sustainability

#5 Technology Business and Humanity



“These are challenges so complex, wicked, and paradoxical they can have an overwhelming effect, yet we have to acknowledge the complexity, and wade in.”

Marco Berti, Professor in Management at Nova SBE



Co-intelligence: Generating future leaders – a world-café workshop

Bev and Etienne Wenger-Trayner from the Social Learning Lab are leading experts in the World Café methodology—a means of gathering collective insights on important societal questions, in a way that ensures many varied voices are included.

Conference breaks into small, facilitated group conversations on the five challenges shared by Professor Berti. Conversations are timed and take place at circular tables with paper table cloths to jot down thoughts and ideas. When the buzzer sounds, participants rotate to new tables where they discuss the same question again, only with different people. Through multiple rounds of dialogue participants share their thinking, filtering and building on each other's ideas in a relaxed, café-style setting. As participants move from table to table they gain clarity by socializing their own ideas, and relaying ideas they have heard from others', or read on the table cloths, cross-pollinating and creating a network of shared understanding and insights across the entire group.

The Wenger-Trayners make use of ChatGPT to assist with synthesizing the data from the workshop, looking for paradoxes and tensions that exist around these big leadership challenges, and asking: what are the implications for executive education?

8 Key Implications for Executive Education

Based on synthesis of the World Café event at UNICON TDC 24

#1 Integrating Ethics and Moral Decision-Making Across Disciplines

#2 Promoting Long-Term Thinking in a Short-Term Business Culture

#3 Developing Cultural Competence and Adaptability

#4 Encouraging Compassionate and Inclusive Leadership

#5 Building Critical Thinking and Resilience in a Rapidly Evolving Technological Landscape

#6 Fostering Skills for Managing Paradoxes and Uncertainty

#7 Embedding Collective Responsibility and Systems Thinking

#8 Providing Tools for Active Listening and Open Dialogue

Panel insights: leaders that impact

Discussing attributes and strategies that enable leaders to drive positive change, Paula Barriga, VP and GM at Novo Nordisk Portugal, describes how the organization's background, rooted in tackling chronic diseases such as diabetes, provides a clear purpose around which to motivate people. Beyond a shared purpose, Barriga notes three elements which help drive performance and ensure impact. "Executive education can make a huge difference in these three areas," she urges:

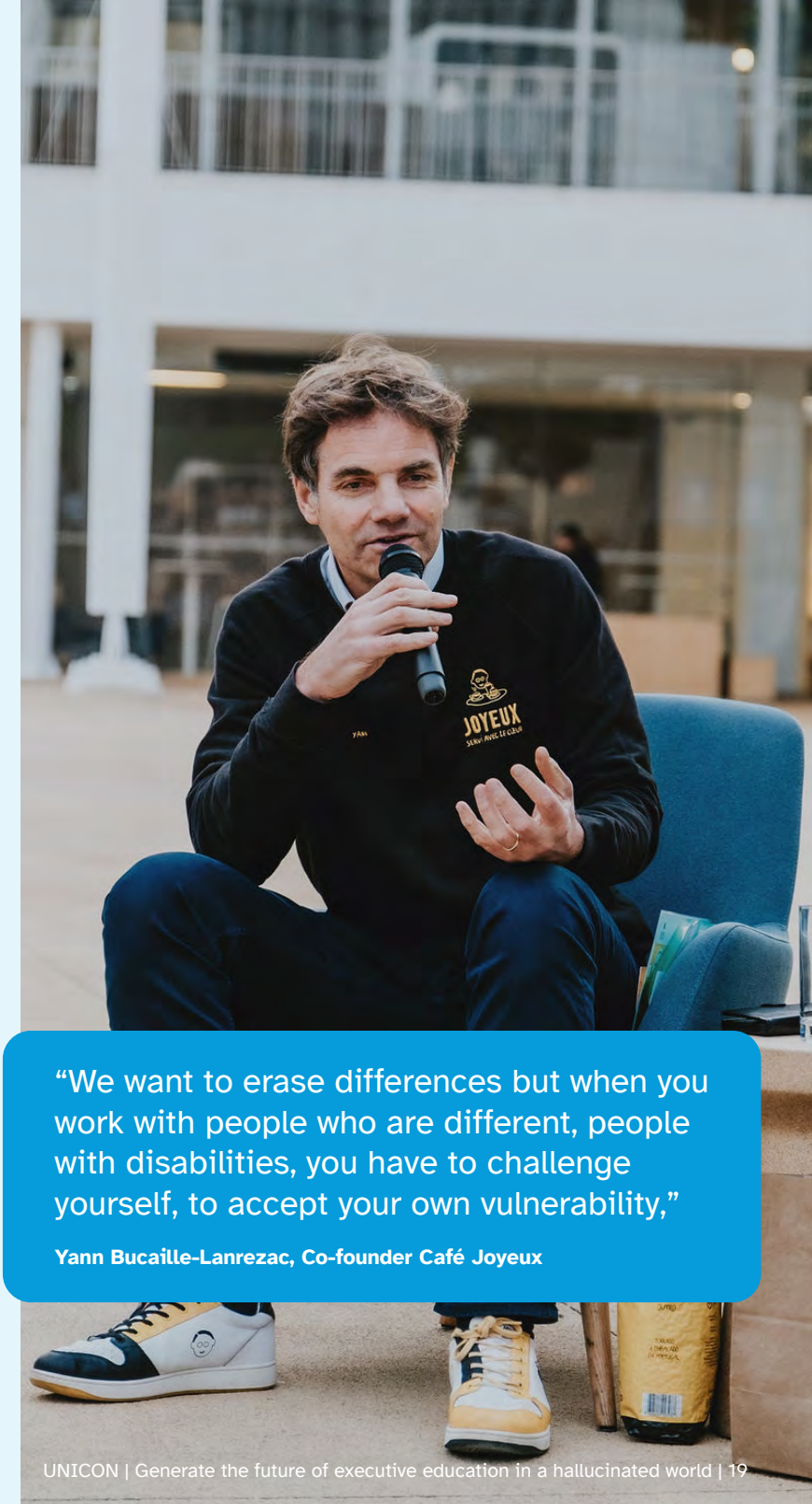
1. Organizational design: "Everyone in the company is considered the same."
2. Sustainability as impact metric, not just a 'nice to have': "We have a triple bottom line."
3. Long-term thinking instilled as leadership capability: "The key is having a long-term vision around impact."

Another panellist, Yann Bucaille-Lanrezac, is co-founder of Café Joyeux, a non-profit that exemplifies its mission—the promotion of inclusion at work—by employing and empowering people with various types of mental and intellectual disabilities, such as Trisomy 21 or 'Down

Syndrome', in a chain of café-restaurants. "By giving them training in an ordinary company we can change perceptions and show they can have a role to play in the world economy, and that we are all useful," he explains.

Founded in 2017, there are now 20 Café Joyeux in Europe and one in New York City. The idea came to Bucaille-Lanrezac while sailing, when he met on board a young man with autism who at the end of the day told him, "Thank you, Captain, this was great. I was told you are the boss, do you have a job for me?" "I had to say 'no'", he recalls, "but that was the trigger for this idea that we could create value together."

"Café Joyeux is showing it is possible to reach some profit while having a high employment rate of people with disabilities. 80% of our employees have intellectual or developmental difficulties. We all have some type of disability, the issue is we all want to hide it. We want to erase differences but when you work with people who are different, people with disabilities, you have to challenge yourself, to accept your own vulnerability," says Bucaille-Lanrezac.



"We want to erase differences but when you work with people who are different, people with disabilities, you have to challenge yourself, to accept your own vulnerability,"

Yann Bucaille-Lanrezac, Co-founder Café Joyeux

The Café Joyeux story is inspiring, not least in terms of its bold strategic vision to lead by example, employing and training people in meaningful work who otherwise were at risk of marginalization. One Café Joyeux was set up by Filipa Pinto Coelho in Portugal when she became pregnant with Manuel, a child with Trisomy 21 who is now 7 years old. Speaking on the panel she explains, “It was the fear felt during pregnancy that led me to it. I wanted to develop a strategy of outreach and positive communication around the abilities and talents of people with IDD. I wanted others to discover, and not reject out of fear or prejudice, the opportunity to meet or employ someone in this spectrum.”



Day three: Life transitions and infinite learning

The future of lifelong executive education: Carrington Crisp report

Now in its second iteration, CarringtonCrisp's Future of Lifelong Executive Education report has evolved, having initially been conducted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and focusing on trends in online learning. Conducted through surveys of 1,100 employers across 32 countries and nearly 10,000 learners from 40+ countries, this year's report explores how employers and individual learners are adapting to continually changing skill demands and the increasing role of flexible, non-degree-based education. The research provides invaluable data-based insights into how organizations, learners, and educators can navigate these shifts. "Corporate needs are evolving very quickly, in turbulence. Their needs are not clear yet, but they are moving forward," says Andrew Crisp, owner and founder of CarringtonCrisp.



Highlights from the report:



- **Only 35%** of employers use business schools, far behind the 57% who use online providers.
- **77% expect to undertake more learning** to upskill and reskill in the future to advance their careers.
- **79% expect to have to update learning** more frequently in the future to keep up to date with skill needs.
- **70% say location of a learning provider** will become less important as online provision becomes more sophisticated.
- **69% indicate** it is important to them that any future learning they undertake is with a provider **with an international brand reputation**.
- **36% of employers would send staff to study** with a provider outside their home country.
- **58% of employers** would have staff **take a course online** outside their home country.
- **63% want to create their own certificate journey** by combining courses in different formats.
- **70% want free learning updates** that can be taken in an hour or less.
- Topics of key interest to learners: Artificial intelligence; Cybersecurity; Digital Marketing; E-commerce; Leadership.
- **79% say learning needs to be delivered flexibly** if they are to engage in lifelong learning.
- **79% agree they would be more likely to join an organization** which offered lifelong learning as part of their package.
- **78% would be more likely to stay at an organization** that values and supports their professional development.
- **74% expect to use AI generated content** in their learning and development.
- **67% of corporates expect budgets for learning and development to increase** in the next two years.

The skills most likely to be identified as key for employers, but not yet seen as widely available are: Artificial Intelligence; Change Management; Crisis Management; Design Thinking; Managing across Cultures; Negotiation; Blockchain.

The five key reasons identified by employers as drivers of learning and development in their organizations are: to improve productivity and efficiency; to introduce new technology; to develop high potential staff; to remain competitive; to maintain professional standards/competencies.

Longevity: 20 years bonus effect

Building on the theme of lifelong learning, a talk by Pedro Gouveia, a physician and researcher in medicine and technology at the Champalimaud Foundation, explores the so-called "20 Years Bonus Effect," the idea that advancements in medicine, public health, and technology will lead to greater longevity, adding 20 years or more to human life expectancy, as well as increasing healthspans—the period of life spent in good health. As 100 year lifespans become the norm the implications for society are huge—from healthcare, to the economy, and not least for executive education.

Gouveia, who's work brings together AI, big data, 3D modelling and other cutting-edge technologies to make game-changing progress in the field of breast cancer, discussed how these advancements are transforming treatment, boosting preventative care, personalizing health strategies, and enabling the management of chronic conditions like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease—extending life expectancy and increasing the longevity of populations.



Career & life transitions

For executive education, increasing lifespans and healthspans has many knock-on effects, challenges, and opportunities. Not everyone will wish to work longer careers, but many will, and for many more it will be an imperative.

How do organizations reap the benefits of an increasingly age-diverse workforce?

What are the skills needed to thrive in longer careers?

How do educational models adapt to meet these shifting demands?

Will lifelong learning models become the norm, with periodic upskilling allowing learners to stay relevant and competitive through their evolving careers?

What new management skills will rise in demand to lead this new-look workforce?

To help explore some of these questions, led by Ricardo Zózimo, Professor of Management at Nova SBE, conference turned to a ‘human library,’ an approach used in research and product design to gain deeper understandings of the experiences, challenges and requirements of a diverse range of personas, building empathy with clients and end-users, and generating qualitative data for human-centered design solutions.

“The most important dimension is to focus on the person’s perspective,” says Zózimo, “and to experiment with different types of questions. Consider how their needs relate to the role of business schools and executive education in their learning journey and life transitions.”





In the Human Library, participants engage in structured discussions with five distinct executive education learner personas (the freshman, the career juggler, the overwhelmed parent, the entrepreneur, and the silver talent), each sharing personal stories about navigating career and life transitions and the role of executive education in those journeys. Guided by interaction principles — such as asking one question at a time, active listening, and using AI tools for inspiration — participants explored the unique perspective of each persona.

Role of business schools in infinite careers: Idea incubator

A ‘Garage Party’ style session was utilized next, building on the insights generated in the Human Library. Participants rotated between four thematic areas, spending 7 minutes at a time discussing what they had learned from each persona, exchanging ideas and concepts inspired by their time in the Human Library. In this iterative, fast-paced format, participants were encouraged to leverage the depth of insights gained and move towards brainstorming practical solutions.

Infinite careers and lifelong learning

Speaking on the final panel of conference alongside Gabriel Aramouni, Mike Malefakis shared the qualities he sees as essential for building an ‘infinite career’:

Curiosity “The key to keeping you motivated for a life of continuous learning.”

Smart Risk-taking “Keep experimenting with new tools, models, modalities and understand failure is part of the process.”

Playfulness “Much of what we work on is critical and extremely serious – like climate change and creating a sustainable economy – yet only approaching these challenges with a serious lens won’t allow you to access the creativity and energy you and your team needs to tackle them.”

Humility “Sometimes we don’t pick up signals from the market – such as gaps between our clients priorities or perceptions and our own as providers.”

Speaking about the need to build a network of multi-generational friends and advisors, Malefakis concludes by saying, “It keeps you fresh if you are on the more experienced side of life and it keeps you wise if you are on the younger side. UNICON is a great platform for building that multi-generational as well as multi-national network.”



Conclusions

This year’s Team Development Conference challenged attendees to engage with a ‘hallucinated world.’ This meant confronting tough questions around how to deal with fragmented realities and sometimes unreliable AI outputs—but it also meant opening one’s mind to unconventional problem-solving and innovative thinking.

In doing so, eight key themes emerged at this year's conference:

#1 Don't run from complexity

The idea that as well as asking the daring the questions, today's leaders must realize now is the time for daring solutions. A new generation of AI-enabled technologies provides the tools to design these solutions. 'Acknowledge the complexity, and wade in.'

#3 Live experiences in change management

A change management simulator that 'forced out natural behaviors' to reveal powerful insights showed that for some topics, there is no substitute for experiencing the reality of the challenge live and in-person.

#2 Exec-Ed's role in the AI boom

Executive education can be 'an installer of calm and thought' on AI, as well as providing the skills and expertise to challenge the assumptions built into large-language models, and question the outputs they gives us, enabling leaders to assess them with human skills of discernment, critical thinking, and prioritization.

#4 How can we mesh-up with our clients and understand their needs?

Over multiple panels, workshops, and research presentations, the conference saw a strong drive to learn from executive education's clients, to understand and anticipate their needs and design human-centered products to meet them where they are.

#5 Help us prepare people for change

A recurring message from corporate clients: in the face of change and transformation, automation and AI, many skillsets are becoming redundant. This poses huge societal as well as organizational challenges—which executive education providers are well-placed to help solve.

#7 Living in the future

From a Masters student's perspective that, "10-15 years from now we won't be looking for knowledge per se, but how to identify the right problems to solve," to considering the impact of a '20 year longevity bonus' on the global workforce, the conference successfully enabled attendees to 'live in the future' for three days, and think innovatively as a result.

#6 Power of collective intelligence

The tools and methodologies available to harness and synthesize the collective intelligence of large and diverse voices has never been greater.

#8 Respect for difference

Hosted by a school steeped in internationalism, with attendees arriving from all corners of the world to collaborate together, many of the topics covered, from peace to inclusion to leadership, depend on respect for one another's differences.

Closing remarks

Speaking on behalf of the host school, Katarzyna Fonseca, Director of International Development at Nova SBE, encapsulates these themes, “We are setting a course together that will define how executive education rises to meet the urgent demands of our time,” she says, acknowledging what a tall order that is. “As executive educators we are uniquely positioned to navigate this unknown territory. We are the lighthouses, guiding people and organizations through change, helping them see and find clarity. Our role is not just to teach, it’s to prepare, empower, and build the agents of change who will lead industries, communities, and nations forward,” she adds.

Closing the conference from UNICON’s side, Executive Chair Melanie Weaver-Barnett remarks, “Remember even during times when things aren’t going the way you want them to, you can access and create joy for yourself and for others. My guess is every one of you experienced moments of joy this week— through insights, conversations, socializing. This should remind us of our ability to access and create joy, and that we can do it in the context of our work. We all spend a lot of our time at work, so creating joy in that context—for yourself and others—is really meaningful! Thank you to the Nova team for being the catalyst of joy this week. Let’s all go back to our respective workplaces and carry it forward.”



Generate the future of executive education in a hallucinated world

Impressions, insights, and takeaways from UNICON's Team Development conference 2024 hosted by Nova School of Business & Economics

