

## Upskilling for business leaders

### 1 Warmer

- a. What sort of things should business leaders learn to improve their leadership skills for the future and remain in touch with their employees and the company business goals?

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- b. Share your ideas, then scan the article to see how what topics it mentions.

### 2 Key words

- a. Write the words from the box next to the definitions below.

Check your answers and your understanding of the words by using the same word to complete the example sentence immediately after each definition. Then read the complete article to see how each of the key words is used in context (the words may sometimes be in a slightly different form).

ambiguity    applications    boards    fellow    implications    intermingled  
mentoring    off-site    resilience    robust    upskilling    volatility

1. particular uses that something has \_\_\_\_\_

*We haven't really discussed the practical \_\_\_\_\_ of this new technology yet.*

2. possible effects or results \_\_\_\_\_

*We need to carefully consider the financial \_\_\_\_\_ of the proposed changes.*

3. extra training given to workers to make them better at their job \_\_\_\_\_

*The groups' task is to decide how much \_\_\_\_\_ managers should be provided with.*

4. something that is not clear because it has more than one possible meaning

\_\_\_\_\_

*Unfortunately, there seems to be rather a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ in the report.*

5. a word used to describe situations that can suddenly change or become more dangerous

\_\_\_\_\_

*There's too much \_\_\_\_\_ in the stock market right now; we need to wait with our investments.*

6. strong and firm \_\_\_\_\_

*His speech was held in the typically \_\_\_\_\_ style for which he is known.*

7. mixed with, combined with \_\_\_\_\_

*Their initial optimism was \_\_\_\_\_ with worry when they heard the results.*

8. the use of a more skilled or experienced person to teach a less experienced person about their job or a particular subject \_\_\_\_\_

*Our newly introduced \_\_\_\_\_ programme has so far shown excellent results.*

9. taking place away from the company building \_\_\_\_\_

*Patients' meals are now being cooked \_\_\_\_\_ and delivered to us in trucks.*

10. someone's ability to become or stay healthy, happy, or strong even in a difficult situation

*Despite the recent difficulties, she has shown great \_\_\_\_\_ to stress.*

11. the most important people in a company, who make decisions about the way that the company is managed \_\_\_\_\_

*He is a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ of several NGOs.*

12. used for talking about people who are similar to you or are in the same situation as you

\_\_\_\_\_

*They discussed their experiences with \_\_\_\_\_ refugees.*

## Business leaders feel pressure to keep their skills up to date

### *Executives are going back to the classroom as they try to keep up with new technologies and geopolitical shifts*

ANDREW JACK

27 JUNE 22

- 1 Santiago Maestri used his expertise in marketing to build a chain of shops selling iPhone accessories across his native Argentina. But, as the global shift to online retailing accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic, he saw the need to return to school to learn more about data science.
- 2 “This is the language that companies are speaking right now,” he says. “You have to have the skills for the future. Clients are using lots of technology and I need to understand things like recommendation engines.”
- 3 This month, Maestri took part in a week-long crash course at London Business School alongside an international group of experienced managers. The topics discussed ranged from deeply technical questions to the commercial applications and managerial implications of big data.
- 4 Courses like this are part of a broader shift towards more frequent, specialist and life-long upskilling among senior executives entrepreneurs and non executive directors as they seek to keep ahead of fast-moving business trends. Areas of concern include cyber-hacking, wellbeing and sustainability, with digital transformation among the top priorities.
- 5 “Companies are saying there is a ‘never normal’ now, with continuous change, ambiguity and volatility,” says Kanishka Bhattacharya, adjunct assistant professor of management science and operations at LBS, who helped lead Maestri’s course.
- 6 Even participants with a background in computer science gained fresh insights into the mathematical tools used to extract robust insights from masses of data, and how different varieties of artificial intelligence compare with one another.
- 7 But just as important were managerial skills — especially in a competitive market for talent, where recruiting and retaining specialists may mean abandoning top-down “command and control” structures. “Engineers now work with not for companies,” says Bhattacharya, describing a shift to “tribes and squads” of coders with deeper knowledge and sometimes higher pay than their managers.
- 8 The trend for senior-level upskilling is not confined to the private sector. For example, among the 25 participants on this month’s advanced management course run by the University of Cambridge’s Judge Business School were leaders from government departments and health and education providers — as well as executives as varied as the owner of a British eco-coffin business and a shipping manager from New Zealand.
- 9 Over three weeks, they discussed the factors driving global disruption for organisation show to respond strategically and how to develop their own leadership skills. Morning keep-fit sessions were intermingled with class discussions, workshops and individual mentoring.
- 10 “We want to explore the effects of unexpected geopolitical events and how senior people should respond,” says Stelios Kavadias, a Judge professor. “They reflect on the context so they can implement reform within their own organisation rather than trying to take ideas from elsewhere, which often doesn’t work and develops cynicism.”
- 11 After a brief lull in executive education during the pandemic, as companies cut training budgets and focused on adapting to remote working and sharp shifts in their markets, there is fresh appetite for such insights — and growing competition among education providers to cater to it.
- 12 A recent FT survey of chief learning officers (CLOs) showed that more than half expected their training budgets to be higher this year than last. Their motivations included the acquisition of new knowledge, as well as senior staff retention — and not least allowing executives to mix again in-person, off-site, following the Covid-19 lockdowns.

*Continued on next page*

- 13 Leadership development was the most frequently cited area in which they sought training, followed by diversity and inclusion, digital transformation, change management, innovation and digital skills.
- 14 Over one-fifth highlighted wellbeing, resilience and sustainability as continuing themes.
- 15 Meanwhile, business schools report rising demand from alumni to hear insights from faculty during reunions — or increasingly to sit in on classes offered to current students — as they seek to keep up to date.
- 16 But, with costs under pressure, and demand for innovation in content and format, the schools are themselves facing disruption from competitors including digital start-ups.
- 17 The FT survey showed that many CLOs were partnering with individual consultants, training companies and online platforms, such as LinkedIn, to provide programmes for their executives.
- 18 Patrick Dunne, a consultant with varied for-profit and non-profit experience who provides training for boards, says the appetite for continued upskilling reaches right to the top of organisations. Even non-executive directors are seeking to benefit from workshops, simulations, and peer-to-peer advice.
- 19 “There is a shift that is creating a very different type of leadership that combines culture, purpose, values, and style,” Dunne says.
- 20 He argues that, in the past, boards have been able to hold managements to account based on pre-agreed budget and strategic plans. By contrast, “the modern world is satnav: you know where you are going but the weather may change or there are roadblocks, so you don’t know how you’ll get there. Directors need to cope with uncertainty and hold executives to account in a different way.”
- 21 For many, including Maestri, the opportunity to network with fellow executives, guest speakers and professors who are also practitioners is a key benefit of upskilling. “Why travel 40 hours to London for these courses? [Because] it’s not only a very good level of education it’s also the people” he says.
- 22 His most recent programme gave him introductions to coders in India. He is already making plans to return for more courses as he seeks to keep up.

FT

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## 3 Understanding the article

a. Answer the questions with as much detail as possible from the article. If possible, do this without looking back at the article immediately.

1. Where is Maestri from, what line of work is he in, and what prompted him to go back to the classroom?
2. Where did he go for his training and why?
3. In addition to hard technical skills, what soft skills could he update on the course?
4. What possibly surprising, and not-so-surprising elements were included in another 3-week advanced management course run by Cambridge University?
5. Why are some managers returning to business schools that they attended and graduated from possibly many years in the past?
6. What alternatives are there for leaders who do not want to travel and take intensive courses at well-known business schools?

## 4 Business language – useful phrases

a. Find multi-word expressions in the article that have the same or a very similar meaning to the explanations below. The paragraph numbers will help you.

1. get further information or a different way of understanding something (paragraph 6)
2. can be found elsewhere too (paragraph 8)
3. a short quiet period in something that is usually active or busy (paragraph 11)
4. a renewed interest in something (paragraph 11)
5. get someone to own up and acknowledge their deeds or needs (paragraph 20)
6. try not to fall far behind other people's knowledge and skills (paragraph 22)

b. Now use these phrases to talk about the article, changing the forms wherever necessary.

## 5 Business language – initialisms

**initialism**      noun countable      /ɪˈnɪʃ(ə)lɪz(ə)m/  
an abbreviation consisting of the first letters of each word, pronounced separately.

a. Find three initialisms in the article.

Write the letters; then write out what they stand for.

*E.g., NHS = National Health Service*

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b. What are these further initialisms short for?

CEO \_\_\_\_\_

CFO \_\_\_\_\_

COO \_\_\_\_\_

c. What other business-related (or work-related) initialisms do you know?

## 6 Discussion questions

a. Discuss the questions and support your answers with facts, figures, and opinions.

What, if any, upper-age limit would you set for participation in training courses and mentoring programmes?

How realistic and important are life-long learning and CPD?

Should business leaders be treated in the same way and offered the same training as employees?

## 7 Wider business theme – Continuing professional development (CPD)

- a. You work in the HR department of a large company and have been tasked to come up with CPD training options for employees at upper-management level, and possibly even the company's three executive board members.

Look back at the article and your answers in task 1 and decide which three topics you'd like to offer first and how you will go about this.

- b. Compare these points and consider the pros and cons – including costs – of each:

- in-house or off-site
- intensive (e.g., a one week full-time course) or training spread out over months
- online or face-to-face
- in-company trainers and specialists (e.g., someone from the legal or insurance department) or outside consultants
- training in groups or individual training

- c. Write up your suggestions and email them to your company's CEO.