

## Upskilling for business leaders

### 1 Warmer

a. What is upskilling?

1. putting more skills on your CV than other applicants
2. extra training for workers to make them better at their job
3. more money given to people who do difficult jobs

b. Which of the sentences do you most agree with and why?

Upskilling is important if you want to earn more money.

Upskilling can help older employees keep their jobs.

Upskilling is most important in IT companies.

Upskilling shows that you are serious about your work.

### 2 Key words

a. Write the words from the boxes next to the definitions below them.

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

ambiguity      applications      coders      priorities      squad      volatility

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

*At the meeting, we talked about the \_\_\_\_\_ of the new software.*

2. important things that need to be dealt with first \_\_\_\_\_

*Good-employee health insurance is one of our top \_\_\_\_\_*

3. 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.*

4. 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 shouldn't invest our money yet.*

5. a small group of people who do a particular job \_\_\_\_\_

*Ever since she joined the police, Frances had always wanted to work in the drugs*

\_\_\_\_\_

6. computer programmers, developers, or software engineers \_\_\_\_\_

*The \_\_\_\_\_ are creating a new website and app for our company.*

boards

cynicism

disruption

mentoring

off-site

resilience

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

*Our new \_\_\_\_\_ programme is very popular with the trainees.*

8. the belief that things will not be successful or useful \_\_\_\_\_

*There is now widespread \_\_\_\_\_ about the government and its leader.*

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

*Patients' meals are cooked \_\_\_\_\_ and delivered to the hospital in trucks.*

10. someone's ability to become healthy, happy, or strong again after an illness, disappointment, or other problem \_\_\_\_\_

*Despite doing two jobs, she showed great \_\_\_\_\_ to stress.*

11. doing things in new ways that change the way an industry or business operates

\_\_\_\_\_

*Digital \_\_\_\_\_ is going to bring big changes to businesses within the next five years.*

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

*He is on the \_\_\_\_\_ of several NGOs (non-governmental organisations).*

## 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

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- 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.

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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 is his business, and why did he decide 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 surprising morning classes were part of another 3-week advanced management course run by Cambridge University?
5. Why are some managers returning to their former business schools?
6. What other options are there for leaders who do not want to travel and take intensive courses at well-known UK business schools?

## 4 Business language – useful phrases

a. Put the letters in *italics* in the right order to complete these multi-word expressions from the article.

1. a bigger change = a broader *fhsti* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 4)
2. get further information or a different way of understanding something = gain fresh *hnssiitg* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 6)
3. a short quiet period in something that is usually active or busy = a brief *ulll* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 11)
4. a renewed interest in something = a fresh *paeteitp* \_\_\_\_\_ for something (paragraph 11)
5. provide people with something they want or need = *actre* \_\_\_\_\_ to something or someone (paragraph 11)
6. get someone to own up and acknowledge their deeds or needs = hold someone to *tcaocun* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 20)

b. With a partner, use the expressions to talk or write sentences about the article.

## 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 and then write out what they stand for.

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

**b. What are these other initialisms short for?**

CEO \_\_\_\_\_

CFO \_\_\_\_\_

COO \_\_\_\_\_

**c. What other business-related initialisms do you know?**

## 6 Discussion questions

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

At what age should employees stop taking part in training courses and mentoring programmes?

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

Should business leaders be offered the same training, with the same trainers, as employees?

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

### a. You work in the HR department of a large company.

You have been tasked to think about CPD training for employees at upper-management level.

Look back at the article (especially paragraphs 13 & 14) and decide which two topics you'd like to offer and the best way to offer the training.

### b. Think about the pros and cons of these points – including the costs:

- In-house or off-site
- a one-week full-time course or one day a month for 6 months
- online or face-to-face
- in-company trainers and specialists (e.g., someone from the legal or insurance department) or outside specialists and consultants
- training in groups or individual training

### c. Decide what you'd like to offer and why and tell the group.