

Multiversity: Exploring Talent Development Program for Innovation and Cross-sector Industry Growth

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ABSTRACT

With the burning challenges in China's urbanization and recent movement of mass innovation and entrepreneurship in China, the changing learning landscape and competence model of the most demanded talent urges for institutional innovation in creating something new out of the box, which also tackled the barriers in the development of cultural creative industries. The common industry concern and bottleneck appeared to be the lack of talent with innovation leadership and entrepreneurship. 'Innovation Leadership' is found the most demanded characteristic for today's talents. The gap for the most demanded talents particular in tech-led cultural tourism sector, called as 'cultural planning producer', needs to be filled with well-researched, all-rounded talent development program with innovative approaches. Emerging as a unique institution that has the diversity of knowledge offerings to talent and society, Multiversity embraces the multi-linkage of a wide range of stakeholders in business ecosystem as well as people of all age groups and professions, which can serve to bridge the gap. Taking Huashan Multiversity's Executive Development Program (EDP) as an example, how talent development program could serve as one of the key solutions in shaping the innovation ecosystem for entrepreneurship and sustainable cultural development is illustrated. A number of experiments in creating a new learning environment and sharing community for collaboration were conducted in the pilot project 'EDP Cultural Spaces in Urbanization', the result of which offers new concepts of immersive learning, modern mentorship, innovation task force and high-potential talent program for future studies.

Keywords: Multiversity, Talent development, Innovation ecosystem, Cultural space, Entrepreneurship

1. MASS INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In China today the government is urging local government to provide support for ‘mass innovation and entrepreneurship’. Premier Li Keqiang says that employees of large enterprises and grassroots entrepreneurs can both create and gain more wealth through entrepreneurship and innovation, an important part of adjusting the income distribution structure and an engine that will drive social equality and justice.¹ Governments at all levels are encouraged to purchase innovative products and services from start-ups that can enjoy favorable policies to issue IPOs and obtain funds through the bond market.² As a result, more efforts are being made in building the spaces and facilities to boost innovation and startups, namely incubators, accelerators, and all sorts of co-working spaces, makerspaces, startup cafés, and innovation hubs. Fresh graduates, college students, and freelancers provide a new army of young entrepreneurs.

Technological innovation has embraced culture, tourism, and other parts of the economy in the building of an ‘innovation-driven nation’. Capacity building training for professionals and executive mentoring programs are an important part of the new ecosystem of ‘mass innovation and entrepreneurship’.

The question remains: what is the competence model for cultural entrepreneurs and innovation leaders in the context of the convergence of culture and technology? A recent market survey, *Global Human Capital Trends 2015* (Deloitte University Press, 2015), on the kinds of talent most in demand in the Asia-Pacific reveals a need for interdisciplinary entrepreneurs and executives with high cultural consciousness as well as an in-depth understanding of market laws. A second but equally important finding is that there is a lack of creative people with innovative ability in the upstream of the cultural creative industrial chain, such as high-end cross-sector professionals who understand culture and who can master

technological applications. Last but not least, the study identified a scarcity in cross-cultural international talent with a broad global perspective, people who understand international laws and regulations and who have cultural awareness of foreign customs and consumption preferences.

Among other traits, leadership is the most in demand characteristic of the creative work force. The demand for talented leadership was ranked top in the Asia-Pacific region. China is experiencing unprecedented urbanization and serious cultural development problems exist in most regional cities because of a lack of programs or a lack of cultural content. The unbalanced development of hard and soft cultural infrastructure has two causes. One is the lack of talents, particularly theatre professionals and arts management talents; another is the lack of soft infrastructure, such as the overall capacity for curating, the supply of cultural content, and the management of cultural spaces like theatres and museums.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF MULTIVERSITY

The changing learning landscape requires institutional innovation in order to create something new out of the traditional education system. For instance, a unique institution that has a diversity of knowledge offerings to industry and society together with creative intelligence of multiple learning resources while retaining the spirit and reputation of the university—the Multiversity.

Multiversity is not a newly invented word; the concept dates to Clark Kerr’s Godkin Lectures at Harvard University in 1963 (Wagner, 2007). Kerr believed that the university in its classical sense had ceased to be functional. The term ‘Multiversity’ has been used on many occasions since to describe an institution with multiple disciplines and programs, or a system of multiple schools or campuses. A university often emphasizes a community of like-minded scholars with oneness of vision, purpose and aspiration. In the university setting, moreover, there is an increasing danger

¹ More information can be found in <http://english.gov.cn/premier/news/2015/10/19/content>

² Xinhua News (June 16, 2015). Guideline to promote mass entrepreneurship, innovation. Retrieved from http://www.china.org.cn/business/2015-06/16/content_35834117.htm

of conflicting interests between the pursuit of knowledge and its commercialization.

Today, the landscape of education and training has changed, particular in the field of innovation and leadership for executives and professionals. The term 'learning' is often used rather than 'education' to reflect a lifelong, proactive attitude towards knowledge generation and innovation. Communities enable both learning and collaboration. In this sense, a community-like Multiversity cherishes the value of connectivity, sharing, and collaboration by creating a dynamic learning environment.

Can the university-centric educational system be challenged by a Multiversity-based learning platform? This paper urges us to rethink the pedagogy and teaching methodologies in developing the all-rounded competence required for the ever-changing integrated business setting. It has been observed for instance that entrepreneurs capture business opportunities where there are unsatisfied demands; very often they develop products and services to cater to market needs. However, between research/invention, innovation, and new business opportunities, there is a gap often called the 'Valley of Death' or the 'Darwinian Sea' (Auerswald & Branswomb, 2003).³ Most businesses trying to innovate 'struggle for life' in a sea of technological and entrepreneurial risks. The challenge is how to successfully survive the Valley of Death or the Darwinian Sea. Obviously, knowledge, skillsets, entrepreneurial and management capacity contribute to the 'survival toolkit'.

Through a case study of Huashan Multiversity's Executive Development Program, this paper argues that the practice-based Multiversity offers an effective approach for developing innovative leadership capabilities for executives, entrepreneurs, and professionals.

The background—as it often is in China—is state policy. In June 2012, *The National Cultural Technology Innovation Initiative Briefing*⁴ was jointly

launched by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Culture, and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television. It was the first time that China's Ministry of Science and Technology took the initiative and a leading role in urging technology-led and innovation-driven cultural development. Talent development was addressed as one of the key measures. Inter-disciplinary curricula of science, humanity, and management were encouraged in higher education and research institutions.

To implement the national initiative, the China Innovation Service Alliance for Culture and Technology (hereafter refers as 'the Alliance') was founded in 2014. It offers a range of innovation services in cultural project development, talent training, investment fund and international collaboration. Receiving RMB 30 million seed fund (US\$4.48 million) for the first year of a three-year plan from the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Alliance contributed to the birth of Huashan Multiversity.

In 2014, BOP Consulting, a London based consulting firm specializing in cultural creative industries was commissioned by UK government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office to conduct a research on the sustainable cultural infrastructure development in China. BOP's research identified five potential opportunities: (1) the operation of commercial ventures with cultural venues, (2) placemaking, (3) audience development, (4) cultural venue technology, and (5) talent development programs. The demand for talents obviously stands out and a huge gap is expected to be filled by offering professional training and executive development program for capacity building.

The emergence of the Multiversity can be explained by the theory of creative destruction, an economic theory of innovation popularized by Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter (1883-

³ Both terms are used to refer to the survival of start-up firms. The 'Valleys of Death', or the 'Death Valley Curve', refer to a period of time between where a start-up firm receives an initial capital to when it begins to receive revenue. The 'Darwinian Sea' is used as a metaphor to illustrate that between a stable shore and the business enterprises, there is a sea of life of death for businesses and technical ideas which will determine their survival.

1950). He believed that “innovation as the critical dimension of economic change” (Schumpeter, 1942); creative destruction is evident in the new economy. Schumpeter’s theories could be used to explain how business innovations in education are influencing cross-sector industrial development, leading to the emergence of new, competitive business models and strategies of an innovation eco-system. In the field of digital technology, innovation is being driven by entrepreneurs such as Larry Page and Sergey Brin (Google) and the late Steve Jobs (Apple). These entrepreneurs have revolutionized the economic structures of many industries, creating new markets and organizational business models in a ‘gale of creative destruction’ (Walton & Oestreicher, 2012).

In the education sector, innovators, thinking in new and radical ways, can redefine the rules of the market leading to economic growth by providing sustainable new market developments.

As mentioned in the introduction, innovation has become a buzzword recently, from the government to grass-roots level. In business settings, we see all types of innovation behavior, from product innovation, service innovation, to design innovation; from process innovation, organizational innovation, to business model innovation. Innovation is shifting its paradigm. Previously, innovation had something to do with tangible goods, for instance personal computers, smart phones, or automobiles with new functions. That is what we called technological innovation and product innovation. In fact, innovation can now be found in more intangible domains.

Business model innovation has attracted increasing attention not only in the business world but also in the education and training sector. A business model draws on a multitude of business subjects, including economics, entrepreneurship, finance, marketing, operations, and strategy. In some cases the innovation rests not in the product or service but in the business model itself as busi-

ness models convert new technology to economic values. A mediocre innovation with a great business model may be more profitable than a great innovation with a mediocre business model (Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002). Institutions and companies are increasingly turning toward business model innovation as an alternative or complement to product or process innovation.

‘Innovation Leadership’ is in demand. Executives and business leaders face tough challenges on daily basis, most of which relate to business models. So, competence in managing creativity and innovation is highly sought after in professionals and executives working in cultural creative sectors. Taking projects in cultural tourism and urban regeneration for instance, the most important role is the ‘cultural planning producer’, the person who is in charge of the overall project development, from concept development to cultural planning, from investment to operations, similar to a 2-in-1 role of a director and a producer in performing arts or in film industry. Obviously, at this stage in China, there is a demand gap for cultural planning producers who are capable to integrate culture technology and business into the culture creative sector and cultural tourism with spillover effects in the regional economic and social development. Such gap of human resources needs to be filled with well-researched, all rounded talent development program with innovative approaches.

Emerging as a unique institution with a diversity of knowledge offerings, the Multiversity embraces the multi-linkage of a wide range of stakeholders in the business ecosystem as well as attracting people of all age groups and professions, who can serve to bridge the gap. The Multiversity also serves as a multi-system for learning as well as a public platform for knowledge sharing and inter-sectoral collaborations, facilitating the development of initiatives, resources allocation, and programs for skills and capabilities development.

⁴ The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China (2012). 國科發高 [2012]759 號 [High-tech development Dept. Ministry of Science and Technology, P. R. China]. Retrieved from http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2012-08/24/content_2210057.htm

3. CASE STUDY: HUASHAN MULTIVERSITY'S EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

In the past decade strategy and policy-making of cultural creative industries have been supervised by Ministry of Culture, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television. The sector's growth and regional development under such an administrative hierarchy have not yet reached a satisfactory performance in terms of overall economic outputs and socio-cultural development. Regardless of the endless efforts in urging the application of culture creativity and design into manufacturing sectors and other non-creative industries, the spillover effects of creativity being observed by other sectors of the economy have not been fully realized. Inter-sector collaboration and convergence of culture and technology desired for transformational approaches. Policy advocacies and action plans shall be in place but are not enough to push the transformation. What industry needs is to explore business model innovation with manageable risks. Therefore, down-to-earth initia-

tives with incentives and pilot projects with funding are probably the right approaches to trigger the transformation by covering the business risks.

Initiated by China Innovation Service Alliance for Culture and Technology, and funded by Ministry of Science and Technology, Huashan Multiversity is an independent postgraduate education and training organization specializing in the convergence of culture, technology, and innovation. The birth of Huashan Multiversity was a result of a strategic partnership between the Alliance and Shanghai Theatre Academy. Huashan, literally refers to Huashan Mountain, symbolizing the summit (the top of Huashan Mountain), perfectly projects the aspired position of Multiversity.

Prior to the establishment of the program, a market survey was conducted in 2015 to understand how cultural innovation drives urbanization and economic transformation and what capacities and skillsets are necessary for the future all-rounded talents. The survey gathered responses from 312

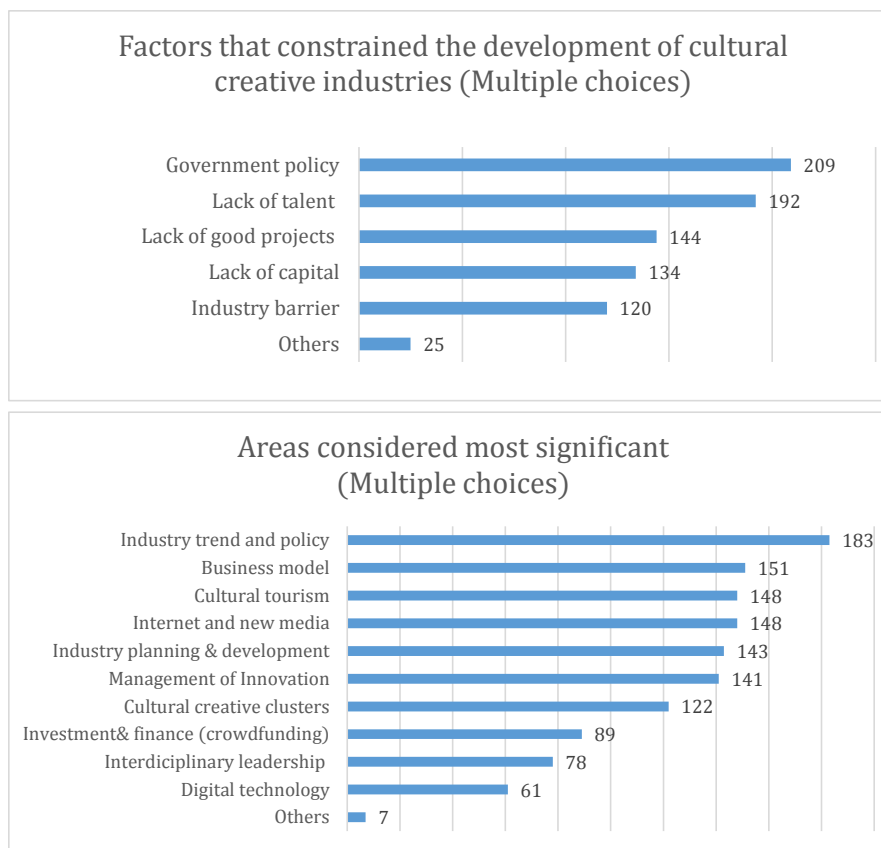


Figure 1. Summary of the market survey prior to the establishment of Multiversity

participants of productive age (20-60 years old) who mostly hold a bachelor's or master's degree. They came from more than 28 sectors including government, education and research, creative and design, consulting, IT, media, and finance with various occupational levels from senior executives to startup entrepreneurs (Figure 1).

The results identified constraints in the development of cultural industries, areas of focus where respondents identified concerns, the perception of international sources to learn from, and the types of talented personnel required for cultural and creative industries. The results were used as the base of forming the model for the Executive Development Program.

3.1 Competence Model for Cultural Professional and Innovation Leader

Competence refers to a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, cognitive skills, behavior and values used to improve performances; or the ability to perform a specific role

that meet the set standards. In order to better understand the competence required for most demanded cultural planning producer, Huashan Multiversity conducted a market survey with an aim to establish a competence model for cultural professionals and innovation leaders in 2015. The study investigated three layers of competences perceived to be important for cultural professional and innovation leader (Figure 2). The inner layer is core competence, which typically comprises fundamental knowledge, ability and skill set in cultural production. For the above-mentioned target group, the core competence refers to the management of creativity, cross-cultural leadership, entrepreneurship, team-work and communication, responsibility and trustworthy. The middle layer is professional competence. It can be professional capacity in arts and culture or sector, or in digital technology, planning and design. Economic understanding of culture creative industries is essential for decision making, while strategy and managerial skills in investment and operations are important for those executives and senior management.

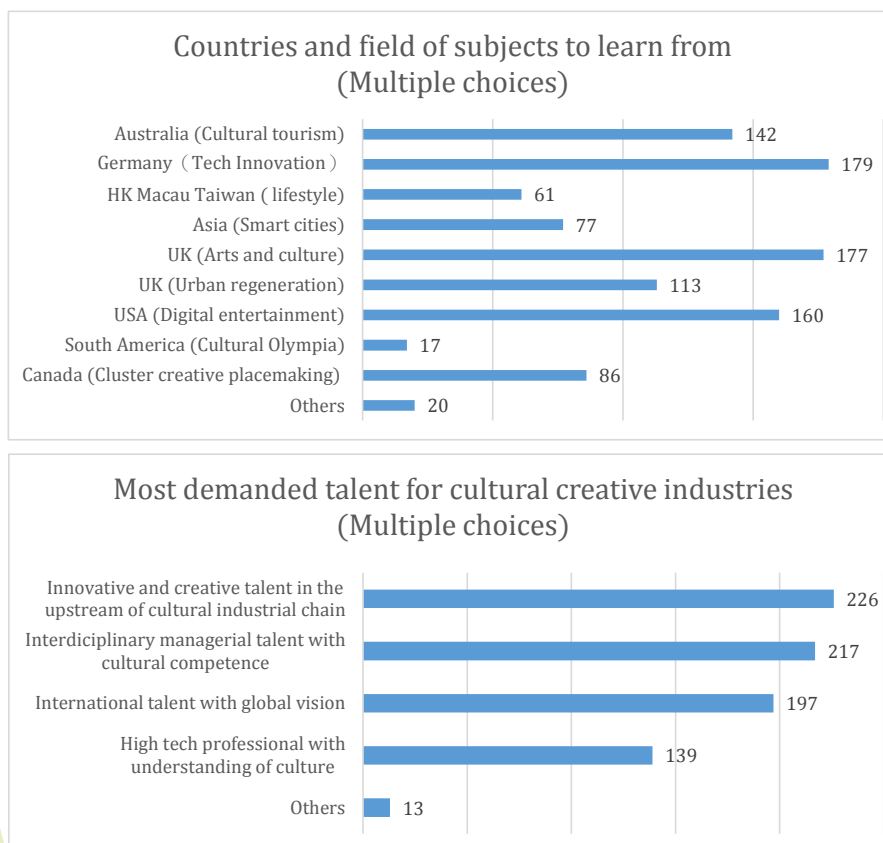


Figure 1. Summary of the market survey prior to the establishment of Multiversity (continued)

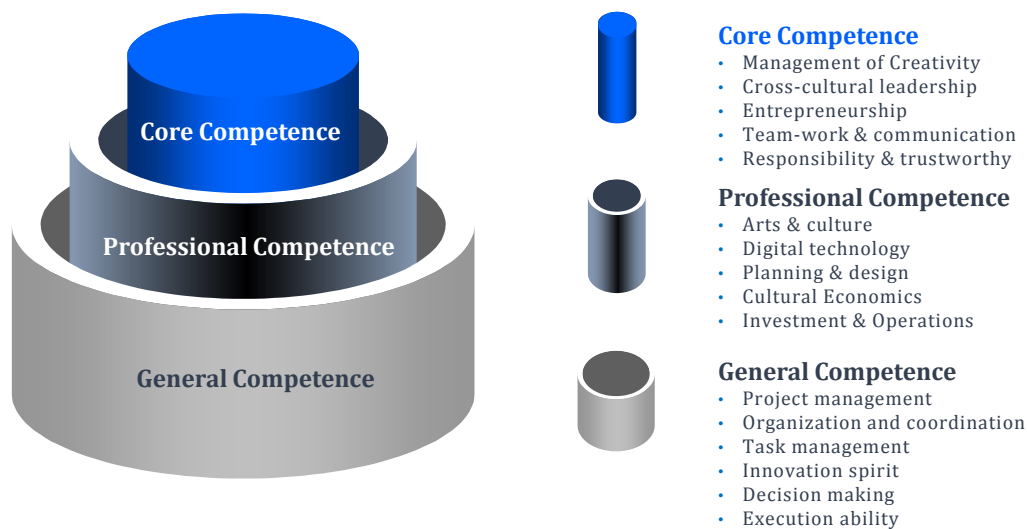


Figure 2. The competence model for cultural production professional
Source: Huashan Multiversity research (available at www.hsinnouedu.com)

The outer layer is general competence, which is much more relevant to junior to middle level professionals. No matter which sector a professional is working for, he or she shall possess the basic skills and behavior, namely project management, organization and coordination, task management, innovation, decision-making, and execution ability.

Based on the research finding on the competence model for cultural production professional, this paper argues that Innovation Leadership is the core competence, which requires embedded inter-linked capacities shaped by the capabilities in business innovation, project management, cultural awareness, foresight decision-making, and adaptability to change (Figure 3). Huashan Multiversity's pilot project, the EDP on Cultural Space in Urbanization (discussed below), aims to develop innovation leadership for EDP participants in its one-year program through knowledge sharing, practice-based learning and carefully designed mentoring program.

3.2 The EDP on Cultural Space in Urbanization

Cultural planning producer is an important role in large-scale cultural projects. Such leading role makes a critical contribution; he or she will have to take full responsibility in the commercialization of cultural resources and overall project manage-

ment, from concept development to architectural design, from business model innovation to operational management.

The one-year comprehensive EDP on Cultural Spaces in Urbanization was developed to cultivate cultural planning producers that the market demanded; the program sought to shape multiple abilities in cultural planning, technological innovation, architectural design, investment, operational management together with an in-depth understanding of international practices and global vision. In this program, Huashan Multiversity takes the responsibility to enhance cross-sector development by offering talent development services, consulting and advisory services as well as running a number of activities, such as conferences and seminars, roadshows and industry promotion events.

3.3 The Immersive Learning Approach

Normally, universities have structured curricula with most courses taken in classroom or in campus. The single discipline approach is good for specialist talent, but obviously has its constraints in dealing with the complexity of the real working environment.

Huashan Multiversity, as a non-conventional educational institute, believes that experiential edu-

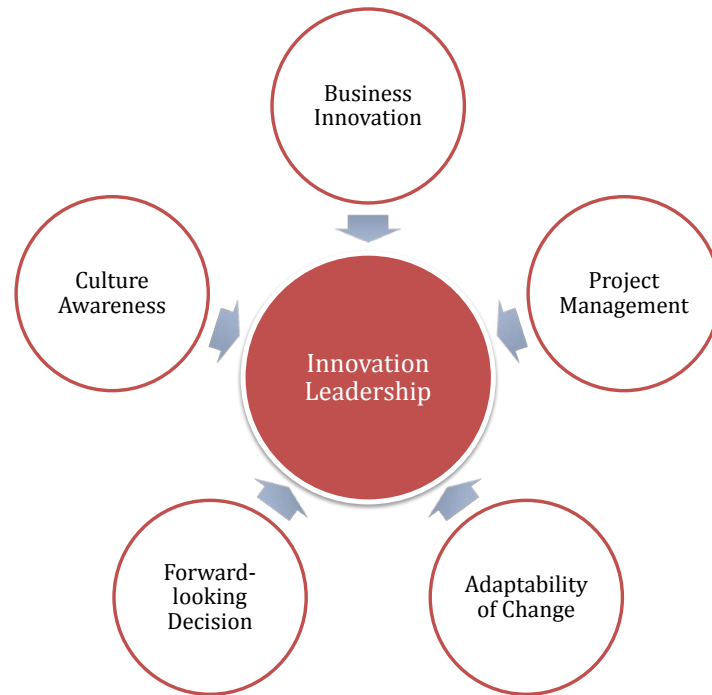


Figure 3. The Innovation Leadership Framework

Source: Huashan Multiversity research (available at www.hsinnnoedu.com)

cation in real scenarios will be more suitable for practice-based talent development program. Real scenarios, particular those sites of best practices and projects-in-progress, and even some case studies of failure, help to create a unique learning environment for immersive experiencing and blended education. The immersive learning approach is focused on four steps: (1) to design learning tasks, (2) to develop learning products, (3) to apply technology in learning, and (4) to facilitate sharing and collaborations.

An example is the Wuzhen cultural tourism program. Wuzhen is a historical water town with beautiful rural settings and rich cultural heritages. Wuzhen is now recognized as the best practice of integrating culture and technology into its tourism and regional development. By hosting influential annual events such as Wuzhen Theatre Festival, World Internet Conference, and recently Arts Wuzhen and many other folk activities, Wuzhen embraced culture, heritage, Internet, arts, and tourism into one destination. What lessons and inspirations could be learned

from Wuzhen's story? Nothing could be better explained than exploring the culturally distinguished water town with curiosity. Huashan Multiversity launched the first immersive learning program, "Wuzhen Discovery & Cultural Tourism", on October 2015 when The 3rd Wuzhen International Theatre Festival⁵ was happening. Instead of a conventional training, Huashan Multiversity applied TIE (theatre in education) and DIE (drama in education) methodologies into the experiential education with multiple tools of applied theatre in the learning process.

Theatre played a significant role in the immersive learning; it is a helpful tool for facilitating the participants to reflect on their learning outputs. Forum theatre is created by the innovative and influential practitioner Augusto Boal for teaching people how to change their world (Boal, 2000) in which 'simultaneous dramaturgy' is applied in the process. The actors or audience members could stop a performance, and the audience could come on stage and perform their own interventions. By applying the approach of Forum Theatre, Huashan

⁵ More information on Wuzhen Festival is provided in <http://www.wuzhenfestival.com>

Multiversity created a play—*Wuzhen Story*—for participants to express their different viewpoints on tourism development. Half of the play was pre-written to tell the story of Mr. Chen Xianghong who is the founder and CEO of Wuzhen Tourism Group. The Multiversity team had some rehearsals and performed the first-half play during the immersive learning program. The play stopped at a controversial point, where the participants determined what the fate of the ‘characters’ would be. Some performed the character of Chen Xianghong, some played the roles of property developer, local resident, government official and employees. The whole theatrical experience required improvisational teamwork and thoughtful reflections on what participants had observed. While traditional learning was delivered mostly by means of lectures or desktop information, the course satisfactory survey revealed that the experience of a participatory forum theatre on one specific learning subject was unforgettable for most participants. With such features, the immersive learning experience also allowed Multiversity to perform ‘out of the box’.

3.4 The Modern Mentorship

The mentoring program has expanded mainly in training. Mentorship is a relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person (Farren, 2012). When Huashan Multiversity recruited participants for its first EDP on Cultural Spaces in Urbanization, one of the experimental ideas was to divide participants (“mentees”) into several innovation task forces (Figure 4).

The participants were grouped into project teams with members from different sectors, different educational background and expertise. A typical innovation task force is shaped by a group of 6-7 participants from the interdependent sectors, for instance, policy-maker from government or state-owned enterprise, consultant, and professional in concept develop-

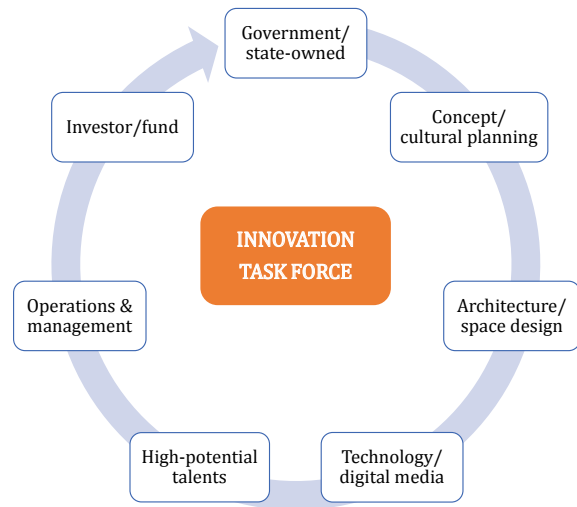


Figure 4. Participants of the EDP program are grouped into an Innovation Task Force handling a real project

ment and cultural planning. Innovation task force assigned to real projects of cultural space would not function properly without an urban designer and an architect who contribute to the overall spatial planning. People with technology background and expertise in digital media applications will definitely support the creative expression and cultural production by the application of technology. The innovation task force can hardly perform well in real project without professionals from operations and investment. EDP program purposely engage high potential talents, who may have different mindsets, fresh ideas, and probably are equipped with knowledge of the latest technologies, to contribute to a diverse learning environment working together with senior executives. By grouping EDP participants from different sectors and different age groups, the innovation task force aims to shape a mini internal ecosystem which is open for external collaborators in delivering real projects.

What Huashan Multiversity applied is the Modern Mentorship model. The group of mentees will be embedded in a “1+1+1” mentor group—the Academic Director, Industry Mentor, and International Expert—to supervise theories, practices,

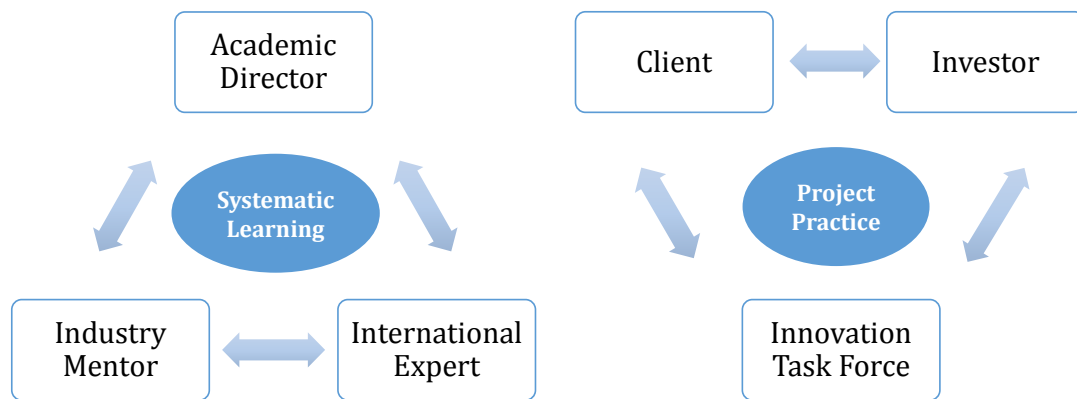


Figure 5. Modern mentorship for EDP on Cultural Spaces in Urbanization

and global perspectives (Figure 5). The blended mentors will be supported by the Director of Teaching Affairs from Huashan Multiversity and a handful of industry experts who will be giving lectures and workshops where they can share the industry insights. During EDP's specific modules the mentoring team and the innovation task force (mentees) will team up to work together on real projects for a sustained period of time from 2 months up to one year. During the face-to-face mentoring program, relevant knowledge and expertise, wisdom and experience, social capital, and the psychosocial support of mentors will be transferred informally to the mentees.

3.5 Flexible Tuition Based on Contributions

Normally educational organizations and training agencies charge tuition for their training programs. For Multiversity, the revenues could be flexible in the pursuit of value creation by joining forces. In EDP on Cultural Spaces in Urbanization for example, tuition is not the only stream of income. The flexible payment and revenue could come in any one of the following sources: (1) participants or their employer paid the tuition, sometimes partial payments applied; (2) government or corporates commissioned a project to Huashan Multiversity in exchange of 1-2 free seats in the EDP program; (3) consulting services in-kind. Example for the latter one,

the pilot 'innovation task force' from Beijing was waived of their tuition costs in exchange of contributing their services and expertise in-kind to a consulting project that Huashan Multiversity will take from clients or from the Alliance in the coming one year.

In that case Multiversity truly becomes a learning platform as well as a sharing community for professional development, business collaborations, and industry growth. The challenge for Multiversity is to manage the training/talent development and consulting services at the same time.

3.6 Knowledge Transfer to High Potential Talents and Young Entrepreneurs

What Huashan Multiversity is concerned with is the knowledge transfer mechanism and its spillover effects for maximizing the benefits to the entire society: How to make the most out of the EDP resources to benefit a large number of up-and-coming successful young leaders for the future? Could the Multiversity be a sustainable model for a third party educational institution to invest in talent?

There is no ready answer to the above questions. The answers will emerge throughout the experiments in the later stage.

The EDP on Cultural Spaces in Urbanization was designed for successful business leaders and established cultural professionals to further develop their innovation leadership and overall competence in pursuit of excellence. Huashan Multiversity, while positioned to target senior executives and industry professionals, is expected to make contributions to the national program of 'mass innovation and entrepreneurship'. The key contribution is to cultivate future leaders for the benefit of industry development rather than management successors for a corporate entity. A variety of teaching faculty and rich industry recourses (e.g. Guru and thought leaders) will be allocated to the EDP program for just a small number of participants (Figure 6). During and after the EDP program, the selected talented personnel will share their learnings and experiences with a wider range of college students and young graduates. Ideally, the spillover effect of knowledge transfer will be transferred to a younger and junior group of talents.

4. CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING: AN ONGOING EXPERIMENT

Multiversity challenges conventional education in terms of institutional structure, methodology, and competencies of talents. Multiversity embraces the multi-linkage of a wide range of

stakeholders in the business ecosystem as well as people of all ages, groups, and professions, rather than a simplistic dimension of students and faculties in the traditional university. A community-like multiversity cherishes the value of connectivity, sharing and collaborations. The changing learning landscape for institutional innovation is creating something new out of the traditional education system.

Multiversity is emerging as a unique institution that provides a diversity of knowledge offerings to talented people and to society. Currently, Huashan Multiversity is in its early stage of development, its value and unique selling propositions have not been fully realized. With a forward-looking vision and structured business plan, the new form of Multiversity is expected to make the contributions set out below, and probably beyond.

Challenges are evident in many aspects of China's urbanization and in the recent movement of mass innovation and entrepreneurship. The fact of unsustainable cultural infrastructure was mainly attributed to the lack of talents and the lack of overall capacities for programming cultural supply and management. The development of cultural creative industries addresses the issue of talents as a bottleneck. Undoubtedly, the

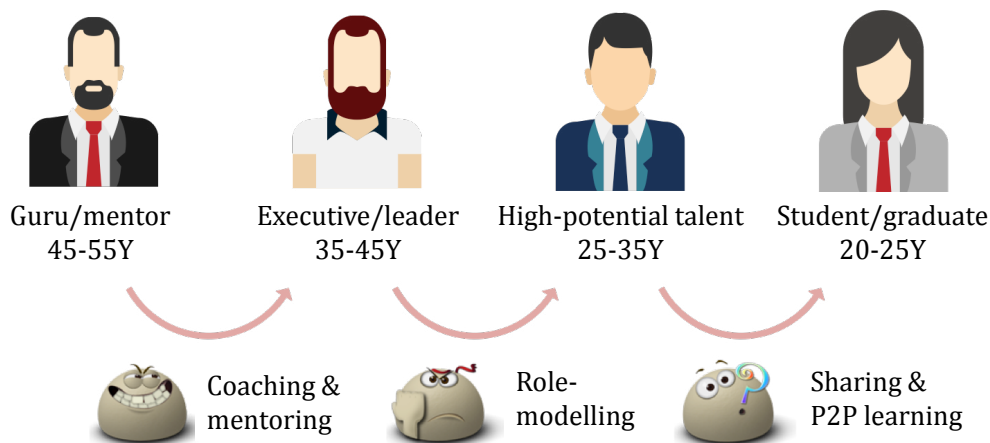


Figure 6. The mentoring program and knowledge transfer mechanism

demand for talents has created a huge gap to fill in by supplying capacity building professional training and executive development program that are catered to the needs of the market.

Innovation leadership is the most sought-after characteristic. This paper urges us to rethink pedagogy in cultivating talent and preparing a creative workforce for the future. The case of Huashan Multiversity is offered as an experimental study in knowledge sharing and innovation in education. The first pilot project—the EDP on Cultural Spaces in Urbanization—provides insights of immersive learning, modern mentoring, innovation task force, and high-potential talents as references for exploring business innovation in the emerging field of talent development.

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