NEW IMD PRESIDENT JEAN-FRANCOIS MANZONI FINDS THE SEA CHANGES IN EXECUTIVE EDUCATION INVIGORATING. BY ANNA TEO

BUSINESS SCHOOLS UPENDED

LISTENING to IMD president Jean-Francois Manzoni talk about the dramatic changes that have swept the field of executive education over the years, it's apparent that business schools themselves make a great subject for case studies. People are still pursuing MBA's, but just about every facet of the paper chase—from competition and curriculum to mode of learning and needs of clients—has been upended. Indeed, disruption has hit schools big time, not least Lausanne-based IMD which, unlike most other top-ranked schools, is not affiliated to any university and is focused on, as one of its taglines says, "Developing executives, transforming organisations".

IMD and the likes of Harvard, Wharton and INSEAD have seen over the last decade the rise of local business schools, particularly in Europe, that "have really ramped up, have become increasingly effective, and are now much stronger competitors, than they used to be", says the leadership professor, who has been at the helm of IMD since Jan 1, returning to Switzerland after five years teaching at IMD's Singapore campus. But that's "not the most dramatic evolution for us", he adds.

The change with possibly the biggest impact, he says, is "the rise of integrated providers and of non-academic providers of executive and organisational development efforts".

He names as an example of the latter, Manzoni, a consultancy specialising in organisational development that was founded in Denmark, and now has offices beyond Scandinavia, in London and Hong Kong.

As for the "integrated providers", he points to the leading executive search firms as increasingly an example, citing Korn Ferry and Heidrick & Struggles, both of which have been acquiring firms in adjacent fields, he notes.

"We've seen this coming," says Prof Manzoni, who has spent his 24-year academic career between IMD and IESE. He is speaking to BT at IESE's South East Asia Executive Learning Center at South Beach Tower.

"The first time I presented this to the IMD board was 2007—I was at IMD at that time—and I drew a graph and I said, here's the danger for us: You have search firms that are completely saying 'look, when we headhunters search, we assess the candidate and we match the candidate with the needs of the organisation. That means that one of our core capabilities is the assessment aspect. How about we start to develop the assessment as a separate business line?'

"And of course Egon Zehnder was one of the first to start to do this on a big scale. I remember in 2003 when I was working with a very large organisation, and Egon Zehnder was doing an assessment of the (firm's) top 200.

"The assessment would typically conclude with an individual professional and personal development plan. And from there, it's a short walk to 'and how about we help you bridge those gaps?', thereby stepping into the executive development market space.

"So, it was quite clear already 10 years ago, that there was a big danger for us, for these firms to say, hey, we can actually move upstream on the education side, the individual development side, and the organisational development side," he says.

While Korn Ferry and Heidrick & Struggles have made clear decisions to go in that space by themselves, other search firms are still mulling over whether to do it themselves or jointly with a partner, he reckons.

"We've gone through exactly the same discussions. We know we need to become more engaged in advisory services we know we need to develop on the assessment side, and the question is— how much will we do this by ourselves?
and how much will we do in this partnership?"

Indeed, "you see this in every industry," he says of the cross-industry encroachment, as it were, that has seen, for instance, the Big Four erstwhile audit firms turn into multidisciplinary professional services firms, notably with legal services.

"Today you have pharma companies that are increasingly going onto the nutrition side, and then you have nutrition companies, like the Neutrogena of the world, increasingly working upstream, on the pharmaceutical side, so that the split in the middle is called nutritionals," he notes wryly.

"So the way you, also, have the technology companies that are increasingly going with the wearables and stuff in the health space. So you see this everywhere - this convergence that leads to much more fluid industry boundaries than before."

The real world

President, IMD

Jean-François Manzoni

Jean-François Manzoni is President of IMD, a business school with campuses in Europe, Asia and the Americas. He joined IMD in 2001 and became President in 2010.

Previous positions include: Director of the Strategic Management Center and Professor at INSEAD, Director of the Strategic Management and Organizational Competition Institutes and Professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

Manzoni holds a PhD in Business Administration from Harvard University and a Master of Science in Economics from University of Lausanne.

Jean-François Manzoni is widely published on leadership, strategy and innovation. He is the co-author of several books, including "Management by Design" (Harvard Business School Press) and "Beyond Strategy" (Harvard Business Review). He is a frequent contributor to leading business publications and is a regular guest on television and radio shows.

Manzoni is a member of the Board of Directors of the Business and Sustainability Network (BSN) in Singapore.

Manzoni is widely respected as a thought leader in the field of leadership and strategy. He is a frequent speaker at leading business schools and conferences around the world.

He is married to Sandrine, and they have two children. Manzoni is a native French speaker and fluent in English.

The big issues

"The big issue for us is really one of the areas on which we are putting a lot of emphasis is what we call "digital business transformation" - we have a research centre in partnership with Cisco, and this centre is producing a lot of knowledge into frameworks, and we are doing a lot of work on that aspect," he says of the work that they are doing at IMD.

"Right now one of the areas on which we are focusing is how to get more leadership knowledge into this," he says. "We have a lot of knowledge on what we do, which we can adapt to the context of what we do."

And in terms of course content, it's not just new technologies or big changes in the established fields, "think of marketing over the last few years," he says, "where we're changing, he says," is "the speed at which we have to adapt the content of what we do."

"And not least, technology is an extraordinary challenge and an opportunity," he says. "There are a lot of companies that are looking at the digital landscape and trying to transform their organizations, and we're working with them to help them do that."

"And one of the things that's really interesting is how companies are using these technologies to transform their organizations," he says. "The idea is to be able to adapt the content of what we do to the context of what we do."