by Johan Roos

Reimagining Business Schools for a Regenerative Future

Introduction: Why Business Schools Must Change Now

In over three decades of experience in business education—as a scholar, leader, and now adviser—I've witnessed significant evolution in business schools. However, these changes are not happening fast enough. As the world faces unprecedented challenges—climate change, societal upheaval, and technological disruption—the need for long-term thinking, innovation, and regeneration is more urgent than ever. Yet, many business schools remain tied to traditional models focused on corporate success and operational efficiency.

While some institutions are experimenting with new approaches, few have embraced the depth of change required to prepare leaders who can balance immediate needs with long-term societal value. Long-term thinking—critical for addressing global challenges—must guide leadership development in business schools. The key question is: *How can business schools transform into incubators for the leaders of tomorrow?* This article explores how a reimagined business school can meet this challenge by shifting from corporate management training to fostering a founder's mentality, embedding experiential learning, evolving faculty roles, and embracing regeneration and legacy-oriented leadership.

From Corporate Managers to Purpose-Driven Founders

Traditionally, business schools have focused on equipping graduates with management skills tailored to corporate careers—helping them navigate organisational structures, optimise efficiency, and address immediate challenges. While these skills remain important, the rise of founder-driven ecosystems—encompassing startups, social enterprises, and insurgent companies—demands a different mindset. Graduates need to cultivate a Founder's Mentality, which emphasises ownership, purpose, and long-term societal impact. Founders think not in quarterly returns, but in the lasting impact their businesses will have on society—balancing short-term performance with a vision for long-term regeneration and success.

Founders think beyond profit and operational success; they embed personal values into their organisations and view success as intertwined with societal contribution. As graduates move into this new landscape, they must be prepared not only to lead their ventures but also to influence ecosystems and drive collective innovation.

Business schools teach entrepreneurship, but they often emphasise processes like funding or market-entry strategies. They seldom cultivate the deeper sense of purpose and ownership that defines true founders. To fully embrace this mindset, students need immersive, real-world experiences that mirror the complexities of starting, scaling, and collaborating within ecosystems. Dual immersion programmes, where students rotate between corporate and founder-led environments, could equip them to lead in both spheres.

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By combining a deeper sense of ownership, purpose, and long-term societal impact with an ecosystem mindset, business schools can prepare future leaders to drive not only organisational success but also societal change across industries.

Embedding Experiential Learning at the Core

To cultivate this founder mentality, business schools must move beyond lectures and case studies, making experiential learning a core pedagogy - not just an add-on. The business environment is increasingly dynamic, and students need adaptable problem identification and solving skills that only hands-on learning can provide. Experiential learning transforms theoretical knowledge into practical insight, enabling students to engage deeply and creatively with real-world challenges.

Methods like LEGO® Serious Play®, which I helped pioneer, encourage students to think with their hands and hearts, engaging them cognitively, emotionally, and physically. However, these methods must be directly tied to business realities to ensure students are prepared for the complexity and ambiguity they will face as leaders. Initiatives such as *Business as Art Studios*, where students prototype solutions to real-world problems and showcase them for practitioner feedback, offer an immersive learning experience that aligns with real business demands.

Despite growing interest, experiential learning is often only selectively used, especially in executive education, and often remaining in Flatland - the term Edward Tufte used to describe the limitations of traditional two-dimensional representations of information. The challenge is to scale these methods across all levels of business education. Reverse classrooms, where professionals collaborate with students on live cases, can shift the focus from passive learning to active problem-solving. Similarly, AI-enhanced platforms could simulate complex scenarios, giving students the chance to experiment and receive real-time feedback.

Experiential learning is not just about teaching practical tools; it's about cultivating the mindset, resilience, and hands-on practice students need to make decisions and take actions through uncertainty and change.

Redefining the Role of Faculty in the Learning Journey

To facilitate this new learning model, the role of faculty must evolve. Faculty can no longer simply be content experts; they must become curators and facilitators of student-driven learning. In this new model, faculty act more like coaches—guiding students as they explore, experiment, and apply knowledge in real-world settings. The shift from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side' is essential for fostering collaborative and adaptive learning environments.

In addition to facilitating learning, faculty should model the human-centric leadership qualities that are essential for future leaders. As described in *The Next Management* framework, successful leadership requires empathy, adaptability, and practical wisdom - qualities that faculty must embody to inspire students. Faculty should not only guide students through academic challenges but also mentor them in developing emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, and collaborative skills - critical attributes for leading with purpose in a complex world.

As AI and peer-to-peer learning become central to business education, the faculty's role becomes even more crucial. AI can support content delivery, provide personalised feedback, and enhance collaborative projects, but it cannot replace the emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, and mentorship that faculty provide. Faculty must inspire students to think critically, creatively, and ethically.

Examples of this shift include *AI-Facilitator Tandem Teams*, where AI supports collaboration while faculty offer mentorship, or *Rotating Learning Facilitator Residencies*, where faculty from various disciplines create diverse learning environments. These models prepare students to face multidisciplinary challenges with agility and insight. By embracing these roles, faculty become essential to the success of experiential, peer-driven, and AI-enhanced learning.

While some business schools are beginning to adjust the conventional faculty-does-it-all model, the transformation needs to accelerate. The role of the faculty member must evolve from content expert to learning facilitator, with a focus on creating spaces for experiential, AI-enhanced, and peer-to-peer learning.

Moving Beyond Sustainability to Regeneration

Sustainability has long been a cornerstone of business education, but the world no longer needs leaders who only aim to 'do no harm'. We need leaders who actively regenerate ecosystems and rebuild social structures. Business schools must shift from teaching sustainability to embracing regeneration. Sustainability seeks to maintain the status quo, but regeneration aims to restore and enhance the systems on which we depend.

Regeneration requires a new mindset, grounded in *practical wisdom* (phronesis), where decisions are made not just for immediate business success but for the long-term health of society and the planet. Leaders must balance operational efficiency with the broader goal of environmental and social restoration.

For business schools, embracing regeneration means rethinking curricula, teaching methodologies, and partnerships. Schools could establish *Regenerative*

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Economy Research Centres, where students collaborate on projects that explore new business models—such as circular economies, reforestation, or regenerative agriculture—that not only minimise harm but actively enhance ecosystems. These centres can also serve as laboratories for students to develop practical methodologies for applying regenerative business strategies.

Initiatives like the *Global Regeneration Challenge* could engage students in large-scale projects that address climate change, inequality, and resource depletion, helping them develop the skills and vision to create lasting positive change.

As business schools begin to shift their focus from sustainability to regeneration, they must also prepare students to navigate the practical challenges that come with this transition—such as financial constraints, stakeholder resistance, and balancing short-term profitability with long-term impact. By equipping students with the strategies and tools to overcome these obstacles, schools will not only contribute to the regeneration of the planet but also ensure that their graduates are prepared to lead in a new era of business.

Shaping Leaders Who Think in Legacies, Not Quarters

Regeneration requires leaders who think in terms of legacy and long-term impact. Business schools must cultivate leaders who understand that decisions made today will shape not only their organisations but the broader society for generations to come. Long-term thinking must guide their leadership, ensuring that short-term gains are not prioritised at the expense of long-term sustainability and societal well-being.

Business schools must cultivate leaders who not only focus on the long-term impact of their decisions but also embed empathy, emotional intelligence, and practical wisdom into every aspect of their leadership. Just as described in *The Next Management* framework, successful leaders must navigate complexity with emotional intelligence, ensuring that their decisions are ethically sound and aligned with societal well-being.

Business schools can foster this mindset through *Legacy-Based Leadership Programmes*, where students reflect on their leadership philosophies and define how they want to contribute to societal well-being. This approach should directly integrate the cultivation of human-centric skills such as empathy and adaptive leadership, ensuring students are prepared to lead with compassion and foresight in dynamic environments. A Legacy Thesis could require students to outline how their career will create a positive impact for future generations, further reinforcing the importance of values-driven decision-making.

Embedding legacy thinking means schools must rethink how they measure success, moving beyond traditional financial metrics to include broader indicators like social and environmental impact. This shift echoes the Drucker Forum's *The Next Management* call for leaders to prioritise the long-term well-being of society alongside organisational success.

Conclusion: a new aspiration

As the world faces mounting challenges—climate change, upheaval of the world order, technological disruption - business schools must rethink how they educate tomorrow's leaders. To cultivate leaders who leave a lasting positive impact on society and the planet, business schools must rethink their approach, embracing new ways that prioritise regeneration, experiential learning, redefined faculty roles, and legacy-oriented leadership.

While some business schools have made strides toward these goals, much work remains to be done. The road ahead is not without its challenges, but the opportunity is clear. Business schools have the potential to lead in solving the world's most pressing problems by cultivating leaders who prioritise long-term societal value over short-term gains. Bold action now will shape not only the future of business education, but the future of the world.

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