

# CREATIVITY AND BUSINESS LEADERSHIP - AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD SANT



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“Large numbers of our graduates will either create their own companies or quickly become leaders in creative enterprises.”

Ben Johnson from the Insurance Practice at Sheffield Haworth interviewed Richard Sant, Head of Careers and Employability at the University of Arts London about a recent nationwide study conducted by Hitachi Capital. The study found that students from more arts based universities are more likely to go into business start-ups or management after graduation.

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**Firstly, congratulations Richard on the recent results of the study, where the University of Arts London came out on top for having the most graduates in the UK who went in to business start up or management after graduation. Can you tell us more about the study?**

The study compared how many graduates from each university in the UK went in to business start-up or management after graduation. When added together this gives an indication of ‘business leadership’. This is an interesting measure because it’s not just about whose students get the most graduate level jobs. Instead it identifies those universities whose students have the proactivity to start and lead businesses. University of the Arts London (UAL) came top of the table beating both Oxford and Cambridge.

### Why do you think more MDs/CEOs are coming out of UAL compared to business schools?

I see this as being about entrepreneurship and start-up and the nature of the Creative Industries. The creative sector is characterised by start-ups and small enterprises. Large numbers of our graduates will either create their own companies or quickly become leaders in creative enterprises. When you add together all those in start-up, freelancing and management it's a high percentage of our graduates.

### Which aspects of the curriculum of an Arts degree would you integrate into a business degree? What do you think is missing from a business degree?

This is definitely not about teaching business school students to paint! There is a very strong element in an arts education which involves practical or studio learning. Through this experience students are encouraged to act on their ideas, take risks with their work, and to be comfortable with ambiguity all of which are important attributes of the entrepreneur. Another aspect of a creative education is design thinking, which is essentially the distilled process of design that can be applied to any context. Many progressive business educators are already beginning to explore this as part of their curriculum.



*Creativity is about finding innovative ways to solve problems, developing vision, thinking up new things and being resourceful.*

### You have established that creativity plays a big part in being a CEO, but what does being 'creative' mean?

There are many ways that we can think about creativity, which is a lot more than being 'artistic'. Creativity is about finding innovative ways to solve problems, developing vision, thinking up new ways to do things, and being resourceful. For me it is also linked with being curious. Art school students are taught to be curious, to see things differently, or to notice those things which have passed other people by. Creativity also implies the ability to follow through on your ideas and bring them to reality.

At UAL we have a very specific way of speaking about the abilities you develop through a creative education called the **Creative Attributes Framework**. Through the framework we surface three key capabilities. First of all, by realising their projects a creative individual draws on the enterprise, agility and proactivity to make things happen. Secondly, by being in the business of developing and sharing ideas a creative individual will connect, showcase and develop compelling narratives.



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The Creative Attributes Framework has been created by UAL to talk about the abilities developed through a creative education



Look for real examples of ideation, innovation and implementation at interview stage rather than solely relying on psychometric assessments

Finally, through operating through ambiguity a creative individual will develop the resilience, self-efficacy and curiosity to navigate change. It is compelling to see that these are also the attributes of entrepreneurship and of leadership.

### **How do we identify the level of creativity of an individual? For example using tools such as Hogan?**

There are different psychometric approaches to measuring creativity. There is Hogan, and also the often-cited Torrance Test of Creativity. However I would also be inclined to complement these kinds of tests with questions at interview stage. Through questioning, the interviewer can look for real examples of ideation and innovation. This allows the candidate to demonstrate that they can also understand and articulate their own creative processes, which is particularly true in examples where creativity has been a part of a collaborative process, not necessarily located in one person.

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*Creativity is rooted in divergent thinking (as opposed to convergent thinking). For an organisation's thinking to be divergent you need diverse perspectives.*

### **It would seem that having a variety of perspectives i.e. diversity of thought within an organisations helps a business to think differently about things. What does diversity of thought mean to you?**

For me there are many compelling cases for diversity including the social justice perspective and the business case for diversity. I am particularly interested in the creative case for diversity. Creativity is rooted in divergent thinking (as opposed to convergent thinking). For an organisation's thinking to be divergent you need diverse perspectives. Curiosity is particularly important here. We need people to notice those things that others may have missed.



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### **Why should businesses embrace it?**

This question reminds me of a question I asked an overseas university several months ago. This particular institution is heavily invested in entrepreneurship support. I asked “why do you do this?” and they replied “Why wouldn't you do it”? I guess that's a very creative way of reframing the question. As I think about the current situation in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic it seems that no one really knows what the new reality will look like. We need leaders now who can envision a new way of working, who can navigate ambiguity, and innovate fast. Old road maps are not very useful just now, so let's tap into creative minds to draw new



### What are the challenges of bringing creatives into a corporate environment?

There is a lot that could be said here. We all know of the high-profile corporate champions of creativity such as Google who have redesigned their working environments to enhance the opportunities for ideation and creative encounters. That may not be the way forward for everyone, however there is certainly truth in the connection between flexibility and creativity. It is hard to ask someone to be creative at their desk starting at 8.30am and finishing at 5.30pm. Ultimately, I think the starting point has to be about challenging perception and understanding on both sides. Creative individuals may have pre-conceptions about corporate environments and may not realise how their creativity might be important and valued. At the same time those recruiting in corporate environments may benefit from broadening their understanding of what creativity means, and decouple it from its more obvious manifestation in art and design to see the raw power of creativity as the driver of innovation.

### How do corporates make it more attractive for 'creative' individuals to join?

As an easy starting point, I would experiment with using the word 'creativity' in recruitment literature, job adverts etc. When I look into this I have found that whilst creativity may be valued by an organisation the word is rarely explicitly used in their literature. Let's have more courage and confidence about talking about creativity and that starts by making it visible and valued.

### How do you see businesses evolving to have a more balanced workforce with wider diversity of thought?

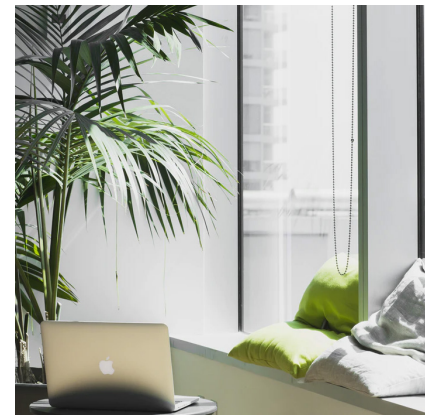
I have to say that a longer-term strategy is the way forward here. I would encourage partnering with creative institutions and universities on graduate recruitment. In time, these creative graduates will work their way up to leadership positions and transform corporations from within.

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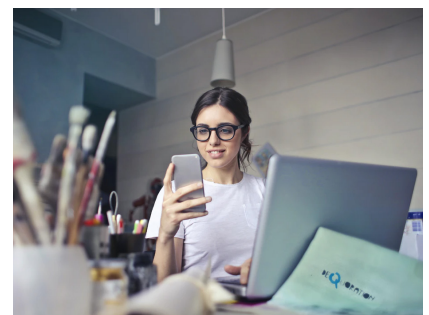
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Redesigning office environments can enhance opportunities for ideation and creative encounters



Partnering with creative institutions and universities on graduate recruitment will help to diversify an organisation's workforce.