

The JBS: Authentically African and globally innovative

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The Johannesburg Business School (JBS) is committed to delivering world-class business education that focuses on the African context and is geared for Industry 4.0, according to senior director Professor Lyal White. It must, he adds, be purpose-driven for sustained impact on the changing social, political and economic fortunes of our continent.



Professor Lyal White

"We are authentically African, with disruption and innovation at heart. These pillars support our strategy for collective impact and our desire to be a catalyst for connection on our continent as we educate and mentor future generations of African leaders and managers."

The JBS forms part of the College of Business and Economics at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the professor speaks of more than 100 full-time faculty members - twice as many as any other business school in South Africa. He predicts the JBS will be central to positioning UJ as a tertiary institution in the Fourth Industrial Revolution by supporting a business academia ecosystem that produces socially aware graduates.

"Higher education is vital to entering the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and ensuring that Africa becomes future-proof."

The JBS executive programme offerings were launched in August with the art of storytelling at which world-renowned and bestselling business author David Hutchens introduced participants to the fast-growing body of theory around developing an organisational narrative. He has explored the intersection of narrative, leadership, and complex systems change for over 20 years and created solutions for, among others, the Coca-Cola Company, PayPal, Walmart, IBM, L'Oréal and the US Olympic Committee.

As Prof. White explains, "If you are a leader, you are the narrator. Organisations and institutions increasingly recognise its power and story as a core leadership discipline. By embracing new technology, teaching and learning methods, the JBS will enable the creation of innovative new business models in Africa to produce visionary and critical leaders."

He explains that the Fourth Industrial Revolution's scope is far beyond its digital or information counterparts. It is a systemic transformation that impacts on civil society, governance structures, human identity, economics and manufacturing while integrating human beings and machines, the physical and the cyber. The underlying technologies being artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, nanotechnology, biotechnology, Internet of Things, cloud computing, autonomous vehicles and 3D printing. Herein, the humanities, with creative and critical thinking, play a big part.

"UJ," he adds, "has the highest concentration of staff with PhDs in AI on our continent and we are more than ready to tackle this new era. At an unprecedented level, the global environment demands innovative business leaders with entrepreneurial spirit and government officials who can lead African businesses to the forefront of the global economy. It also needs those who can steer global businesses to succeed in Africa. With our focus in providing global management thought leadership and deep African insights, JBS prepares students for that role, giving them that critical edge for success."



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"Fortunately, we attract a great diversity of students who have the drive to succeed, confidence, a strong record of triumph and a burning desire to advance the evolution of business in our society."

The JBS offering includes undergraduate diplomas and degrees, postgraduate degrees and programmes, and will soon include an MBA. Also on the cards are online programmes, blended learning and unique contact programmes with delegates from across the continent and partners from around the world.

The senior director concedes that, despite burgeoning opportunities, this continent is a tricky place to do business. “A rich tapestry of cultures, religions and languages layered over obscure geographical lines and vast distances creates a business environment riddled with complexity. Economic disparities and a history of socio-political instability in a region that is institutionally weak and grossly underdeveloped means there is no such thing as business as usual. Conventional approaches and standard business acumen do not work. Preparing individuals and organisations for this context requires an MBA with a difference.”



Shaping the African business context

Five themes shaping the African business context from the inside out are:

First, politics and institutions continue to determine economic performance across the continent. These are inextricably linked to business. While some argue that Africa is more democratic and politically inclusive than ever before and that its youthful population heralds major change, ageing, autocratic leaders dominate. Six of the world's 10 longest-serving heads of state are African. Political institutions have not kept pace with commercial interests, requiring an understanding of the power, policy and institutional fluidity beyond conventional business acumen. MBAs need to understand the notion of power and politics in Africa.

Second, the demographics of development without facts and proven numbers make business decisions tricky. Africa will boast the fastest-growing population of any region over the next 50 years, and within 10 years, most Africans will be living in cities. This will have huge ramifications for business and society. Issues like growing inequality, informal business and ballooning urban slums are core to any Africa strategy. For example, informal markets comprise an estimated 35 percent of Kenya's economy and 66 percent of Nigeria's. If the business fails to grasp the relevance of this sector, Africa's full, economic potential will not be realised.

Third, the Fourth Industrial Revolution will not be lost in Africa, where innovation and disruption are underway with a local flavour.

While automation understandably worries a continent grappling with unacceptable levels of unemployment, 80 percent of young people believe technology is creating jobs, not destroying them. This sentiment inspires hope. Again, policies need to keep pace because African countries lag the developing world in innovation and entrepreneurial flair.

Fourth, while there is the talk of continent-wide economic integration, the free movement of goods, services and people remains a pipe dream. This is a prerequisite for realising the continent's true economic potential. The intra-Africa disconnect poses a serious challenge to businesses seeking opportunities of scale between borders, requiring creative thinking and innovative solutions.

Fifth, the rise of African multinationals and the notion of "Africapitalism" present an interesting link and nuance to business development. The most successful firms in Africa have recognised their role in developing society and markets for the future. A purpose-driven business that strives for collective impact has become an integral part of strategy and execution in Africa.

"This, Prof. White concludes, "is a cornerstone of the MBA in nurturing sustainable business.

"It must be grounded in the African context, with a strong global mindset."

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