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THE COST OF CUTTING CULTURE: CAN A CREATIVE EDUCATION CLOSE THE BUSINESS SKILLS GAP?

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Poet Gabriel Akamo performs a reading.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Let's give another round of applause for Gabriel for that thought-provoking reading. It's not often in life you have the pleasure of meeting a professional poet. Someone who is paid to produce lyrical verses, to open minds and stir hearts. But how does one become a poet? Unlike most jobs, work in the field of poetry doesn't come with an out-dated job description. It's not necessary to produce a list of academic accomplishments or provide years of previous professional experience to prove you are suited to the role. Instead, your success relies solely on the qualities you possess. The strength of your creativity. Your ability to communicate. And your critical perception of the world around you. In today's world, it's not just in the field of poetry where these skills are the key to success. They are fast becoming a necessity in business too.

The relationship between business and transferable skills

From communication and critical analysis, to resilience and creativity, these skills – known as “fusion” skills due to their cross-sector nature – are gaining new recognition in the workplace. Whereas they were once considered good “add-ons” to a strong academic background, today, employers are prioritising this new skillset as equal to or above technical abilities.¹ This modern attitude to recruitment has been a result of the changing face of business. Twenty years ago, the largest companies in the world were from the oil and energy sector. Today, they have been superseded by the tech giants of the 21st century. These new employers and their technological innovations have transformed the global jobs market, demanding new skills from employees and threatening traditional roles with automation.

Increasing skills gap

In the UK, 40% of all professions face high risk of automation or significant risk of change.² At the same time, the emergence of new technologies is predicted to create hundreds of new roles which we cannot even imagine yet.³ While we cannot be certain of what the jobs of the future will look like, we can predict the skills that will be required from the workforce. Research from Deloitte has shown that those most resilient to economic shock and automation are employees who have high levels of social, creative and analytical skills. Essentially, the fusion “skills” we spoke of earlier. On top of this, research from Nesta estimates that jobs requiring creative minds will grow as a percentage of the labour market by 2030. Along with those demanding organisational skills and project

¹ Nesta report, 2019.

² OECD, 2018.

³ McKinsey Global Institute, 2017.



management.⁴ The challenge is that the demand for these “fusion” skills are evolving at a faster rate than jobs can be filled. In their research into skills shortages, the Department for Education found that candidates’ lack of “fusion” skills – whether it be self-management, critical analysis or leadership skills – were commonly cited as reasons for why job vacancies were “hard to fill”.⁵ And despite being recognised as crucial skills for the sector’s future growth, financial-professional services firms are increasingly struggling to recruit the creative and communications talent needed for the 21st Century.⁶

So, what is the cause of this business shortage in creative, “fusion” skills? And why is the financial-services sector suffering more than most?

Cause of the creative skills gap

Well, to answer that first question, we must begin by looking at our education system. According to the Durham Commission, creativity is not being given enough priority in schools to meet future skills needs.⁷ In part, this is due to the demotion of traditionally creative and cultural subjects, such as the Arts, within the school curriculum. In the Commission’s report, they noted the importance of the Arts as a resource for young people to “draw [...] inspiration for creative thinking.” Acknowledging that the arts are not “soft subjects” but “offer a body of skills, knowledge and understandings” that allow for “the acquisition of creativity.”⁸ Along with creativity, the Arts were shown to enhance other “fusion” skills such as communication, oral skills, motivation, empathy and appreciation of difference and diversity – skills highly desired by modern business.⁹ Despite the apparent link between the Arts and the creative skillset required for the 21st century, uptake in these cultural subjects are falling. This is largely due to the absence of the Arts from the English Baccalaureate – a schools performance measure at GCSE level which promotes academic disciplines.¹⁰ As such, since 2010, Arts GCSEs entries have decreased by 28% and the number of hours arts subjects are taught in secondary schools is down 17%.¹¹ This is hugely concerning as research by Arts Council England has shown that more than a third of students rely on their school for access to the arts.¹² Without such access, we risk preventing students from attaining the creative and “fusion” skills needed for employment in the 21st Century, building a workforce which is unable to drive business and secure economic growth.

Why the financial services sector?

So, the current set-up of our education system might explain why there’s less creative talent available, but why is the financial-services sector missing out more than most? According to the Financial Service Skills Taskforce, this is in large part due to the public perception of the sector’s culture and purpose.¹³ Too few people believe financial-professional services can offer them a creative and dynamic work environment but value these characteristics from their future employer.¹⁴ And large numbers of people have low-levels of trust in financial services, which is a big concern when we consider that employees are increasingly attracted by socially purposeful organisations.¹⁵ Location also plays a big part in attracting creative talent. As the City’s Place for People report explains, talented

⁴ Easton and Djumalieva, 2018.

⁵ Winterbotham, M. et al., 2018.

⁶ The City UK, 2019.

⁷ P.8. Durham Commission, 2019.

⁸ P.59, Durham Commission, 2019.

⁹ P.63, Durham Commission, 2019.

¹⁰ Durham Commission, 2019.

¹¹ Cultural Learning Alliance, 2018.

¹² Arts Council England

¹³ The City UK, 2019.

¹⁴ The City UK, 2019.

¹⁵ The City UK, 2019.



people are attracted to “buzzy, vibrant 24-hour places, that offer a range of amenities.”¹⁶ As I’m sure you’re all aware, the hub of the UK’s financial-professional services sector is situated right here in the City of London. And any of you who have walked more than ten minutes into the City will know that there are hundreds of “amenities” including, shops, bars and restaurants. We even have museums, cinemas, theatres and several major exhibition spaces. Despite this, few people consider the City to be a creative space, particularly in contrast to areas such as the West End, Camden and Shoreditch. And this is having a big impact on our ability to attract creative talent. For example, 92% of tech and media business owners – two industries which depend on creatives – believe a City location affects their ability to hire the right staff.¹⁷ In the age of innovation, this poses a big problem. Unlike previous generations, financial-professional services firms are increasingly dependent on collaborations with other sectors. The blending of “longstanding expertise” from a “diverse range of fields” enables them to spark “disruptive change” and find “new opportunities” in business.¹⁸ As more and more businesses make fundamental decisions on where to locate based on where the best global talent wants to work, we need the City to be seen as an attractive, cultural area. Cultivating creativity not just within individual firms, but across the whole of the Square Mile. In doing so, more creative companies will be enticed to locate here, offering City businesses easier access to the innovative talent and creativity that gives them “a competitive edge” and which, in turn, will drive UK business and prosperity.¹⁹

Culture Mile

Thankfully, we are already making a start. As some of you may know, in July 2017 the City of London Corporation launched Culture Mile along with its core partners the Barbican, Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London Symphony Orchestra and the Museum of London. Stretching from Farringdon to Moorgate, this is a new area for contemporary culture in the ancient heart of London’s working capital. Bringing together the City’s key cultural institutions including the core partners and a wider network of organisations in and around the area, Culture Mile is redefining this section of the City as a major destination for culture and learning, with a particular ambition to support the development of creativity and “fusion” skills. In cultivating creativity in this corner of the City, we want to fully unlock the diverse creative talent among our visitors, workers and residents – bringing commerce and culture together to meet the needs of business and to build a cultural district where creative enterprises of the mid-21st century want to be.²⁰

Conclusion

Needless to say, there is much to be done to close the creative and “fusion” skills gap in business. Our students – the workforce of the future - need greater access to creative education, and our businesses need to be in – and build – a culture of creativity within and around their organisations. To explore this topic further and explain how their organisations are striving to cultivate creativity in the Square Mile and beyond, I have with me a panel of experts from our Culture Mile institutions. After introducing themselves, we will have a deeper discussion about the importance of creativity in the future of work, what businesses and policy makers can do to drive creativity, and the role of Culture Mile in supporting a creative society.

So, for now, let me pass you over to the Panel.

Thank you.

¹⁶ City of London Corporation, 2018.

¹⁷ City of London Corporation, 2018.

¹⁸ City of London Corporation, 2018.

¹⁹ City of London Corporation, 2018.

²⁰ Culture Mile, 2019.



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Conclusion of Panel Discussion

Ladies and gentlemen – the world of work is experiencing a revolution. The emergence of new technologies into the workplace is transforming roles at a rapid rate and the continuous growth of the innovation sector is pushing business to become more creative. Because of this, the skills we need from our future workforce are evolving. No longer do academic achievements guarantee successful employees; rather those with a range of “fusion” skills – creativity and communication, presentation and problem solving – promise to deliver better business growth. As the centre for UK business, the City of London relies on businesses to be able to access this type of talent to enhance economic growth and drive prosperity. Currently, however, shortfalls in our education system, lack of access to the arts and the misrepresentation of the City as a place for business – not creativity – is threatening firms from attracting that talent.

As we have heard from our wonderful panel, addressing this issue is now a priority for the City. And I look forward to carrying this agenda further through my own mayoral programme – Global UK: Championing Trade, Innovation, and Culture. A programme which seeks to highlight the relationship between culture, commerce and creativity.

I hope this evening’s lecture has left all of you with some food for thought, and perhaps, even encouraged you to explore how you can cultivate your own creative skills.

But for now, may I say thank you to Gresham College for giving me the opportunity to speak to you all today – and thank you for joining me.

Thank you.

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