Making a difference – digital and AI

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Hello, and welcome to the third in this series of four episodes on the subject of intrapreneurialism. In this series, we've looked at what an intrapreneur is, what we do to foster an environment and a culture that inspires and promotes intrapreneurs. In this session today, we'll be looking at how we use intrapreneurs to make a difference, particularly in digital and AI. I feel like for years I've been saying the world's moving faster and faster, and the pressure is higher and higher for us to create change and innovation within businesses, and there's no space to slow down. That feels like it continues and is ever increasing, particularly now we see the popularity of AI growing. The pressure from all directions for us to look at what AI means for our businesses and how we integrate it. What we're going to talk about today with our three guests is how we use intrapreneurs within our business, those that might want to step out and push our business forwards to drive innovation and change, particularly within digital and AI. Because it's not always something that needs to come from the boardroom. Those sat at the top of the business don't always have the answers. Sometimes we need to build an environment that allows people within our business to shake things up, to push things, press buttons and perhaps even step out of where they would usually be expected to behave in the business to make a difference. And we

should inspire that. So today I'm joined by three experts with much experience of creating change within businesses. Firstly, Darren Campbell is the Global Head of Startup Catalyst at Capgemini. Jane Dickinson is the Digital Skills Lead at The Open University. And Julian Hall, who is the Founder of Ultra Education and also an Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University. So, thank you, the three of you, for joining us today. Perhaps I can start with quick introductions from everybody before we dive in and have a deeper conversation. Darren, can I start with you?

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

Thanks Josh, and lovely to be here. I'm Darren Campbell. I work for Capgemini, who are a global technology services provider, and in my role, I currently look after their Startup Catalyst business, which is effectively a function within the innovation part of the organisation. Our objective really is to help surface some of the most interesting innovative start-ups from around the world, bring them into Capgemini's business and then promote those start-ups, within our customers and so drive innovation and change basically across the world. So, I look after that, and lovely to be here today, Josh. Thanks Darren.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Jane, yourself?

Jane Dickinson, Digital Skills Lead at The Open University

I'm Jane Dickinson. I'm very privileged to be the Digital Skills Lead at The Open University. I spend a lot of my time working with organisations to help them

build digital talent pipelines to help them nurture their talent. But also, more recently I've been working on how we can really support people who are interested in tech to be able to develop those skills around perhaps other roles, other jobs, other family commitments, and kind of move into rewarding roles in the tech sector and help bridge that digital skills gap.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Fantastic and finally, Julian.

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

Hi Josh, thanks for having me. I'm the CEO and Founder of a now ten-year-old social enterprise called Ultra Education. And in that time, we've been teaching entrepreneurship to children from 7 to 18 years old. But also, with a view to helping them to develop work-ready skills and, more often, a future of work-ready skills, including AI. So that they can integrate into the workplace, be it through employment or self-employment. We see the skills that they're learning as being absolutely transferable into the workplace as intrapreneurs. My background is in technology. For quite some time I had a whole career in corporate before I left, and so I recognised the opportunity for digital transformation, not just for corporates but also for communities and for children and young people. So for us, fostering those skills and that mindset and that capability around technology is something that we... Our

mission is to imbue that much earlier on than it would have historically been for children and education.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

That's amazing. So real, tangible learning, not just learning out of books but learning about how to actually face life and go and achieve something.

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

Absolutely.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Yeah that's cool, I like that. Let's start with a question to Darren. I think when we talk about innovation and change and digital and AI particularly, we're thinking young start-ups right? We're thinking fast-paced, independent businesses, and we're looking at potentially our own larger organisations. And well, we can't do that, that's what they do. But your department within Capgemini focuses on how we bring those smaller start-ups into corporates and work together, and those collaborations make a difference. Can you tell me a bit about that and how that works?

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

So, we basically have a number of industries that we work with across Capgemini. As an organisation, we, for example, target energy and utilities, we

target financial services, we target automotive, etc. So we have a number of industries we focus on. And as part of our mission, we want to help our clients with their digital transformation journeys, whatever that may be. For example, BMW within the automotive sector wants to do something different. Part of my team's role is basically to help drive innovation into some of those opportunities that we push to clients like BMW, for example. And what we do as part of that is we are constantly scouring the world looking for the most interesting, innovative start-ups that we can then push to our clients through those sectors. It's a very active role because we have a number of people positioned in some of the key hotspots around the world. So we've got people in San Francisco, in Berlin, in London, in Cambridge, in Amsterdam, etc. so the list goes on and on. But we have a number of people around the world who are looking for these start-ups, who we firstly have a bit of an initial conversation with to understand, what is it? What value are they really bringing? What can they potentially bring to our clients. And then, where there's a match, where we think there's something interesting, we will then bring those start-ups to the surface. So, we'll raise them, raise their profile within Capgemini, to the relevant leaders within our organisation, and then a subsequent step would then be to take those organisations and start to discuss potential client opportunities with them. What we're really doing is giving those start-ups that opportunity to get visibility of clients they typically wouldn't always get access to but also giving us access to our global network. We spot a start-up in San Francisco, that's great. Perhaps somebody in Australia has a need. You know, we can bring those start-ups across the

oceans to bring benefit to our clients. So that's really what we do. We're really careful about the type of organisations that we work with, and we can talk a little bit about that later, but we have to do a bit of an evaluation of these companies to understand a bit about what's really going on behind the PowerPoints, behind the conversations. So, we do do an assessment, of those organisations before we, purchase.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

How do you find that changes the way innovation happens? If you compare that approach to somebody that might be trying to build their own internal skunkworks, or whatever they might refer to it as, without external help, how do you see those two approaches?

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

I'm a massive fan of open innovation. What I mean by that is there are ready-to-go companies, they've got a solution, they've got an answer to a problem already, they've got the capability, so why build it internally? I'm a big fan of that. I'm not saying that there aren't circumstances where it is relevant to to build capabilities internally, but I truly believe that if you want something fast, you want something quick, you want something dynamic and you want something that's going to evolve, perhaps going and looking externally is a good way of bringing that innovation in faster and quicker. And, just to add, over the years, I've been in this role for three years, and in the three years I've

seen an increasing interest from big global corporations in doing this, working with organisations in this way, open innovation, because they see that it's access to very quick capabilities.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

I think that's quite interesting because the last few episodes of this series we've been talking about those that sit, particularly in large organisations, and want to instil change, they can see what needs to be different, they can see quite often a path to get there but are stuck between various restrictions of targets, time, resources and potential as well internally. Do you find that I guess that intrapreneur character within the larger corporate, seeing this as an opportunity to push forward what they see as the right thing to do but without needing the resources to build their own teams and everything else, they can come to an external start-up or smaller organisation and bring that capability in to see their change enacted.

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

Absolutely. I mean, it's definitely, there's definitely an increase in appetite for it within bigger organisations. Like I said before, I think the one thing we need to be aware of, though, is that when we are bringing these smaller companies into the sight of these bigger companies, we're almost trying to align a speedboat and a big ship. So you do need the right capability to be able to make that happen because a lot of these companies that we work with, certainly, they want to move 100 miles an hour. Survival is their game, right? A

lot of them have funding challenges. They want to grow in a market really, really quickly. And then they come to a big corporation, and that big corporation is moving so slowly. So you need a capability within these big organisations to be able to allow that matching to happen, to firstly set the expectations with these smaller organisations and build the right processes in place to allow these bigger companies to use and make use of the capabilities these smaller organisations are offering. It's really important that you have that facility to do that matching, and that's exactly what we do. Because you can't work with a small start-up in the same way that you can work with Microsoft, for example.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Absolutely. And I think what's really interesting there, which we also touched on in prior episodes, is that the skills needed for an intrapreneur or an entrepreneur on either side of that conversation, the biggest one you need is the ability to tell the story, to try and explain where we're trying to go, how this is the stepping stone. As nonsensical as it might seem on the face of it, this is how we get to where we're trying to go. Julian, I trust that's one of the things that you're teaching to young people when you're talking about teaching them entrepreneurship, it's how to how to sell, not just sell a product but sell an idea.

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

Absolutely. I think, for us, it's giving them something tangible that they've created. So, it's not talk and talk, it's actually saying, okay, if you've got an idea for a product or service let's actually bring that to fruition, even if it's an alpha version, something that you can sell to family and friends, but that will give you the input you need to improve upon it. And what we've found is that a lot of those processes that they learn at such an early age you know, 10, 11, 12 years old, is still relevant in the workplace. It's still relevant in a number of sectors. And the more exciting thing about it now is that we're able to use AI tools and digital tools to help them speed up the development of those ideas of those products and services.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

So, they're actually making real things, they're making whatever their ideas might be and not just learning here's some skills that you're going to need and here's how you might use them, but go and make it and go and try it out?

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

Yes, so I always describe entrepreneurship as a practical sport. If you want to learn to ride a bike you don't examine the tyre pressure and the springs of the handlebars and how high the seat is. Well, you might do that, but you actually get on and start riding. Similarly with entrepreneurship, lots of people learn by

doing, and there's lots more research showing that is a really effective way for young people to learn. So, we've taken that approach and given young people the tools, the space, the support to be able to actually come up with something tangible, whether it's physical products, digital products, services, put them in an environment where they can sell, where they can get further support, mentorship, customers' feedback to help them to iteratively develop that idea.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

That's really interesting. We're going to talk a lot about growth mindset, particularly with those that are already at work and probably 20 years into their career. I mean, how do you define growth mindset in your world as well, but also how do you instil that from such an early age, because I think that's critical?

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

So, for us, it's about redefining existing terms. So, in the world of entrepreneurship we love acronyms and redefining them. So if you look at the word fail, which is quite a common word in school, you've either passed or failed a test or an exam. Lots of entrepreneurs in the growth mindset community have reframed the word fail to be first attempt in learning, and actually, in the world of business, particularly small and start-up business, it is about failing fast and failing cheap because you're starting off with so

many assumptions, it's almost impossible to get them right first time. So, it's again, going back to the riding a bike analogy, if you're learning to ride a bike and you fall off, no one has said that you have failed at riding a bike, because we know that you're going to stumble, you're probably going to fall off the bike, right? But actually, it's just about getting back up on the bike and okay, what did I learn there? A bit more balance, a bit more speed, a bit more confidence. And then you apply that, and it's the same thing in business. So what we do is we give them examples of businesses, both grown-ups and young people, because we've worked with so many now who have maybe started a business idea and it didn't work out, started a partnership and that failed, but they've gone on to do something else because they've learned from that experience. That's the important bit. So often it's just about reframing what they already know within a context that enables them to take that learning with them and do something useful with it. And that's the important thing. Life for us in what we teach is about feedback. It's data. What do you do with that data? Somebody's come along and said, your product is too expensive, it's not good enough, someone else is already selling it, I don't like the colour. But it's that data. And so that data, you then take it as feedback and again you make micro-changes, but constantly. It's always a work in progress. And that's probably the last thing we'll say to them is that perfectionism is continuous development. It's never perfect, right? If you look at it like that, and you almost look at it sometimes as an experiment, saying well, I'm about to launch something, but it's an experiment to see what feedback and data I get that you look at it more objectively. It's not something

you take personally. If someone says, I don't like that, you're looking at it like that's data that I can use to improve.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Absolutely, and what feels like it should be all numbers and data and a very technical thing like change, innovation, new-product development, actually it's very human. It's about having the resilience to go and experiment with these things, because if you can face the challenges and the setbacks, then you're the person that can continue to push, and that's where change and innovation comes from.

Jane, bringing that over to you and your work at The Open University, why is it that people are so intrinsically part of innovation and change when, as I say, it feels like it should be about computers?

Jane Dickinson, Digital Skills Lead at The Open University

I think to your point, I think I would even go as far as to suggest it's not really a technology issue at all when we talk about digital transformation, because quite often the phrase 'people, process and technology' is the mantra that we wheel out when we talk about it, isn't it? But change management lies at the heart of digital transformation, and it's really about understanding how people work and always keeping your eye on the problem you're trying to solve. And I suppose if you bring it back to think about that successful transformations really are reliant on people's ingenuity and skill in their application of technology. And also, you know, as we've just talked about, on their readiness to adapt to change as it does anything else. So, it is very

human. I think all successful transformations really need the voices and the buy-in of all stakeholders throughout a project, whatever you're trying to do, making those micro-changes, as has just been discussed.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

So would you say that's one of the big issues you see in tech innovation, that it's not tech, it's people? Yes, absolutely. Almost to the point where I think it should just be people, people, people. But I think the technology is just, it's the enabler, isn't it? You know, it enables change. But also people need to be, and are, agents of change.

Yes, absolutely and people talk about this digital skills gap, can we can we touch on that for a minute? Can we define it? I think it's a common topic on many a radio station, many podcasts, many books. People talk about the digital skills gap, but very rarely, like the word innovation as well, do people sit down and define what does that mean? What is the digital skills gap? What does it mean to you and The Open University?

Jane Dickinson, Digital Skills Lead at The Open University

So I guess to me, when people talk about the digital skills gap they talk about the gap between the skills that organisations need to be able to solve problems and to be able to take advantage of opportunities, and the skills that are available to them. Either in their existing workforce or indeed that they're seeing coming through in terms of talent pools that they have access

to. For example, in some of our recent surveys more than half of employers are reporting a mismatch between young people's skills levels and the levels that they would expect them to have. And when you twin that with some of our other surveys around people not being very confident or at all confident, in applying things such as AI to their organisation. Or that there's this overwhelming, more than three-quarters of businesses believe that adopting new technologies will positively impact the productivity of their organisation. You can see why we hear so much about how this gap is really holding us back in terms of innovating, in terms of driving productivity and ultimately not just how it impacts the bottom line of individual organisations but also UK plc.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Absolutely, I find that quite interesting. Julian, do you not feel that what you're doing should be such a prolific thing in all schools with that in mind that businesses are saying they don't have the skills from the people coming out of education? Do you not feel like what you're doing should be much wider spread? Is there something that you see as a clear limitation to that you've managed to break through?

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

Josh, If I had a penny for every time someone said that. Yes, I bet. Absolutely and well, thankfully, I've been part of a number of roundtables with government and with education and a number of the stakeholders' lobbying

bodies and organisations who absolutely see enterprise and entrepreneurship as something which should be a part of the national curriculum and something that should just be a normal thread throughout a young person's learning, or at least the accessibility to that education. It seems as if government isn't sure whether or not entrepreneurship education should sit with business or sit with education. And a number of years back, I believe, a minister made mention of, well, if we kind of green-light an A-level in entrepreneurship, what will they become? You know, it's they don't quite... obviously there was a disconnect between how it's entrepreneurship is an enabler for any sector. And they want maths to become a mathematician, science become a scientist. Yes though because there wasn't that traditional straight line. You know, the frustrating thing about it is that there are so many countries around the world, we talk about UK plc, while in this regard we are very much behind. In terms of entrepreneurship, and that, when you scale that up to what's happening within the bigger business on the global stage, in some instances we do punch above our weight, but you can see that we don't output the same kind of businesses, the same type of successes, as other countries. Or as prolifically as well. I mean, we may have some excellent examples, but it's not as widespread and consistent, is it? It isn't at all. And I just think it's because there's a narrowness to how we approach business and entrepreneurship here, when actually, small businesses are the lifeblood of the UK economy. So there's work to be done, there's conversations to be had. But as I said, there are groups and consortiums who are pushing on that conversation, and we hope that we can make some headway on that. In the

meantime, I think it would be great if more entrepreneurs would come together, because sometimes government needs the commercial sector to plug a gap, and then they can jump behind it. But that hasn't quite happened yet.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Yes, absolutely. But there are some opportunities, Jane, to kind of catch up. If you weren't as lucky to come across a programme like Julian's when you were at school or in your younger education years, things like Click Start programme at The Open University are designed to help people catch up with digital skills and entrepreneurship to some extent, is that right?

Jane Dickinson, Digital Skills Lead at The Open University

Yes, that's right. So we've just recently launched the Click Start with The Open University programme, which is aimed at 18 to 30 year-olds, and really developing their confidence and digital awareness skills in key areas such as cybersecurity, AI, coding. But we are wrapping around that those all-important professional skills, so things like resilience, communication, all of those things that we've just talked about, critical thinking, I think, and problem solving and lack of fear of failure, that's so critical. So that's what we're trying to do to bolster and support people, as they will be – in their lives, in the workplace – working alongside these technologies, so it's really important that they feel empowered to be able to utilise them to the full and to use technology as an enabler. So it's open to everyone across the UK that is 18 to

30, and it's completely free to get involved. So that is one of the things that we are doing. Although obviously our curriculum more broadly, our short courses, our degrees, all of the things that we're doing, all of our free learning and OpenLearn, is really focused on how can we support people to move into more rewarding work, to solve problems, to engage all of those wonderful things that make us human, as perhaps AI starts to do the more routine things. And how can we really develop that resilience and growth mindset so that we've all got the skills to be successful in work and life.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Yes absolutely. And a word you said there which is really important is empowered. I think, as you said, when the robots take over there's two things that we still need to do: one is leadership and the other is to empower people to contribute to what's going on. We need to hopefully be able to direct robots. Let's not get too dystopian about that future just yet.

Darren, why is that leadership so important in making change and implementing innovation in businesses?

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

Gosh. I could answer that question in so many ways, but I think fundamentally, you touched on it before, but that the world we live in today moves so fast, right? I can't remember who it was, but somebody coined the term VUCA, so: volatile, uncertainty, complex and ambiguous. That's the state of the business world these days, and I think in order to navigate that we need

strong leadership at all levels. So from the top of the organisation, right down to the lower levels, we need that strong leadership, and we need that ability to be able to navigate that VUCA world, as we call it. I think that the skills that we really need to build, encourage, to navigate this VUCA world that I talk about are things like... We need the adaptability. We need to be curious, particularly given the onset of technology, it's constantly changing. We're always seeing these new things. We had DeepSeek pop up in China. We've got all these things happening, so we need the ability to be curious and critical. Jane talked about critical thinking. We need to sometimes challenge what we see, because these things look great on the bonnet, and then we look underneath and actually there's maybe something else going on. So I think leaders need those capabilities. I also think that, problem solving is a big area. We need to, as leaders, they need to be thinking about, when I see a DeepSeek pop up, what does that mean for me? How how can I address that? What does that mean to my business? What can I do? Is it an opportunity or is it a threat really? You know, so we need strong leadership to be able to ask those questions. I think leadership again, for me, is about having that ability to also bring the right people along the journey with you.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

I think that's, I think that's interesting, because we've talked about intrapreneurs a lot through this series and about how they are sort of mavericks, the people that want to take a step out of line and say, right we're going to create change. But I think there's a huge importance to the leadership they work within, around, underneath to be able to enable that

behaviour, because I think a lot of them look at leadership and say, right that's somebody that tells you what to do. But actually, how does a leader not just tell somebody what to do but sort of give them scope to step out of line and to be a maverick?

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

When we're talking about leaders operating within the context of big organisations, there's a whole ecosystem around them. There's policies they need to adhere to. There's, like you said, there's leadership structures that are above them. There's teams that may be below them in the organisation hierarchy, and then you'll be able to navigate all of that. I think what's important is that they have a vision, they are then committed to that vision, because you will often be challenged. People will often question you and say, oh, well, you know, why are you going in that direction? But if you have a vision and you're committed to it, you need to stick to it, and you need to be bold enough to stick to it. And I think Julian talked about risk. They also need to have the boldness to take risk. Because they're quite often going against the standard or organisational beliefs, the behaviours, the processes. They need to be disruptive. So, there's all these other factors that kind of sit around these leaders that exist within these wider ecosystems, that and the things that they need to grapple with and also be comfortable with, you know, change is not easy. And change is uncomfortable, and as a leader who's forcing change, I'd like to think of it as you're almost putting tension in the

system. So, you're going up against the grain. So, you need to be bold enough and confident enough to stick to your commitments and drive it through.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

And you actually, you went back into education midway through your career with The Open University, didn't you?

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

Yes I did.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

How did you find that trying to maintain change and maybe some, I don't know, would you say that, almost like a change of course but also maintaining a career at the same time.

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

It was hard. You know, I'll be honest, it was hard. I did a Diploma in Management maybe ten years ago, maybe a little bit longer, actually. And I did it because, I mean, I was working within the corporate environment at the time. I was managing a big organisation at the time, and I wanted to I wanted to understand more about the context in which I was operating. So hence the reason why I picked the Diploma in Management. Doing that whilst doing a day job was challenging, because of time. However, I got so much benefit from it, genuinely, I learned some new skills. I saw my role, I saw my

organisation in a different way off the back of that. I also loved the fact that I got to meet people from all over the world, actually, on my course, and working in very different contexts. So I got to make some friends, some of whom I'm still friends with today, and learned from them. And so for me, I think taking on that challenge at that point in my career, yes it was tough, but I think the benefits far, far outweighed the challenges that it came with. And, I thoroughly enjoyed it and thoroughly recommend that anybody who's embarking on or is at a point in their journey where they feel they need to accelerate their skills a bit more or want to do that, they're working.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

A critical part of being an intrapreneur is identifying where you could benefit from more knowledge, more experience, trying to step out of what's comfortable and do more, even if that does mean you're strapped for time and everything else. Julian, what advice would you give to employers to promote intrapreneurship, entrepreneurship within their businesses? What are the things they could do to inspire people to do more of that once they reach the working world?

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

Well, I can kind of reflect on what I currently do within our organisation, and that is to really put trust in your team, because if you have, as Darren mentioned, a clear vision, then actually it's in the same token, a good leader

will recognise that they are not the fountain of knowledge, perhaps, and that if they have good team members who are aligned with that vision, then perhaps the members of the team will have other ways to help meet that vision and help that vision to become something more substantial. And it may just happen in a different way. And so, I've given my team the creative licence to be just that, creative. Because when I look at other huge organisations who I have a lot of respect for. If you think about a company like Google, they very early on had their kind of 20% time, where actually Google Docs came from there, Google Maps, a whole bunch of Google products came from their employees, and if they didn't create that deliberate time for their employees to exercise that entrepreneurial spirit they had, then who knows? Google may not be the company that they are today. So, I think there's there's a lesson to be learned in that for businesses everywhere.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

And, I think critical that sticking on that point of view, because we actually talked about this percentage time previously in another episode. And what's so critical there at Google is that the people felt inspired and motivated to contribute to the business and not go straight to the pub with that time. How do you create that feeling in culture?

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

Because within a business, you've still got the stability of being within a team, having some resources. You don't need to leave your job and become this super risky entrepreneur, and the business benefits, the individual benefits. It can be a great recipe for success. It's just that, when you look at all of the cycles of technology and we're at the beginnings of what a lot of people think is a significant shift with AI, there was an employee at one point who said to their boss, we should really have a website, 20 or 30 years ago. Then there was an employee that said we should really have a mobile app, or everyone's accessing our stuff, we need to go on the cloud. There's always been an employee, who has told the leaders in that organisation about the new technological change. As we know, not all of those leaders listened, and so they became the dinosaurs of the previous technological revolution. So I think looking at it like that, even if we just look at the evidence in recent history, leaders who are switched on will realise that not being the fountain of all knowledge, that actually there's a massive fountain of knowledge within their workforce, but their workforce needs to think about how they can all be in a space where they know they can create, they can contribute, they can innovate.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Create a commission by showing evidence that you're here to listen.

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

That's a great word. And know that they'll be listened to, and I go back to, be trusted to come up with something that may or may not work. That's the other thing. I mean, Amazon are famous for hacking a bunch of products that absolutely didn't work. But they're okay with that because they know that there's, I think Jeff Bezos calls it one-way-door decisions and two-way-door decisions, it's stuff that you need to think a bit more carefully about because you can't really reverse it. And there was stuff that if it works, it works, if it doesn't, hey at least there's something we've learned, maybe not to do that again but we're not going to not try. And I think leaders need the courage to be able to do that otherwise a smaller incumbent will come along with the courage to be innovative and take market share.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Absolutely and Jane, you've done a huge amount of research in this area. What other things can people learn from some of these more disruptive large businesses that have managed to create change in digital and AI?

Jane Dickinson, Digital Skills Lead at The Open University

There's probably lots and lots we could talk about and probably take up the rest of this podcast on that topic, couldn't we? But I suppose if we tried to get under the hood of successful disruption, we are going to uncover a number of themes and they are going to be the themes that we've been discussing so far. So it is going to be great mindsets and resilience, the lack of

a fear of failure. It is going to be that interplay between leadership and the rest of the organisation that Julian's just been talking about. But I think for me as well, taking that systems-thinking approach to problems and projects, because I think sometimes when we embark on a course of action, whilst we can be very agile and we can navigate around roadblocks, we get fixated on the project and various milestones. We don't always zoom out and remember to take a holistic view of the environment we're operating in. And I suppose if we point to famous disruptors, perhaps like Uber and Airbnb, who were able to change the markets they were operating in, they did that, didn't they, through the successful application of existing technologies to their context. So for me that was less about the technology but more about a laser-like focus on the customer experience. So I suppose on the connectivity between the driver and the customer in the case of Uber, where all of a sudden we had this opening up of visibility of wait times and the price that we were going to pay and availability in a way that we hadn't seen before. So I suppose for me the common thing that I see when people are successful, it really starts with a focus on the problem or indeed the opportunity. And how you improve the experience for your customer or your colleague, and then you kind of go away and look at ways in which the technology can do that. And crucially, as we've talked about throughout this session so far, how you bring people along with you, how you win those hearts and minds, how you always incorporate those views of your key stakeholders.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

And it's not just that we're talking about leadership roles and key stakeholders, and certainly into my mind come people who are more advanced in their career, but I think it's also the acceptance and inclusion of the younger workforce that can see things differently. I know when I started my career very young, I was 15, 16, working in manufacturing with public companies. I mean, that is an industry like no other that expects you to be old and grey to to walk through the door, and so I was very young. And the people that did let me through the door let me ask questions and say, well why do you do that? Why do you do this? And I think it's that 18–30 category which sadly I can no longer count myself as part of, that can bring about a bit of naivety, a bit of ignorance, but it's valuable, right? How do we focus on that age group in the businesses and make sure that we're listening?

Jane Dickinson, Digital Skills Lead at The Open University

To me all ages are really important, and everybody's got a contribution to make, for sure, and a valuable contribution to make. And I think a lot of the conversation around AI. We've seen, haven't we, that what you get out is only as good as what you put in. So if you're not taking into account everyone's needs and perspectives the result you're going to get is going to be very different. But as 18 to 30s, as I said before, are going to be increasingly living and working alongside technologies, it's really important that we help them have that baseline awareness and understanding of the skills. But also we do create a culture that takes into account, as Julian and

Darren have been talking about, the fact that the pace of change has never been so fast, and it will never be as slow again. How do we start to think about, how do we give them the resilience and the tools to be able to just run with that, and the confidence, I think, like you say, to be able to ask those curious questions and to start to make contributions from really day one? And I suppose that's one of the things, perhaps, that we see about apprenticeships in the workforce, because people are learning and then applying their knowledge in the workplace right away. We are seeing that value to the business, we're seeing the value to the individual and kind of helping people to move their careers on.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Absolutely. Well, should we take a few minutes to talk about AI in particular? Darren, UK government sees it as a massive opportunity for growth for the UK. I think a lot of businesses do as well. Or is it all just a fad, and it's all about chatbots? What's in there really? What's tangible?

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

Oh gosh. AI I think is, certainly in my view, an enormous opportunity. Some people will say, I think Julian said it before, we're kind of on the cusp of another digital revolution or another phase in our digital revolution, and I think AI is is leading that. I think we talk about AI, I mean, a lot of people I think the lens is really on Gen AI, to narrow a bit more, and I think. Can we define Gen AI? Gen AI is basically about generating with AI. So, you can create, you can

take, for example, lots of text and create some answers to some questions. Or you can create images. So, it's all about creating using AI. It's basically the power. But AI has just got so much potential, Gen AI in particular, because it can touch any part of a business. From the finance department to HR to operations, Gen AI could, or AI more broadly, could solve a problem. It could present opportunities, and it's far beyond chatbots, just to answer your point earlier on. It extends to all sorts of use cases, across a multitude of industries. An example might be, I want to be more operationally efficient. Perhaps you could use Gen AI to drive efficiency within a manufacturing process, for example, or within a finance department. So, it can touch so many different places, and we could talk for hours and hours about a number of different situations in which it could be used. But fundamentally, for me, yes, it's a potential growth driver because it will enable the creation of new business models. It's an efficiency driver because it can help to cut out cost or create more synergies within an organisation. And last but not least, it can also be used to enhance customer experience. A lot of people are using it within the customer experience space, so that's a great place where it could play.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

And if somebody's watching this and they are an intrapreneur, or they have real ambitions to become one, and they want to do something in AI, they've seen an opportunity, what are some things they should be aware of?

Darren Campbell Global Head of Startup, Catalyst at Capgemini

What should they be aware of? Well I think lots of things, but I think if you just cut it down, I think firstly regulation and laws. So in America, for example, you have a lot more freedom than you do in the UK or than you do in Europe. In regards to privacy and data protection?

Absolutely so, I think the first thing, if an entrepreneur is looking to launch an organisation that's focused on AI or Gen AI, understand the regulatory environment in which you're operating. If you're doing something within an organisation, there may also be, and should be, policies related to AI or Gen AI within an organisation. So again, be aware of what boundaries you are able to operate, I think is is one point. The other thing I would also draw caution to is skills. Jane's talked a lot about skills, but I think there's this, Gen AI is all the talk certainly in the IT industry at the moment, and so there's a big draw on skills, and we don't have enough people in the industry who have the right skills to enable us to really exploit this. The UK is a great example of that. If you are going down the Gen AI route, where are you going to find the skills to deliver whatever it is you want to do in that space? And then a couple of other things I think to be aware of is that AI, or Gen AI in particular, is typically trained on data. So what that means is these systems are fed tons and tons of data, and then they use that data to then do their generation, or create. What a lot of people are not aware of is that sometimes that data may be cooperated or it may have been trained on data that isn't legitimate. Sometimes that data may have bias in it. So there are things we need to think

about with regards to the type of data that we're feeding these AI systems and be careful of. So those are just some thoughts. I mean, there's many, many other things Josh, but those are some of the ones that immediately jump to mind.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

Really helpful. So Jane, how's The Open University helping people who similarly may be thinking about starting a project in AI or looking to implement AI in some way? Is there some opportunities at The Open University to understand more about it?

Jane Dickinson, Digital Skills Lead at The Open University

Yes in the Click Start programme that we talked about earlier, and we have a Getting Started with Gen AI course, which is really all about demystifying, just following on from a lot of what Darren was saying there, it's as much about what Generative AI isn't as much as what it is. And what we do is we take people on a fun exploration of Generative AI. We get them using the tools. So the ethics and this journey around where it can be really valuable and what its limitations are is kind of baked into this journey. I think by week six – and it's roughly a ten-week course if you do three hours a week, but you can do it at your own pace – by week six you're creating your own advertising campaign. So in doing your jingle and your videos you're using AI, as Darren was saying, to generate that output on those graphics. So that's what we're offering. As I

say, that's out there and that's absolutely free for people to participate in. We also have some content now that we're starting to post on our free OpenLearn platform as well. But we're also developing a whole new AI undergraduate degree, which will be launching in early 2026. So for those who actually want to get into the technical piece of this we will be offering that very soon. Some very exciting developments going on there, and over and above that, internally at the OU at the moment, we're working with industry to roll out training to all of our staff.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

And so that's you how to track AI internally across the university itself?

Jane Dickinson, Digital Skills Lead at The Open University

Yes so really again, to give staff that awareness, that demystification, and then starting to give them the skills and the awareness, as I said before, about policies and procedures, but also what we're doing is we've got a view to refining that and then potentially making that available to our corporate clients as well. So, very much, we are using it. We're starting to, drink our own champagne. We are rolling out training to all of our own staff. We are looking to support other organisations and then, in terms of our education and our learning, we're also piloting approaches to using AI to support us to create new content, perhaps more quickly. And whilst we will never be able to replace or replicate the amazing work that our lecturers and our tutors

do, that's just not possible. We can look at piloting, perhaps, some digital assistance to offer additional value to our students. So again it's about, as has been said before, offering that additional customer value. So those are some of the things that we are doing.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

That's really cool. And Julian, are you also implementing AI in your organisations? Are you finding value in your business itself?

Julian Hall, Founder – Ultra Education and Entrepreneur in Residence at The Open University

Yes. The two things we're doing, one is for our kids and one is internally. So we've spent the last couple of months, since October, November last year, developing our own AI mentor. She's called Abby. She's essentially a voice agent, and we've trained her on the last ten years of data that we've collected in delivering entrepreneurial education to that age group. And you can have a conversation with her. An actual conversation? Your own conversation, yes. So we've trained her on one of our facilitator's voices. We've fed her all of our content, and we've put some guidelines in there, and essentially our pedagogy, how we would if we were in front of a ten-year-old, what process and what line of questioning would we, and what responses would we give to that ten year-old if they said they wanted to set up a T-shirt business or whatever it might be? And so we've essentially soft launched this mentor. It's

just a mobile phone number that can be called up, and they should have a conversation with you about it. At the end of the call, she'll send a WhatsApp or an SMS summary of the call. She'll follow up. If you ring again, she'll say, hi Josh, how's the T-shirt business going? Did you manage to figure out the logo that we talked about? So for us as a social impact organisation, what that means is that we can remove the constraints, which leads us to working with more children. So in the work we do at the moment we might see anything between maybe 50 to 100 kids a week. But technically Abby can speak to maybe 200 young people at a time. There's still lots of tweaks and stuff like that, but she's essentially in alpha mode, so we're quite excited about that. And what that actually means is once we've nailed that approach, technically we can spin out mentors who can teach any subject. So, at the moment I'm spending quite a lot of money on an A-level tutor for my daughter. So, my next mission personally is, can I figure out how I can save some money? But also kind of a much wider volume of knowledge going into that training. And more importantly, as a social impact organisation, we know that there is a cost barrier to a larger number of families than we would like to admit who simply can't afford the types of education that they would like for their children, which means that there's a barrier to them going off into certain professions, be it in university or otherwise. AI could potentially help to bring that cost barrier down, not to replace, but to supplement. So, we were doing that for our students. And then internally, we're developing a company well, a kind of an admin employee who we could shoot off a Slack message to and say, can you update our privacy policy in accordance with the new GDPR laws

for example. And it can go off and do a draft, and we can have a look, sign it off. Can you send this school our new proposal, find the school's email, it will draft something and it can send it. So, once you've plugged it into all of our systems, which we're about to do, then we can send a WhatsApp voice note, Slack messages, and it can essentially just help us to do a lot of the heavy lifting that the team would need to do. So, you know, we're quite excited about how that could just help us to buy back time for us to do higher-value work.

Josh Valman, CEO of RPDK and host

To have more impact. Absolutely. Excellent. Look, we're coming to the end of this session now. I've really enjoyed that conversation. Thank you, everybody for your contributions. I will make an attempt to sum everything that we've said here up into a few sentences. I can't do it justice in a few sentences, but I think when we're looking at this, are we talking about digital AI? We're not just talking about computers, we're talking about people skills. We're talking about developing the skills yourself or within your organisation for people to be able to understand and articulate ideas, communicate them, tell the story of how change can come about from certain project to certain partnerships, a certain piece of technology. I think we've also talked about the environment required for empowering people to to bring that change forward. You know, very rarely does the best change come from a couple of select people sat at the top of an organisation. It needs to be from an environment where

those at all levels of the business can contribute, can fill the need and the permission to bring about change and bring something to the business.

And, finally, to stay learning. I think that one of the key themes to all of your answers has been that we don't know everything, and the people that do best admit they don't know everything and acknowledge that and look for education, experience, opportunity throughout their career and provide that to other people. And I think that's one of the most valuable and exciting things we've discussed today. So, thank you very much, the three of you.

This has been the third in the series of four. You can listen back to the last two episodes on The Open University website. The next session will be focused entirely on sustainability and how we might use intrapreneurialism to drive sustainability. So, catch us again in the next two weeks for the next episode. But, for now, thank you very much, and thank you to all of our guests.