

TEDxHSG: MIND / SCAPES, The Future of Learning

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September 17, 2023

In a world overflowing with information and countless ways to absorb it, a world where it is increasingly hard to focus on oneself and not get distracted, the act of learning itself has undergone a transformative evolution. Just as the famous saying goes: 'The only constant is change.' The ever-changing methodologies and paths of learning offered to us require us to keep pace and adapt. This journey of self-improvement and the pursuit of knowledge took center stage at the recent TEDxHSG event, themed 'MIND / SCAPES, The Future of Learning.'

A diverse group, ranging from eager students to seasoned professionals, gathered with a shared purpose: To delve into the depths of learning and its profound impact on our lives. While our magazine typically zooms in on finance and economics, this special edition reminds us that the foundation of any subject is rooted in how we learn. This article is for those readers, who weren't able to attend this TEDx event but still want to take part in the experience. In a newfound cooperation between TEDxHSG and SGFER, I was allowed a glance at this year's event to provide you

with a perspective on it.

A Morning of Irony and Insight

Stepping into the university's library building, the morning's irony wasn't lost on me. What better venue to delve into the realm of learning than within the walls of one of Europe's most esteemed universities? Right at the entrance, I received a warm welcome and guidance from one of the many volunteers who made this event possible. The entrance area was already filled with many students and professionals, side booths showcasing event sponsors, and a buffet in the center of the room, tempting attendees with fresh coffee and pastries. Conversations hummed, a mix of eager anticipation and genuine curiosity, and I found myself wondering what the day would hold.

The Audimax, the university's central lecture hall, had a certain presence. Rows of seats awaited, some already occupied by keen listeners, others still to be filled by one. In front of the Audimax, the iconic TEDx red dominated the stage, a color and logo so globally recognized. I paused soaking in the ambience. Being in a setting dedicated to the sharing of ideas felt special. I settled into a seat, observing as the auditorium swelled to near capacity with an estimated 550 attendees. It promised to be a day in sync with the spirit of TEDx, and I silently commended the speakers and organizers for what was to come.

Embarking on a Journey of Insight

As the lights dimmed and music began to play lightly, the chatter slowly faded away. A video started, recapping all the speakers that were supposed to speak that

day and the general theme of the day. There were some interesting and well-known people within this group of speakers, like the former CCO of Red Bull or Thomas Kehl, Co-Founder of Finanzfluss, and it was evident that the attendees were ready to commence with the first speeches. After a short introduction to the event and a welcome by the two hosts of the day (here it was pointed out that this was not supposed to be a lecture of some kind but rather an interactive event, hence there were also Q&A parts at the end of each speech), Manu Kapur stepped onto the stage. As a professor at the ETH Zurich for Learning Sciences and Higher Education, he seemed to be a very fitting speaker for this event. His topic: The intriguing concept of 'How Failure Drives Learning.' As he began, it was immediately evident that this day would shape to be filled with perspectives that challenged, enlightened, and perhaps even reshaped our own. To provide our readers with a review that is as close to the actual experience as possible, I will share a couple of key insights about each speech, hoping to showcase their main ideas as well as some key moments.

He began his speech with a little exercise. Think for a moment and list down the emotions you associate with failure. Next, write down feelings tied to success. If you've followed along, you might find that the list of words for failure is lengthier than that for success. Manu Kapur argued that this is a core feature of our language. We learn from failure. He called it 'Productive Failure.' Drawing an analogy from sports, he explained that muscles must be pushed to their limit, to a state of breakdown, only then can they rebuild stronger. A similar principle, he argues, applies to learning. Encountering failure enhances memory retention. For instance, if tasked with remembering a

word he's thinking of, you'll likely recall it for a longer duration if you initially guessed it incorrectly.

'Sometimes you have to lose yourself [...] so you can find yourself,' he said, a sentiment that resonated deeply. Manu Kapur went on to mention that this thought of failure driving learning is the underlying philosophy for many domains, including engineering, startups, business in general, and science. In science, for example, the principle of learning through failure is particularly prominent: When a study is published, the scientific community attempts to debunk it through falsification, in other words, to prove the study wrong. The more attempts it withstands, the more credence it gains. In this sense, while the study aims for success (by withstanding falsification), it's the iterative process of confronting and learning from potential failures that fortifies its position. Thus, failure is at the heart of everything.

While Manu Kapur delved into the essence of learning through failure, Cynthia Hansen, MD at the Innovation Foundation, empowered by the Adecco Group, shifted the lens towards the 'Power Of Perspective.' The two different yet interconnected topics showcased the multifaceted nature of learning. Being a Korean-American, she was pretty lost when she first moved to Japan as a young university graduate for a job as an English teacher. She had to overcome many cultural hurdles in that tiny town where she lived, not to mention the thick Japanese accent they spoke there, which she wasn't used to. People would tell her, 'Hello, you are looking much fatter today,' which, while perplexing, was not meant to be derogatory.

Determined to provide innovative English instruction, she started to experiment. She tried things such as a room-sized game of Twister or English Karaoke. Some

initiatives flopped, while others thrived, evolving into full-fledged course schedules and resources for fellow educators.

When assisting job-seekers, Cynthia again employed a trial-and-error approach. While many strategies didn't yield the desired outcomes, some did. Over time, she identified consistently successful methods, such as a tech tool that reframed individuals' skills to align with employers' preferences. The learning she thus shared was that we, on an individual level, should find out what helps us to learn best or reach our goals. We should try different things like she did and scale whatever works best for us: 'Scan, build, scale.'

As Cynthia commenced her speech and Q&A under great applause, Thomas Kehl, a well-known German Media Entrepreneur, Bestselling Author, and Co-Founder of Finanzfluss, took to the stage. His theme resonated with a universal concern: 'How to NOT Mess Up Your Personal Finances.' He began by addressing an intriguing paradox: while previous generations may have been ill-equipped to handle their finances due to limited knowledge or resources, such constraints are obsolete in the contemporary era.

Many young people have experienced the COVID crisis in 2020 as their first and only financial crisis so far. Prices plunged, but still, many young people were not scared. On the contrary, they started seizing the opportunity and bought stocks. They were Do-It-Yourself money managers, Thomas Kehl commented. Knowledge today is freely accessible to us, and while you had to make mistakes for yourself to know better in the past, you can learn from other's mistakes today and prevent doing them. On the other hand, brokerage is also almost cost-free today. Cost-efficient funds have risen. But how is one to manage his money in an

effective way today? Thomas Kehl also had some key takeaways on that. First, learn what you need to know: The basics of investing and where you intend to invest. Second, follow the money, not advisors. Advisors will not advise you well; they can often only advise you on products from their bank or partners, not on what is best for you. Third, if it's too good to be true, it probably is. Fourth, brokers benefit if you trade a lot, not you. Invest your money and forget it; don't trade. And lastly, don't be afraid to make mistakes. Your first time will almost certainly go wrong, and that is fine. If you hesitate, reduce the budget. His mantra: 'The best money manager is you.'

With that, the first section and the first three speeches of the day were finished, setting an excellent start for the day.

Pushing Boundaries and Embracing Passion

After a brief break, the next session started with Adrian Rouzbeh, MMA-Trainer and Black-Belt, Bestselling Autor and Entrepreneur, and his speech on 'How To Master Life Like a Fighter.' His ADHD made school a challenging time for him when he was young. He couldn't focus and had difficulties to catch up to the rest of the class. By his own admission, he was hopeless and stuck. Yet, when he started to learn to fight, his life started turning around. He had discovered a principle of fighting that could be applied to any situation in life. He called it the PHS Principle: Playful, Holistic, and Serious.

Life is full of games, as Adrian put it, but it is vital to choose the right games to play. And this principle can help with that. A game needs to be playful. If you

have no fun with whatever you are doing, it probably isn't worth doing. The game also needs to be holistic. Adrian reflected on his time in school, when had to shut down 90% of the systems he thought were important for his learning. The learning approach was too one-dimensional. Academic learning like that doesn't include all ways of learning and may not be right for everyone, just as it wasn't right for Adrian. And lastly, a game needs to be serious. In fighting, that's easy: If you don't take it seriously, you will get knocked out. It's often not as easy in life to find seriousness in something you do. It is crucial for us to discover the 'why' behind our actions.

Following that pattern, you will find that some systems have low learning effects while others have high learning effects. Choosing systems with high learning effect is essential to make the most out of what you do. As he put it, 'Even if you are not playing a high-effect game, you are still playing.' Choose wisely what to do in life.

Following Adrian Rouzbeh's engaging address, Sophie Bonnaire Lafont took to the stage, whose speech was titled 'How Curiosity Can Change Your Life.' Serving as Global Head of Learning & Development at Nestlé, she is deeply immersed in the universe of curiosity and its profound impact on learning. With a challenging question, she set the tone: 'When was the last time you tried to learn something for the first time?' Reflect on that for a moment. It might feel like a distant memory to you. Yet, observe children and you witness their raw curiosity every day, sometimes every hour, showing how curious we are as children. We are curious by nature. Why then, she wondered, does curiosity seem to fade away during school?

As we gain experience in our lives, we are increasingly

told to refrain from being curious. 'No, don't touch that!', 'Be careful with that!', 'Stop doing that!' are just some of the expressions that most people have heard at one point. These seemingly little sentences have a great effect, they are one reason we get less curious as we age. We start to develop fears, and all those fears hinder our natural curiosity. Yet, in this rapidly evolving world, we need curiosity to navigate it, and most experts and leaders agree on that. Thus, she suggests three steps to gain back our curiosity. First, put aside your ego! You don't know everything, and that is fine. It is okay to ask questions. Second, confront your fears and expose yourself to new situations. And third, enjoy! The good news is that you don't need any skills to be curious. Still, being curious isn't easy; it will take a lot to become curious again, but it's necessary. You must 'reconnect with your inner curiosity,' as Sophie Bonnaire Lafont ended her speech.

The last speech from this second section was delivered by Cinzia Sanvido, President of the Julius Bär Art Committee. She held her speech on 'How Passion Shaped My Life - Both Professionally and Personally' and started by asking the listeners: 'What was your passion? What has changed, and why?' For many readers, this question may be easy to answer; for others, it might require a more profound reflection. Cinzia Sanvido's passion was always art. Her parents, however, had other ideas about her future. They didn't like the idea of her going into arts, so she went into private banking. Fate, however, had other intentions. One day, when she was at a gallery for contemporary art, she randomly ran into the former president of the Julius Bär Art Committee and exchanged a few words with him. That brief exchange led to him asking her

to join the art committee. She was finally able to connect her passion with her job and regards herself as very lucky to be able to do that. Such stories show how passions shape our lives. Cinzia Sanvido urged all attendees to try and combine our passion with our career. For it is through passions, that we find joy and meet great like-minded people, much like Cinzia Sanvido did. While neither an artist nor an art historian, she is now pursuing a career related to art, all because it is her passion.

As mentioned above, there was always an interactive part, a Q&A at the end. I have not mentioned any questions and answers so far, as including all Q&A's would be too much for an event summary, but I will highlight one of the key takeaways here. Someone in the audience asked her that often, our grandparents and sometimes parents still tell us that we should not follow our passion as a job. What does Cinzia have to say to that? She didn't have to think about it for even a moment: 'I want to wake up in the morning and be happy.' Follow your passion.

Redefining Learning and Challenging Norms

After a long lunch break with some catered food included in the ticket price, the final sequence of speeches began. The day had, until now, lived up to its anticipations, offering a wealth of insights and reflections. It was only fitting to anticipate that the concluding section would be equally, if not more, enriching. Commencing the segment was Manfred Hückel, former CCO at Red Bull and Managing Partner at St. Gilgen International School as well as a Bestselling Author, starting with his speech on 'Strengthening Strengths -

A Gentle School Revolution.'

He began with an engaging quiz. Picture, he suggested, two distinct groups of speed reading. The first, an average group, navigates at a pace of around 90 words per minute. The latter, a group of fast readers, breezes through approximately 350 words per minute. Now, all of them go through the same seminar on speed reading. The first group, the average one, increased their reading speed by about 67% to 150 words per minute. A momentary pause as Manfred Hückel posed the question: 'How much do you think the second group improved their reading speed? More or less than 67%?' The title of his speech offered a clue, but the revelation still astounded most attendees: The second group improved their speed by a whopping 729%, reaching 2900 words per minute. This shows that training skills we are already good at can be much more effective than training for something we are average or bad at. Many companies already utilize this fact, however, it remains peculiar at public schools. Hückel cited as a personal example his daughter, who experienced the success of that principle firsthand when she changed schools. At the new school, they developed her skills, which she was already exceptionally talented in, and she improved in those subjects and the ones she was initially bad in.

So, what can we do now that we know this? School reform isn't a viable option. So, we have to start a gentle revolution. First, think of a child or a young person you can help, and that is near and dear to you. Next, think of their key strengths. Lastly, tell them to strengthen these strengths and support them wherever possible. But what do you do when you don't find any strengths in that young person? As once a headmaster of a school put it when he talked to Manfred: 'If you

don't find a strength in a child, you must look much deeper.'

The following speech by HSG Student Representative, Lou Cardorin, pierced deep, tugging on the very threads we often keep hidden away.

Imagine this: On the brink of teenage years, on the very day meant to celebrate the joy of growing up, Lou was gifted a life-altering diagnosis: an autoimmune skin condition. In an instant, the world she knew crumbled. The disease, relentless and cruel, ignited a fiery torment throughout her body, snuffing out her youthful passion for basketball and everything she held dear. There was a time, she recalled with haunting clarity when she couldn't even sit. At a time when her peers' biggest fear was to be the spotlight of classroom attention, Lou's biggest fear was the simple act of reshuffling seats in the classroom. So intense was her pain. She felt helpless, hopeless, lost. A chilling note in her diary once read: 'Aucun vent n'est favorable en voilier qui ne sait pas dans quel port aller.' Translated, it means: 'No wind is favorable on a sailboat that does not know which port to go to.' A sentiment this heavy, this mature, from a child who should be relishing the carefree days of youth is heart-breaking.

Enter Lisa. Lisa, a beacon in Lou's stormy sea, carried her own hailstorm. At a particularly low point, Lisa shared a concerning deadline with Lou: twelve days. Twelve days to find a glimmer of hope or be overwhelmed by her own despair. When Lou considered seeking help from their teachers, Lisa implored her to keep this secret. The sheer magnitude of that trust and the unspeakable burden it placed on Lou's young shoulders is incomprehensible. It's a choice, trust versus life, that no child should be forced to bear.

Both were fortunate enough to find salvation in therapy. Yet, the haunting question that Lou posed is why we are letting things go this far. Why are we only looking at healing the problem once it's almost too late? For Lisa, it was twelve days. Twelve days, and it would have been too late for her. Lou argued for a change in our education system. Instead of our current standard academic education, we must aim for positive education. We need to equip children with the tools to fight the hardships of life. As Lou put it, 'prevent the fall off the cliff.'

As the day drew to a close, Jacqueline Gasser-Beck, Head of the Teaching Innovation Lab at the University of St.Gallen, graced the stage. Her subject matter resonated with me personally, having previously written about ChatGPT. Under the title 'The ChatGPT Conundrum: Navigating the New Norms of Knowledge and Authenticity,' she opened with a provoking statement: 'The College essay is dead.' For a fleeting moment, I dreamed of a utopian world without the hardships of essay writing. However, this daydream was soon punctured by reality. She shared an anecdote of a student who, in a moment of desperation, turned to ChatGPT for a last-minute essay. The AI performed exceptionally well, so well even that he was commended by his lecturer on the eloquence and depth of his essay. However, this victory was shadowed by a lasting realization: 'What if ChatGPT does better in other things, too? What if I will be replaced by it entirely?'

While the dawn of automation in the past has mainly meant job losses and re-education for less-educated people, AI hits the jobs and tasks of well-educated people and threatens to take over even the most sophisticated branches of society. This may not be

exceptionally comforting for some people, but it's a development we can't stop. Rather than viewing AI like ChatGPT as an adversary, we should look at it as a tool. She gave us an example of how she used AI for one of her past presentations. She asked ChatGPT for a structure for a presentation on fast fashion and let it create a mindmap. She requested ChatGPT to combine fast fashion with fast food, which she then put in an image creation AI like Midjourney to get a good-looking visual for her presentation.

However, it is crucial to remember that there are biases in AIs like ChatGPT. Biases are human, so it's only natural for them to occur in AI. According to Jacqueline Gasser-Beck, ChatGPT is left libertarian pro-environment and would have voted green at the last German federal election. Furthermore, it is essential to understand ethical considerations like using it in an essay, which at some academic institutions might equate to academic dishonesty, in other words cheating. However, Jacqueline Gasser-Beck is still sure about one thing: 'Machines can never replace the depth of human connections and emotions.' Instead of fighting change, we should adapt and embrace it. Her words culminated in a thunderous applause, a fitting conclusion to a thought-provoking day.

Thanks for joining me on my TED Talk Journey

As we have now finished exploring the speeches of this year's TEDxHSG Event, I would like to share some personal reflections with you. This event was highly insightful and well organized. Rest assured, I'm eagerly awaiting the announcement of the next installment's date, and when it drops, my calendar will be the first

to know.

While this article captured the core themes of all nine talks, words on paper (or screen) can't fully encapsulate the gravitas of the speeches, the atmosphere in the Audimax, or the visible and audible excitement of the audience. The nuances, the spontaneous reactions, the unscripted remarks - these things are impossible to capture in this piece.

One such element I've sidestepped in this account is the Q&A segment - an integral part of the TEDx experience. As I wrote before, they are meant as an interactive piece at the end of each talk, where attendees can voice doubts and feed their curiosity. Skipping this means missing out on a cornerstone of the event.

Beyond Q&As, when you don't attend, you are also passing up on a great networking opportunity. The breaks aren't just meant for fresh coffee or some warm croissants; they are where you not only get to talk to fellow attendees but also the speakers of the event. Just imagine diving deeper into a talk topic with the very expert speaker who delivered it! These chats can provide new perspectives and clarity on their ideas, that you wouldn't be able to get otherwise.

And then there's the ambiance. I've done my best to describe the buzzing venue, but there is just nothing like the real deal itself. Collective gasps, laughter, sudden outbursts of applause, or even tears - these are moments that can't be replicated or streamed.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, attending means putting yourself in an environment of self-growth. It's an opportunity to challenge your own beliefs, and leave not just informed, but transformed.

So, as a most vehement appeal, don't let next year's TEDxHSG be an opportunity that you let slide by.

Embark on this journey of insight for yourself and return with *ideas worth spreading*.