

UCT course gets business to go with the gut

Issued by [UCT Graduate School of Business](#)

16 Mar 2007

The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is launching a revolutionary course this April that uses a powerful process adapted from psychology to help executives develop their strategic planning and decision-making capacities.

The course, called “Thinking with your Gut”, is the brainchild of the business school’s Executive Education unit, and will enable leaders to tap into and use a powerful resource many may have overlooked – intuition.

According to Catherine Johnson and Maryse Barak, the directors of the course, the challenges facing leaders in the business environment globally are becoming increasingly complex and demanding. “While on the one hand this creates a stimulating sense of purpose, it also carries uncertainty, stress and a feeling of being overwhelmed,” the pair said.

“In a context of transformation, such as South Africa, the challenges and demands confronting business leadership bring unique pressures. The 2006 Grant Thornton International Business Owners Survey revealed that stress levels amongst business leaders in South Africa increased by 65% between 2004 and 2006.”

The UCT GSB course is the first by a South African business school to employ a process called “Focusing”, which has its roots in psychotherapy studies, begun in the 1960’s. Psychologist Eugene Gendlin investigated why some clients benefited from therapy and others did not, and found that the most important element of positive change had to do with the way successful clients processed their experiences. He identified which internal processing activities facilitated successful problem resolution, and devised the Focusing method to teach these skills to everyone,” explained Johnson and Barak.

The research has since been supported and expanded upon by a long series of operational case studies carried out internationally. The Focusing process is now used in a vast range of disciplines from education, trading and investing, to coaching and community building. It has proven effective not only in improving decision-making, but also in promoting more authentic leadership, improving interpersonal relationships and lowering stress levels.

“In our modern culture, which emphasizes the power of conscious rational intellect, many have little understanding of the importance and capacity of human intuition. It is actually a powerful natural resource that we can draw on to complement rational decision-making processes,” said Johnson.

“Most people have some experience of this ‘gut feeling’ – at some point or another in everyone’s life intuition has played a role in a decision. Perhaps it was a feeling in the gut or chest that said ‘Don’t trust this person’ or ‘Hire this person’.”

According to the pair, it is usually the body – the gut in particular – that gives the signal that our intuition is coming into play.

“For executives, tapping into and using such a resource as intuition or ‘gut feeling’ can be a powerful ally in demanding times, not just in the workplace but also in their personal lives,” they add.

Johnson and Barak both bring substantial knowledge and experience to bear on the new course. Johnson is a clinical psychologist and Focusing trainer, and brings well developed skills in facilitating and containing processes of personal change. Barak is a veteran corporate trainer and facilitator whose clients include BP, Eskom, Old Mutual and SABMiller.

The course will be a three day experiential learning process and is designed for senior executives and managers who are involved in strategic planning and decision-making.

For more information contact Shireen Brown on (021) 406 1370 or email . The website is www.gsb.uct.ac.za/think.

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