

Position Paper

# Executive Upgrade Required

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## Executive Summary

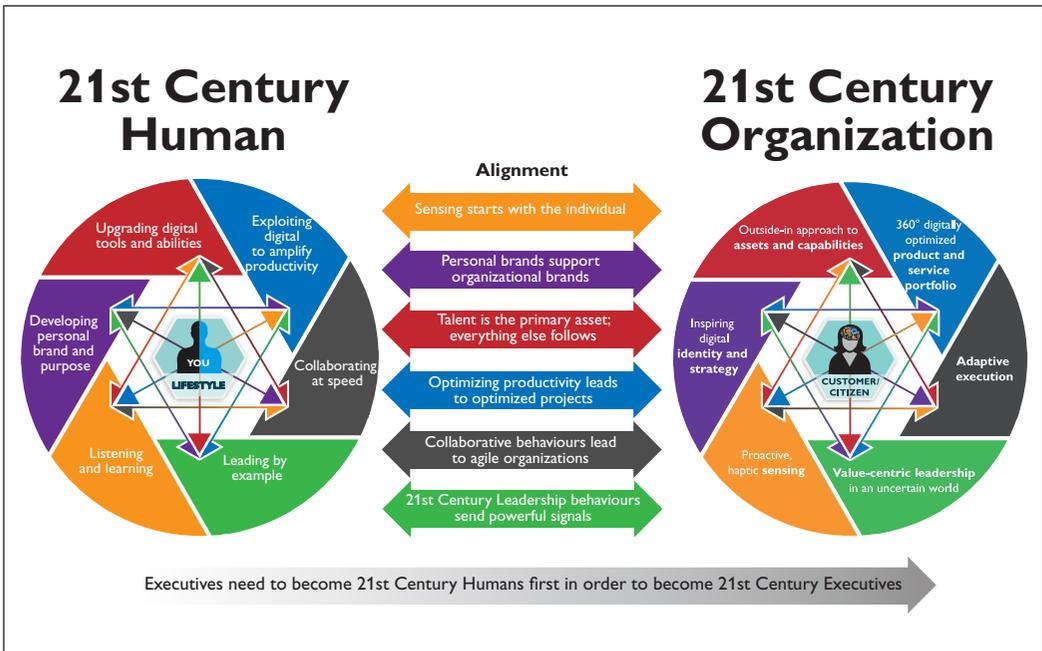
The pace of technology change and disruption is so fast that it is hard for anyone to keep up. As Luke Johnson wrote in *The Sunday Times* at the end of 2015, “Many of us over 40 need more urgency about adapting to the digital onslaught. Before our markets are stolen and companies made redundant by technology, we should re-educate ourselves, and renew our businesses.”

As the cartoon depicts, machines are getting constantly more intelligent and competent, while humans find it increasingly difficult to stay aware of what’s possible in this digital age. How do you get – or even find the motivation to get – the constant digital context and skills updates required to harness the power that’s available and see the business opportunities?



At LEF, we believe executives cannot fully understand the business opportunities and requirements of the *21st century organization* unless they first upgrade their own digital skills with first-hand experience and understanding of the technologies being so rapidly adopted by the market and the digital mindset that surrounds them. The following figure shows the strong alignment between the requirements of the 21st century organization and the profile of the *21st century human*. This is why we believe executives need to become 21st century humans first before they can lead 21st century organizations.

In our experience, an *immersion experience* is the most effective catalyst for updating executives’ professional digital context (for the 21st century organization) and upgrading their personal digital skills (as 21st century humans). It transforms executive understanding, context, thinking and skills.



**There is a strong alignment between the profile of the 21st century human and the needs of the 21st century organization**

Our solution sets this immersion experience in the context of your own business. We have developed a 21st Century Human Upgrade programme, a one- or two-day practical 'hands on the technology' and 'learn by doing' workshop, which performs a personal upgrade from 20th century to 21st century executive.

This paper explores the hidden reasons why the 21st century digital world has been able to develop without executives understanding or even realizing what is happening, why executives' digital skills have fallen behind, and why we believe that an immersive experience is the way to address these issues.

## The 21st century world is developing so fast it is leaving executives behind

The pace of technology change and the shift to a digital world has been so great that it's small wonder busy executives have had trouble keeping up. So many things have changed so fast that the people at the top, even in successful organizations, and even within IT, don't really understand what is happening, and don't realize how dangerous that is.

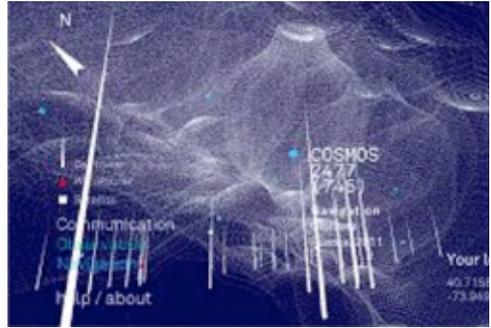
LEF has identified six keys ways in which this is significant for today's organizational leaders, and all of them are addressed by time spent in our 21st Century Human Upgrade programme:

- 1. A parallel digital world is emerging.** There are now two worlds that we inhabit. One is the physical world we see every day – buildings, trees, roads; the other is a digital world that we aren't biologically equipped to see but is, in fact, all around us. This is the digital infrastructure world of radio, WiFi, satellite and phone networks, which connect us (or rather, our mobile devices) every minute of every day. We get great utility out of this of course – being able to make mobile phone calls, use navigation tools and get access to the internet – but because we don't see this digital world, we forget or fail to understand its full impact.

**PHYSICAL WORLD**



**DIGITAL WORLD**



**We now inhabit two parallel worlds**

Our phones are actually ‘Internet of Things’ data collection devices for any organization we casually sign up to join. Through our devices, we are all leaking data wherever we go, pertaining to everything we do, to people we may not want to know. The 21st Century Human Upgrade programme lifts the veil on this hidden world through exercises to create awareness of how individuals and companies are often unprotected, unsuspecting participants in the digital world.

**2. We need to be human online too.** Whilst the relatively formal email has become the backbone of online communications for the older generation, the emergence of social media, where we are able to share anything easily with selected or public groups, means we now need to learn how to be human online too. Marshall McLuhan’s observation that “the medium is the message” warns us that these powerful communication mechanisms cannot simply be used in the same way as older channels. As Deepak Chopra (globally renowned speaker and writer on the mind and body) said, “social media is the next phase of humanity” because it connects us in ways that have just not been available before.

The figure below shows five human characteristics that are now mirrored online. Not using these mechanisms – for example, not maintaining a presence on Facebook – is often a skills issue (set up, use, security configuration, etc.), but it manifests itself as an aggressively out-of-date, anti-technology stance in the digital world. “I’m not on Facebook” is sad because most people would like to share photos and keep up with friends and family – it’s just ‘social’. In the 21st Century Human Upgrade programme, we explore attitudes to these skills, examine the barriers; and we offer a coaching programme post-21st Century Human Upgrade workshop to help participants sharpen their approaches.

OFFLINE	ONLINE
CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER	
ENGAGING IN CONVERSATIONS	
SHARING STUFF	
HELPING EACH OTHER	
BELONGING TO/IN GROUPS	

**Five human characteristics that are mirrored offline and online**

**3. Consumer-driven technology adoption is driving ever-faster change.** LEF coined the term *consumerization* of technology over 10 years ago, when it first identified that the rapid development of consumer technology and its adoption outpaced the speed at which organizations could themselves keep up or develop new technology to match what was available on the open market. Underlying this, of course, was Moore's Law (the doubling of transistors on a silicon chip and therefore its computing power and speed every 18 months). Moore's original law was just about integrated circuits, but it has proved true for all technology (and associated software) – networks, mobile phone capability, online entertainment, online banking, camera technology – which is why consumer technology adoption has moved at such pace. Add this to the speed of innovation and business model disruption coming out of Silicon Valley and all the other tech hubs in the world, plus the race to zero (offering more for less in the pursuit of competitive dominance) between the technology giants – Apple, Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft and Google – and you get a dizzying onslaught of change brought about by technology. The figure below gives a taste of the scale of what's happening.

The relevance, utility and value of all this change has to be contextualized and considered by both firms and individuals. In the 21st Century Human Upgrade programme, executives get hands-on experience of using the latest available consumer technology from around the world.

#### Business Models changed by the internet

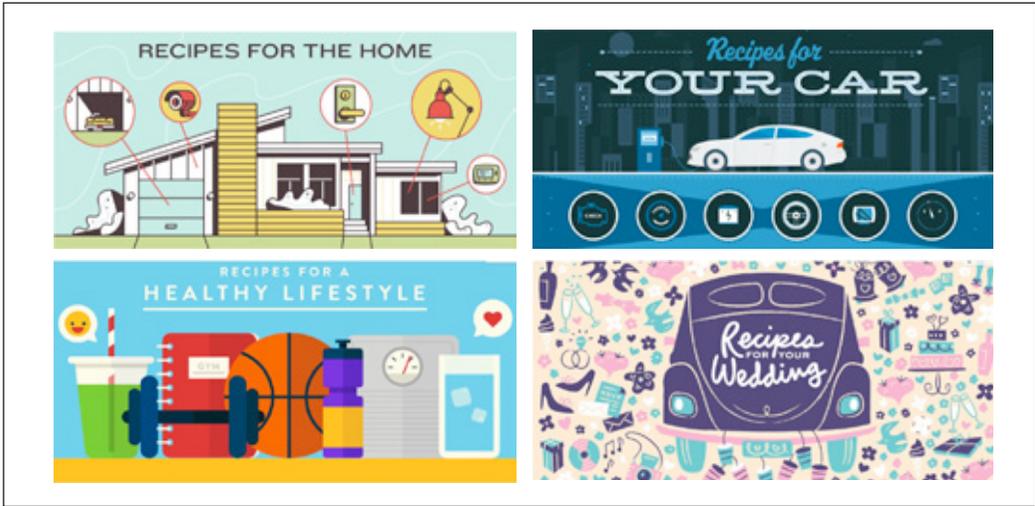
- Banks
- Shops
- Travel agents
- Newspapers
- Broadcast media
- Music
- Books, encyclopedias, libraries
- Cameras
- Film production – video cameras
- Classroom courses/education

#### Things replaced by your mobile (pocket computer/personal IOT device)

- Phone – no fixed line
- Maps
- Desktop PCs with disks/filing cabinets
- Pedometers, torches
- Video conferencing
- Calculators
- Clocks, watches
- Notebooks, diaries, address books
- Faxes, scanners, dictaphones, calculators, pen

The internet is *still* changing everything

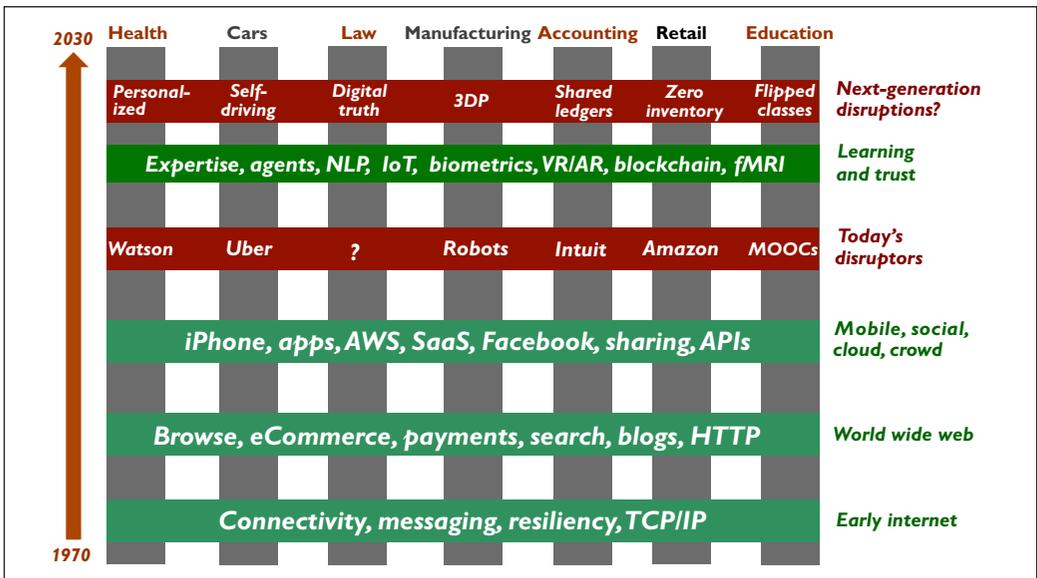
**4. It's getting ever easier to create new software and services.** Just as significant as Moore's Law has been to the speed of computer hardware, APIs (application programming interfaces – enabling software to talk to other software) have been the software equivalent transforming the speed of connectivity. If everything can talk easily to everything else, like the adoption of English as the common business language throughout the world, then at a company level you don't have to build everything from scratch in-house – you can just plug elements of software and services together to create new services. It's like Lego. For individuals, it means being able to create what the free web-based service IFTTT (If This Then That) calls 'recipes' between technologies to help them run their lives – for example, getting their car to talk to the garage door, or their fridge to talk to the supermarket.



IfThis Then That (IFTTT) recipe examples

This approach requires a change in mindset for most executives. The best way to learn about it, and discover how easy it is, is by actually creating a business application – and we don't mean coding. 21st Century Human Upgrade participants are challenged (and helped) to create their own recipes from the devices at the workshop and software freely available on the open market.

**5. A Matrix built on cross-industry capabilities is emerging.** Like roads, telephones and electricity in the 20th century, an ever-more capable digital ecosystem is becoming the underlying business infrastructure of our time. Whereas in the past each major industry sector had its own vertical 'stack' of processes and systems, firms must now leverage powerful *horizontal* capabilities that are used across many industries. These new capabilities are radically transforming many aspects of business and society, and will only get stronger over time. We refer to this emerging set of services as 'the Matrix' (see figure below). While we could have easily used existing terms such as the internet, the web or the cloud, we believe that the metaphor of a matrix best captures the growing friction and synergies between the vertical and horizontal worlds.



The Matrix of cross-industry capabilities is emerging

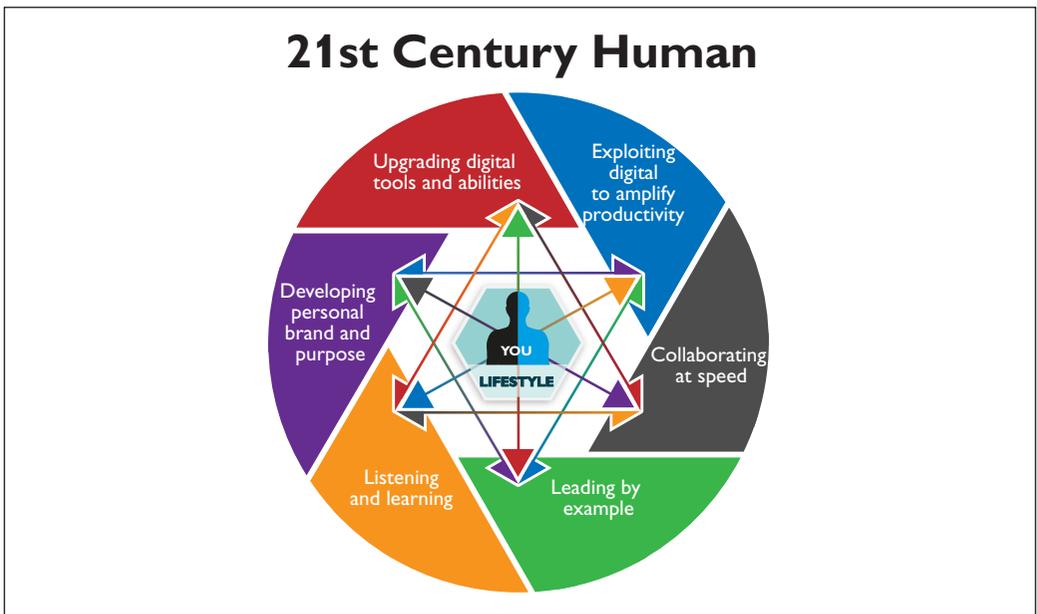
The 21st Century Human Upgrade programme is a chance to explore some of the technologies, innovations and intelligence affecting an organization's industry. Working out how the matrix will increasingly see, talk, listen, recognize, identify, translate, buy, sell, transact, pay, promote, inform, publish, entertain, hide, protect, share, search, experiment, collect, organize, manage, describe, remember, repair, preserve, track, drive, fly, feel, monitor, locate, notify, measure, quantify, observe, anticipate, forecast, control, comply, censor, advise, learn, understand, decide, create and constantly improve is a key part of the programme.

**6. We need new 21st century skills and competencies, organizing and educating for ‘digital’.** In parallel with all the technology change, the world’s infrastructures and educational establishments are organizing for digital and requiring new skills. Putting the word ‘digital’ in front of everything has become a bit of a cliché, but it is what is happening – everything we do is becoming digital to the extent that in a few years we will drop the ‘digital’ because everything will inherently, partially or wholly, be digital in its nature. The figure below, from the World Economic Forum, shows a set of social, emotional and cognitive abilities that enable individuals to face the challenges and adapt to the demands of digital life.



The elements of ‘Digital Intelligence’ needed to adapt to digital life

We have developed our own view of the 21st century human digital competencies required by executives in alignment with the requirements of a 21st century organization, as shown on Page 1 of this report and in the figure below.



The 21st century human requires multiple digital competencies

These skills will be essential, as the list below shows:

- If you do not build your personal brand (now including your online brand) you risk being invisible and inhuman/aloof to your staff and your customers.
- Unless you can listen and learn how to increase your information competence and understanding of the context of markets, customers and the world you will remain in the dark, miss business opportunities, and have less chance of building a winning strategy.
- Without online productivity and time management skills you will be time-poor; be seen as 'slow at making decisions' and spend more time at work.
- You must improve your personal digital fabric – or be seen as ineffective, incapable, unable to operate in the digital world and losing value to the organization.
- If you cannot collaborate at speed you will be left out of the loop.
- Be able to lead teams and communities online – or be seen as not interested in people, and very 'last century'.
- Finally, unless you monitor your health, fitness and resilience, you will become over-stressed and burn out.

All of these competencies are covered in the 21st Century Human Upgrade programme, with LEF support available to develop them further.

## Executives fall behind for many practical and behavioural reasons

With the pace of change and new technology affecting our lives, it is no wonder executives feel they cannot keep up, or they get frustrated, or adopt 'do nothing' as a strategy. Outlined below are some of the main reasons why executives struggle:

- **We don't know what we don't know.** This sounds obvious, but with technology advancing so fast, many people are just not aware of what is available or possible.
- **We don't have time to keep up.** We hear buzzwords like 'Internet of Things' and 'Augmented Reality', but we are so busy doing our jobs that we don't have time to figure out what they mean and answer the main business question, which is: how do we make money from this?
- **We get frustrated using IT and apps.** Irritations with technology (such as insufficient bandwidth to download, not being able to make it work ourselves and not knowing who to ask for help) often mean we give up on trying something new.
- **We didn't and don't get time to play.** Millennials have been using different forms of computers since pre-school; they are fast, competent and adept not only at using technology but using it to communicate. The older generation haven't had those 10,000 hours of play and practice with new technologies – our experience of computing is often limited to mundane processing of emails, producing budgets and creating presentations.
- **We fall into bad habits.** Like the golfer who plays the same bad golf shots every weekend and never gets coaching to improve, we seldom seek to improve the way we use computers.
- **We prefer to remain in fear.** Even if we realize the technology is leaving us behind, it becomes too embarrassing as senior people to reveal how little we know and ask for help.
- **We don't trust the machines to do it for us (or we won't let them).** How many of us would let a car drive us by itself? Or a computer invest our money? Or carry out surgery? Or choose a date for us? Sometimes we need to know more about how something works before we will trust it.
- **We have someone to do it for us.** One common solution is to have someone else carry out digital tasks for us. Some people outsource their business social media presence, which is like sending someone else to a meeting in your place – you don't learn what is going on and you don't form the relationships that are the bedrock of trusted commerce.
- **We just don't care or don't need to care.** At a senior corporate level, we often come across what we call 'Full Tummy Syndrome', where you feel so secure and protected in your position that you have no motivation to learn new 'digital stuff'. This lack of appetite to learn, develop new skills and explore online possibilities will prevent you from creating new value and winning in the 21st century. As Steve Jobs said, "Always stay hungry".

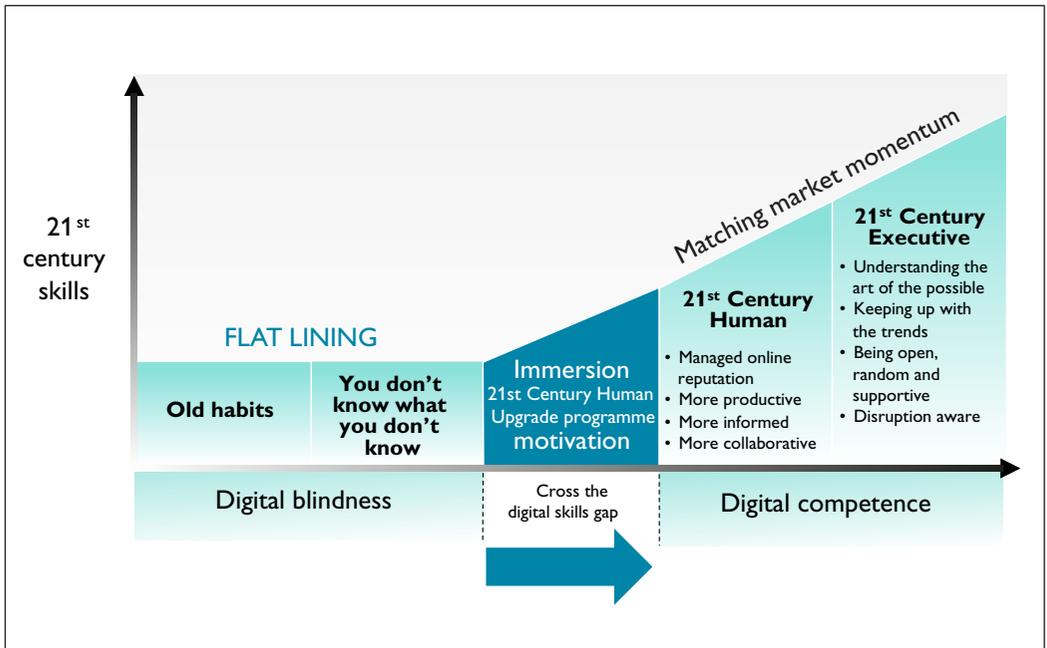
Add these factors together and we have the 'boiling frog syndrome' – by not getting to grips with technology, executives are like frogs in water that is being slowly brought to the boil, but don't realise they are being cooked. At LEF, we prefer to call it 'sleepwalking to irrelevance' – they cannot see what is happening to them until it is too late. The challenge is to help executives overcome some, if not all, of these blocks.

## An immersion Xperience can help

Life coach Tony Robbins says: “To make an impact in your life you need an immersion experience – an event which compresses decades into days and acts as a catapult for your life.” He is referring to the three-day immersive experiences that Robbins Research runs, which focus on ‘life skills’ and help people to change their mindsets and take action to transform their lives.

In order to break through the learning, motivation and relevancy barriers of digital technology, LEF has been designing and creating immersive experiences for organizations for many years, both on our week-long study tours of technology firms in the US and elsewhere, and through our 21st Century Human Upgrade programme. The programme provides a powerful immersion experience for executives or emerging digital business leaders, delivering both professional and personal learning about the digital mindsets and skill sets needed for the 21st century. We are not talking about the ‘immersive experience’ of a 3D virtual reality world, but immersion in digital technology, practical hands-on exercises, group brainstorms about real business challenges, and activities that build awareness of our own digital eco-systems. These all help executives to put digital into context, change their mindsets and take action to impact themselves and their firms.

The figure below shows how the 21st Century Human Upgrade programme can be the catalyst to crossing the digital skills gap.

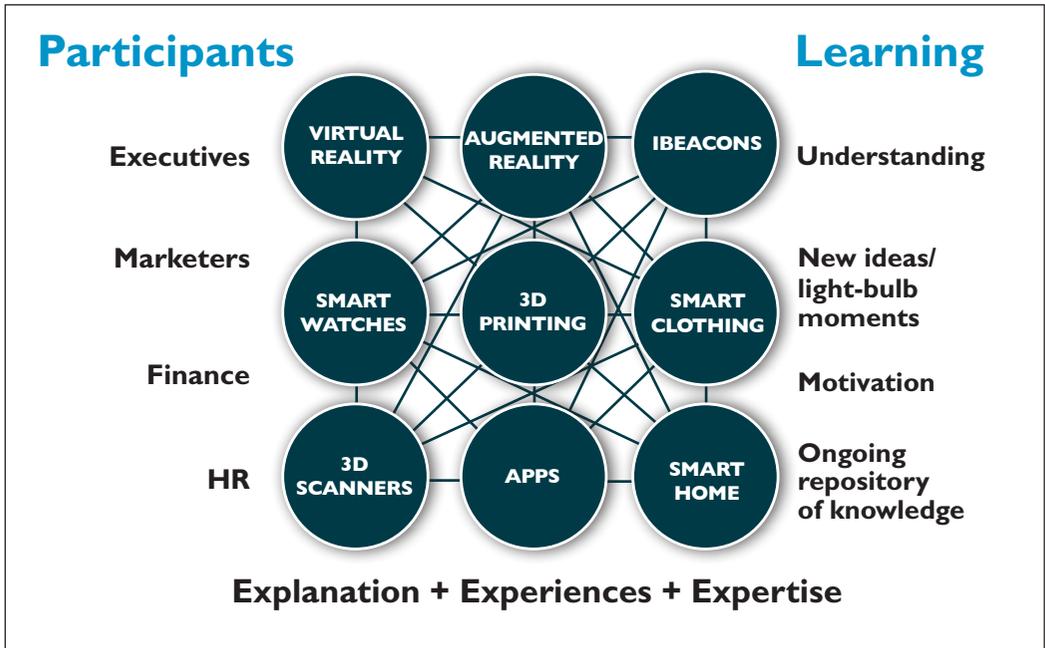


**The 21st Century Human Upgrade programme helps cross the digital skills gap**

Time spent in the 21st Century Human Upgrade programme enables individuals to develop a digital business *mindset* through experiencing new technology and applying it. This then equips them to better understand the emerging 21st century business and become digital business leaders.

## The 21st Century Human Upgrade programme provides professional digital technology immersion

The 21st Century Human Upgrade programme first and foremost gives its participants hands-on understanding of early stage technology that is available in the market but not widely known about. The figure below shows some of the technologies reviewed in the programme today. Importantly, it is the link between the technologies that is just as important as the technologies themselves.



Multiple technologies are reviewed in the 21st Century Human Upgrade programme

Attendees spend time creating recipes to experience the emerging API economy and discover how hardware and software can be quickly remixed to create new value. This is not just the experience of wearing an augmented reality headset, but the experience of how it might be applied. As we say, “It’s about the mindset not the headset”.

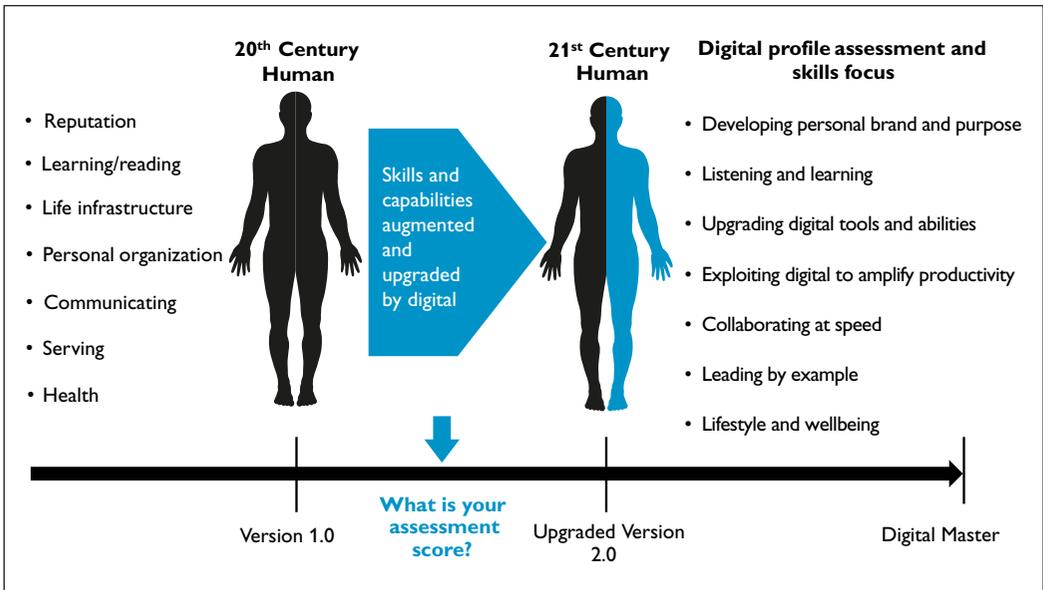
Throughout the programme, attendees are facilitated by the programme team – a set of experienced individuals who have been in the technology industry for many years, tracking and experimenting with emerging technologies, and help to cut through the noise of a crowded market. Their ability to ‘join the dots’ and put things in context helps attendees to create new ideas for their organizations.

This is a key aspect in that it creates an environment where collective thinking generates new ideas, ways to make money and cut costs, and ways to improve business processes by the application or adoption of new technology. The programme brings together individuals often from different parts of the organization who form a digital business ‘mastermind’ group, harnessing thoughts, ideas and energy from each other, and rethinking approaches to the market.

# The 21st Century Human Upgrade programme addresses personal digital skills

Research has shown that we typically spend 39 percent of our waking time on some kind of digital device. In effect, such devices become an extension to our brains, yet we don't ever get coaching to review the scope of what we do or don't do, improve what we do or enhance what we do. Most people want to spend less time on their devices, and learning to be more effective and efficient with our digital lives will free up more time to spend on the people who matter to us in real life.

The programme tackles the core personal digital competencies identified earlier as essential to a 21st century human by starting with a Digital Profile Assessment that measures how 'digital' executives currently are (see figure below).



**The 21st century digital skills profile assessment**

This forms the structure for the programme and subsequent digital skills coaching. The programme includes exercises that cover each of the core areas of personal digital skills, to show attendees what is possible and motivate them to take further action to advance their careers.

After the workshop, attendees can enrol in a 21-day challenge that involves being supported by an LEF digital skills coach. Again drawing from Tony Robbins, it has been shown that the motivation generated from the immersion experience and the likelihood of applying what has been learnt so that the desired outcomes are realized are 80 percent greater when supported by a results coach.

Another key outcome of putting executives through this immersive experience is that it shapes their approach to developing the organization's digital skills.

## Summary

The double whammy of new technology impacting the way the business works in the 21st century, and the 21st century skills required by any executive to remain current, valuable and in post when many don't fully realize what is happening, means that firms need to act now to educate their executives and employees before it is too late.

We believe that an immersion experience can provide that catalyst. It can simultaneously help executives develop a digital mindset, help to co-create business opportunities during the immersion experience, and motivate participants to upgrade their digital skill set to become the 21st century executives that 21st century organizations need to thrive.

For more information on the 21st Century Human Upgrade programme visit:  
<https://leadingedgeforum.com/advisory-service/21st-century-human/>

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