e-Leadership: Are you Digital and IT Ready?

5 June 2015, Europe House, London

Effective e-leadership for High Performance SMEs

05/06/2015 – The e-leadership regional event which took place in London has been launched successfully. The event has attracted around one hundred participants coming from various industries. The line-up of the speakers has provided insightful perspectives on policy making, education, and training landscape of e-leadership for the SMEs. The Europe House, where the event was hosted is a historical venue, where important agreements on the past, present and future of Europe have been formed.

The event was opened with a welcome letter from **the Earl of Erroll (Merlin)**, a cross-bench peer of the House of Lords, Chief of Scottish clan Hay, and hereditary Lord High Constable of Scotland. In his letter, he said that a strong network of collaboration from both the demand and supply stakeholders has been developed through this initiative. Henley Business school together with its European partners (Aarhus University, INSEAD, IE Business school, Antwerp School of Management and New Bulgarian University and empirica), and the results of the on-going projects on creating educational and training offerings for e-leadership have led to innovative ideas delivering value and improving our futures. The Earl of Erroll is also the Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Entrepreneurship, and has been active in other Parliamentary groups including impact of regulation on business and the internet, Local Authority Smartcard Standards e-Organisation, Parliamentary ICT Forum, Science and Technology Committee, Digital Policy Alliance (EURIM). He has also been active in thought leadership in the ICT arena especially around Cybersecurity, Intellectual Property, Broadband and the Internet.

This was followed by an opening speech "Effective e-Leadership for High Performance SMEs" from The chairperson **Prof Kecheng Liu**, Head of Business Informatics Systems and Accounting at Henley Business School, University of Reading, highlighting the objective of e-Leadership project, which is to develop targeted actions for start-ups and fast growing SMEs to provide them with relevant e-leadership skills and qualifications for entrepreneurs, managers and advanced ICT users that are trans-nationally recognised. He raised attentions on SMEs' demands from e-Leadership, and questions on what can policy-makers and educators do to support SMEs. Technologies are intensively embedded into business nowadays, and every business somehow requires e-Leadership to improve the productivity and efficiency. Policy maker and educator should deliver values to SMEs in order to help them achieve high capabilities, high performance and high competitiveness; on the other hand, e-leaders should take the opportunities to transform the values to their own business performance enhancements.

The first theme in the morning aimed to introduce the European e-Leadership skills initiative, a speech "e-Leadership for Europe: Fostering Competitiveness, Growth and Jobs" was given by Werner B Korte on behalf of **André Richier,** Principal Administrator at the European Commission in Brussels within the DG GROWTH (Key Enabling Technologies and ICT Unit). **Werner B Korte,** the director of empirica, have provided an overview of the European e-leadership skills initiatives. He firstly drew a picture displaying the benefits of digital transformation, and indicating that EU businesses are lagging behind; then introduced the EU e-Skills strategy adopted and main activates undertook at EU level for fostering greater productivity, growth, competitiveness, ICT-led innovation and digital jobs; and finally presented the e-Skills policy activity index and networked readiness index stressing on the importance of policy initiatives on e-Skills, and reminded the audience with the definition of e-Leadership. Following on the initiatives, Werner B Korte, continued the findings on structural changes of the ICT workforce from in the past three years, and presented an indicative ICT workforce "Maturity" index that indicates that even though many EU countries have been ICT workforce "mature" already, there are still a number of countries especially from eastern but especially southern Europe need further improvements. He then defined the e-Leadership skills with a scoreboard and an index by using 24 indicators from 4 dimensions. Finally, the skills requirements for SME summarised from interviews and survey were highlighted, and the e-Leadership journey and course are demonstrated.

Nigel Payne, on behalf of The Tech Partnership gave a speech on "Developing tomorrow's e-leaders today". Tech Partnership is a network of employers collaborating to create the skills to accelerate the growth of the digital economy, and is also recognised by government as the Industrial Partnership for the Information Economy. He talked about e-Leadership initiatives in the UK supported by the Tech Partnership, which aims to help SMEs develop strategic

digital skills e.g. cybersecurity, big data, e-commerce and the Internet of Things, in order to bridge the skills gaps amongst tech specialists for growth.

Prof Jianzheng Yang, Director of Legislation and Policy Committee, Chinese Commission of E-Commerce, provided latest development in electronic commerce and applications in China. In his eye-opening talk, he introduced the policies and projects launched in China such as the "National E-commerce Application Talents Training Project" for supporting SMEs and universities by taking the advantages of the open web platform. He also offered a number of examples such as Taobao University training programmes for SMEs in China to demonstrate both policies and methods the China government set out for improving SMEs' ICT skill set.

The last session in the morning was a panel discussion to reflect on the information received in the morning. The panel consisted of all the speakers (**Prof Kecheng Liu, Werner B Korte, Nigel Payne, Prof Jianzheng Yang**) in the morning and provided opportunities to the audience to have further interactions with the speakers. The Chair of the panel, **Prof Andrew Godley** from the Henley Business School, provided a brief summary of the key issues addressed in the morning, and opened floor to the conference attendees. A strong point was emphasised by **Werner B Korte** when he answered the question on how to prepare business proposal based on his experiences with capital banks and investment management organisations. The business proposal should be precise and concise with highlighted attractive points such as key competitive advantages and innovative ideas that can be quickly caught, because each proposal literally would not take more than three minutes to go through the first round evaluation. Great interest from audience expressed in the policies and mechanisms in China regarding encouraging SMEs taking active part in developing themselves in the adoption of advanced ICT and acquiring e-leadership capabilities.

The theme of the afternoon session was e-Leadership for SMEs: success stories, training courses, programmes, MOOCs. It was started with a discussion of skills requirements in SMEs and Start-ups for innovation through e-leadership by **Prof Kecheng Liu**, together with **Dr Maksim Belitski**, lecturer in Entrepreneurship at Henley Business School who provided statistical results from interviews and a European survey of decision makers, describing the demands of e-Leaders from IT, strategy, and business & market dimension. A trailer of Henley's three weeks' e-leadership massive open online course (MOOC) was also demonstrated at the end the presentation.

The successful SME case studies were later presented. **Chris Tingley**, the CTO from Conjure presented a case study of developing ICT capabilities and strategies, which heavily utilised ICT within the business areas such as management, software development, sales, marketing, PR and monitoring (social media), project management and planning, and HR. **Simon Walker**, the Chief Strategy Officer of Foundation-SP collaboratively demonstrated a list of key factors such as efficiency vs responsiveness in organisation, culture agility, and creative productivity on driving engagement and innovation in E-Leadership via collaborative technology. **Maarten Goossens**, Senior Manager of Urban Science International (US) later presented an automotive case study of applying business intelligence through e-leadership. By combining technology and business intelligence, the traditional car buying process has been changed to be more integrative and real-time with customer's preference. Finally, **Adam Clark**, CEO & Co-founded of the ConnectTVT Accelerator Innovation Hub, unveiled the secrets they found to innovative e-Leadership, and also defined the e-Leadership that "*it is not just about skills and training, and it is very about inspiring mindset and culture…*".

The afternoon session was then moved to discussing about IT strategies future enhancement. **Liz Bacon**, BCS Immediate Past President, stressed on the importance of attracting, retaining and promoting women to become future digital leaders. **Adam Thilthorpe**, BCS director of Professionalism, highlighted the top management issues, and IT trends in the past 3-5 years. This was followed by the discussion of training landscape of e-leadership for the SMEs. **Ian Myson** from the Charted management Institute (CMI) provided information about the e-Leadership and digital entrepreneurship higher and executive education programmes and general training programmes for SMEs and entrepreneurs in UK. **Ed Cooper** from Vital Six, introduced the high growth accelerator, which focuses on helping high growth SMEs. **Rob Mettler**, director of Digital Business PA Consulting, presented their barometer data from case studies highlighting the importance vs leadership to digital success. **Jason Jingsong Zhao** from the Huawei Technologies (UK) Co. Ltd, demonstrated how ICT innovation helped the Huawei in the past three decades.

In the conclusions the chairperson, **Prof Kecheng Liu**, summarised the key questions and results of the day. Development of appropriate policies, e-skills training, and educational programmes was seen as a key direction for innovation through e-Leadership for SMEs. Policy maker and educator should deliver values to SMEs in order to help them achieve high capabilities, high performance and high competitiveness through building experience and demonstrating best practices, initiating e-leadership programmes, deepening support with programme alumni, supporting start-up and accelerating further growth, engaging local business, and continued learning from feedback and optimising the value and impact. The SME e-leaders should take the opportunities to transform the values to their own business performance enhancements by setting business vision and strategy to identify outcome value,

digitalising existing business, creating digital businesses and products, and shaping the business to fit in the wider digital ecosystem. There was unanimous agreement that every business is somehow an e-leadership embedded business. Enhancing SMEs' e-Skills will be a key competence in the future economy and that the European Commission e-leadership initiative has been very timely and started at the right moment (more information: www.eskills-guide.eu, www.eskills-lead.eu, www.leadership2015.eu). This European initiative aims to develop and recommend specific curriculum profiles for e-leaders (based on the European e-Competence Framework) and outline the knowledge and skills necessary for business leaders to turn into e-leaders.

The networking session from 5:00 h onwards was originally scheduled for 30 minutes, but many participants stayed till 6:20pm. Both educators from Universities and SME leaders exchanged their findings and interests in building knowledge network of e-Leadership for business performance enhancement. The information regarding relevant government policies and supports was also shared amongst participants. Potential collaboration between industry and educational organisations were also discussed for future improvement on e-leadership innovation.

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e-Leadership Skills Definition

e-Leadership is of crucial importance for companies and industry to excel in their business operation. For effective e-leadership, the skills required are seen as those which enable people with very strong ICT skills to lead qualified staff from ICT and other disciplines towards identifying and designing business models and exploiting key innovation opportunities. Their success is defined as making best use of developments in ICT and delivering value to their organisations. Demand is growing throughout European industry to improve the quality of e-leadership, covering organisation leadership in ICT innovation to deliver business value. Research has confirmed a significant shortage of e-leadership skills across Europe - a call for action.

e-Leadership skills refers to the skills which an individual in the modern economy requires to initiate and achieve innovation utilising ICT:

-- Business Savvy: Innovate business and operating models, delivering value to their organisations

-- ICT Savvy: Envision and drive change for business performance, exploiting digital trends as innovation opportunities

-- Engagement capability: Lead inter-disciplinary staff, and influence stakeholders across boundaries (functional, geographical).

The European Commission e-Leadership initiative started in 2013 has focused on the leadership needs of top decision-makers and professional leaders at larger enterprises. These leaders oversee portfolios of both well-defined and emergent innovation opportunities. Successful design and implementation requires developing and engaging highly qualified staff to achieve the target value. With this further initiative on 'e-leadership Skills for SMEs' - started in 2014 – The Commission is now targeting SMEs and start-ups.

Feedback from the event

- "Very good overview of the European e-leadership initiatives"
- "I in particular liked the case studies"
- "I liked the varied talks from different sectors and perspectives which I found really useful"
- "Excellent mix of academic and practitioner perspectives"
- "The Estonia issues!"
- "Some good insights into trends etc."

- "Very good case studies, take home ideas. The attendance and time away allowed me to reflect my own and clients business"
- "I liked the studies of success companies and consulting companies sharing strategies"
- "Fantastic statistics in the presentations on e-leadership demand, supply and forecasting"
- "Very useful overall as introduction to EC / EU policy"
- "I found the case studies, the understanding of what e-leadership means (balancing business savviness with ICT) and empirica's research particularly useful"

 The event is supported by the EC in the scope of the service contract to promote e-leadership in Europe (LEAD)

Links to European initiatives and reports on e-leadership and e-skills:

- European Conference on Digital and Key Enabling Technologies Skills: http://leadership2015.eu/conference/
- e-Skills for Jobs 2015 high level conference under the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union: http://eskillsforjobs.lv/
- 7 Regional Cluster Events on 'Are you fit for the Digital Economy? Training and Education Pathways for SMEs and Start-ups' in 2015 in Berlin, Madrid, Helsinki, Lisbon, London, Paris, Prague: http://eskills-lead.eu
- 10 Regional Cluster Events on 'New Curricula for e-Leadership - Delivering Skills for an innovative and competitive Europe' in 2014 in Sofia, Reading, Madrid, Milan, Munich, Antwerp, Budapest, Aarhus, Paris and Wroclaw: http://eskills-guide.eu/home
- European e-Skills 2014 Conference: e-Leadership and ICT Professionalism: http://eskills2014conference.eu
- European Guidelines and Quality Labels for new Curricula Fostering e-Leadership Skills: http://eskills-guide.eu/home/
- e-Leadership Skills for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: http://eskills-lead.eu/home/
- e-Skills: The International Dimension and the Impact of Globalisation: http://www.eskills-international.com/index.html
- European e-leadership skills conference 2013: http://www.insead.edu/events/e-leadership-conference/
- E-Skills for the 21st Century website - DG Enterprise and Industry: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/ict/e-skills/index_en.htm
- Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs website: http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/grand-coalition-digital-jobs-0
- European e-Competence Framework (e-CF) website: http://www.ecompetences.eu/
- CEN Workshop on ICT Skills: http://www.cen.eu/CEN/sectors/sectors/isss/activity/Pages/wsict-skills.aspx
- e-Skills for Competitiveness and Innovation: Vision, Roadmap and Foresight Scenarios: http://eskills-vision.eu/home/
- Towards a European Quality label for ICT industry training and certification: http://eskills-quality.eu/home/
- E-Skills: the international dimension and the impact of globalisation: http://www.eskills-international.com/
- European guidelines and quality labels for Curricula for e-leadership skills: http://eskills-guide.eu/home/
- Monitoring and benchmarking e-skills policies and partnerships in Europe: http://eskills-monitor2013.eu/home/
- Fostering the ICT Profession in Europe: http://cepis.org/index.jsp?p=827&n=940
- Professional e-Competence in Europe: http://cepis.org/index.jsp?p=940&n=2406
- Monitoring e-skills demand and supply in Europe: http://www.eskills-monitor.eu/
- Evaluation of the Implementation of the Communication on e-Skills for the 21st Century: http://eskills21.eu/

Photographs

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