

Ca' Foscari
Alumni

Venice
School of
Management

Articles and interviews Alumni VSM 2024-2025

The future of management and the crucial role of creativity

The experience of three successful VSM Alumni

In a constantly evolving business landscape, the role of managers has transformed far beyond the simple coordination of resources and processes. Today, creativity is an essential skill for addressing increasingly complex global market challenges and effectively driving change. On October 17, 2024, three alumni of the Venice School of Management spoke at the event **“Artificiale: Managerial Intelligence and Artistic Thinking”** – Future of Management 2024, sharing their experiences on how creativity has become a foundational pillar in their professional lives: **Marco Benvegnù**, Head of Corporate Brand Management at Arper SPA; **Massimiliano Mirabella**, Head of Marketing and DTC at SIDI Sport; and **Cinzia Scarbolo**, Head of Omnichannel, Trade Marketing & Digital Retail at Vodafone.

Creativity and innovation in design

Marco Benvegnù [ITA], Head of Corporate Brand at Arper—an organization with design at the core of its business—highlights the deep connection between creativity and innovation. “Creativity helps me imagine, design, and deliver experiences that can evolve and innovate the company culture. For a design-focused company like Arper, creativity is essential to express meaning through products.” According to Benvegnù, creativity must be paired with practical application and aesthetic appeal in order to capture attention. “Design becomes the vehicle for expressing the full potential of innovation, which I see as the result of three multiplying factors: creativity, execution capability, and appeal. Aesthetic value in design is crucial: to be appealing and communicate meaning, we must capture something intrinsic to human nature—the pursuit of beauty.”

Creativity in management: a constant discovery

Massimiliano Mirabella [ITA] reflects on how creativity is an essential component he discovered throughout his professional journey. “What’s creative about a manager’s job? A lot—and it’s one of those discoveries you make early on and that stays with you throughout your career. Our role is to build in a world where the context is constantly changing. As responsibilities grow, you face constant uncertainty and both internal and external factors,” says Mirabella. In a world overloaded with products and information, creativity becomes key to finding new



ways to be relevant and distinctive to consumers. “You constantly find yourself facing a blank page. Starting from a blank page is the right approach: asking yourself what’s the best way to achieve the end goal. No one gives you the answer, and it’s not necessarily found in the path you’ve already taken. Often, by freeing yourself from past paths, you build new ones that lead to even greater outcomes. That’s why the work of a manager is creative.”

Creativity as entrepreneurial spirit and improvisation

Cinzia Scarbolo [ITA] offers another perspective on creativity, emphasizing its links with entrepreneurship and improvisation. “When asked what’s creative about my job, two things immediately came to mind: the first is entrepreneurship. Every day I feel like an entrepreneur of myself, constantly working to improve processes and create new projects to bring innovation into the company,” Scarbolo explains. The second key aspect she highlights is improvisation. “Working in a fast-moving tech company, staying on top of things and being able to improvise is essential. You’re constantly facing new and unexpected situations. This is where improvisation comes in—it stems from experience and helps turn daily challenges into creative opportunities.”

The future of management: balancing creativity and strategy

Looking ahead, managers will need to continuously balance technical expertise with creative capacity to

remain competitive in an increasingly fluid market. The ability to start from a blank slate, improvise in the face of uncertainty, and design experiences that combine aesthetic and innovation will be critical skills for leading companies to success.

The experience shared by the Venice School of Management Alumni shows how creativity can be cultivated and channeled toward innovation, offering fresh perspectives to tackle the challenges of a constantly changing world.

December 2024

Lucia Marcuzzo, Levi Strauss & Co

From the Venetian lagoon to leading Levi Strauss & Co.

Lucia Marcuzzo, **Senior Vice President & Managing Director** for Europe at Levi Strauss & Co. since 2024, is a success story that perfectly embodies the balance between local roots and global ambition. From her academic training in Business Administration in Venice to leading Levi Strauss & Co.'s European operations, her journey is a prime example of how passion, determination, and an inclusive vision can shape an extraordinary career. With a leadership style inspired by sustainability and diversity, Lucia is redefining how the fashion retail sector addresses the challenges of the future.

Lucia joined Levi Strauss & Co. in 2010 as Vice President Retail Europe, overseeing company-operated stores, the e-commerce channel, and the franchise network. In March 2016, she was appointed Vice President Central Cluster, achieving significant results in the German and Benelux markets. In September 2020, her role expanded to include the UK and Nordic countries, and in May 2021, she was promoted to Senior Vice President & Managing Director for Northern Europe, adding responsibilities for Eastern Europe as well. With a passion for teamwork and inclusive leadership, Lucia describes retail as “a deeply people-driven industry, where success depends on your ability to influence, collaborate, and lead at different organizational levels.” Her vision reflects a continuous commitment to creating sustainable and inclusive work environments, contributing to the advancement of the retail industry in an increasingly dynamic global context.

How would you describe your study experience at the Venice School of Management? How did it influence your career?

Studying at the Venice School of Management was transformative. It taught me to think critically, connect theory with practice, and approach challenges with a global mindset. The combination of academic rigor and practical application to the “real world” provided an invaluable foundation for my career. It also sparked a curiosity that still drives me to learn every day. Of course, the unique setting of Venice made those years truly special.



What skills or values you developed during your studies have been essential in your current role as Managing Director Europe at Levi Strauss & Co.?

Three key aspects come to mind: adaptability, rigor, and collaboration. At the Venice School of Management, I learned to approach complex and rapidly changing problems with flexibility and composure. The professors and programmes demanded hard work and a rigorous mindset—it wasn't always easy, but it was worth it. Collaboration was another core value: studying and working with people from different backgrounds and perspectives taught me the importance of embracing diverse viewpoints—something I rely on daily while leading a multinational European team.

In your opinion, what are the main challenges and opportunities fashion retail managers face today?

The biggest challenge is navigating constant change, whether in consumer behavior, technological advancements, or economic uncertainty. The fashion retail sector is continuously evolving, and that brings both challenges and opportunities. These same forces allow us to rethink how we connect with customers—leveraging data and technology to build deeper, more personalized relationships while navigating market complexity.

The key for leaders is to have a bold vision, to look beyond the short term, and to act with clarity and the ability to adapt quickly to unexpected circumstances, remaining flexible and ready to respond to emerging

challenges and opportunities.

How important is the dialogue between universities and the professional world in shaping tomorrow's leaders? Do you have concrete examples of how this dialogue has supported your career?

The dialogue between academia and the professional world is crucial to shaping forward-thinking leaders. Academia provides theoretical frameworks and new ways of thinking, while companies test those ideas in real-world contexts. Early in my career, this dialogue helped me connect strategic concepts to operational challenges. Today, I see it as a two-way street: companies can also provide valuable input to help shape academic curricula and better prepare future leaders for the complexities ahead.

A recent meeting with students at the Venice School of Management gave both me and my leadership team insightful, real-time feedback and fresh, well-prepared perspectives on the Levi's® brand.

What challenges have you faced as a woman in a leadership position, and how have you overcome them?

One of the main challenges has been balancing competing priorities and finding equilibrium between personal and professional life. But every challenge has been an opportunity to grow and make an impact. I learned early on to prioritize and to favor progress over perfection.

Finding my leadership style and my voice has been—and still is—a journey. I try to balance confidence with humility to stay authentic and focused on meaningful results. Along the way, I've relied on strong relationships, trusted mentors, and a network of colleagues who have served as both allies and sources of inspiration.

Today, I see these moments not as obstacles, but as opportunities to lead authentically, break barriers, and pave the way for the next generation of leaders—both women and men—to dream big and achieve more.

If you could share a message with today's students at the Venice School of Management, what advice would you give them to make the most of their studies and prepare for a successful career?

George Bernard Shaw once said: "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." Never underestimate the power of effective communication. Be known as someone who communicates well.

Secondly, a growth mindset is a real asset: stay curious, don't be discouraged by obstacles—embrace them as learning opportunities—and face challenges with courage. Success and growth come when you're willing to push beyond your comfort zone.

Give yourself time to learn. An extraordinary career rarely falls from the sky.

Lucia Marcuzzo's professional journey is a testament to the power of solid preparation and authentic leadership. Her experience at Ca' Foscari and the Department of Management—now the Venice School of Management—equipped her with the tools to successfully navigate an ever-changing industry. Her story shows that curiosity, adaptability, and collaboration are the cornerstones of a thriving career. With a bold vision and strong commitment to her values, Lucia continues to inspire the next generation of leaders, proving that the future of retail—and of leadership itself—is built with dedication, creativity, and courage.

January 2025

Arianna Mazzon, Venezia FC

Creating value through partnerships that connect territory, sport, and culture - the story of a partnership manager at Venezia FC

Arianna Mazzon is the Partnership Manager at **Venezia FC**, where since 2021 she has been responsible for developing activation strategies for the club's partners and managing external relations. In her role, she oversees collaborations with companies and institutions across various sectors, including prominent cultural partnerships such as those with La Biennale di Venezia, the Civic Museums, Save Venice, and Ocean Space—working on projects that interweave **sport** and **culture**. Previously, she gained experience at Diadora, working on public relations and trade marketing, and at La Biennale di Venezia during the 2019 Art Exhibition. Arianna holds a Master's degree in **Marketing and Communication** from Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She has a particular passion for art, culture, and travel—interests that positively influence her strategic approach.

What does your role as Partnership Manager at Venezia FC involve? What are your main responsibilities?

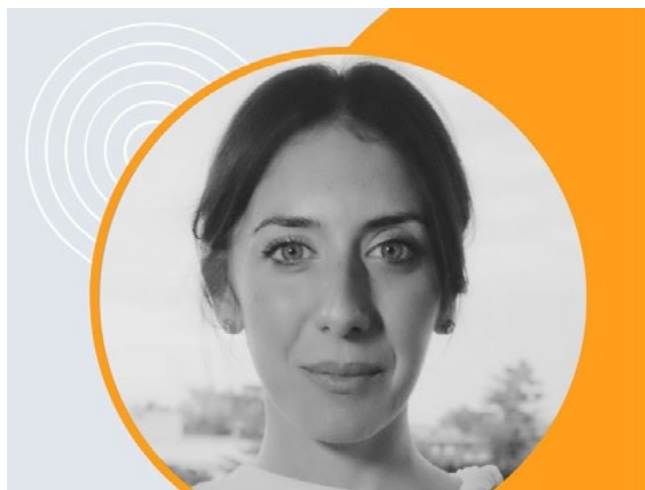
My role as Partnership Manager at Venezia FC sits at the intersection of sales and marketing/communication. Specifically, I activate the benefits defined in the contracts with commercial partners, ensuring each collaboration is fully leveraged while remaining aligned with the club's marketing strategies.

I also manage partner relationships, acting as the main point of contact to ensure ongoing communication. At the same time, I coordinate and activate cultural and community partnerships with institutions such as La Biennale di Venezia, Save Venice, We Are Here Venice, and Ocean Space. Finally, I oversee the planning and execution of institutional events.

How do you build and manage strategic partnerships in a football club like Venezia FC?

Building and managing strategic partnerships in a football club like Venezia FC requires a balance between achieving the club's objectives and creating value for the partners.

On one hand, we work to ensure that each partnership aligns with our strategies: from meeting sales targets



to reinforcing brand positioning, which combines heritage, innovation, and a deep connection to the city.

On the other hand, we focus on the value a partnership can provide to companies that choose to invest in football. This includes:

- *brand visibility and recognition, thanks to Venezia FC's international reach;*
- *association with positive values such as integrity, diversity, inclusion, and community engagement;*
- *fan involvement through tailored strategies that foster authentic interaction with our community;*
- *consistency and authenticity, which are crucial to strengthen the partner's brand credibility;*
- *activations that go beyond matchday, delivering value throughout the entire season;*
- *long-term projects that generate lasting and meaningful impact.*

My role is to manage the partnership from the initial negotiation through to the design of activations that are innovative, relevant, and impactful for both parties.

What are the main challenges you face in your work, and how did your management studies prepare you to tackle them?

One of the main challenges I face is balancing the needs of various stakeholders. This requires ongoing relationship management, negotiation skills, and strategic thinking.

Other challenges include managing complex projects—often under tight deadlines and with multiple collaborators—and designing increasingly

creative and innovative activations to stand out from direct competitors.

My academic background in management provided me with essential tools to meet these challenges: my training in marketing and communication taught me how to structure effective operational plans and make decisions based on data and goals. At the same time, the group work and hands-on projects during university were crucial for developing the ability to think outside the box, collaborate in teams, and navigate interpersonal dynamics.

Can you tell us about your collaboration with the Venice School of Management? What was it like to return to the classroom during the Communication course led by Professors Cinzia Colapinto and Francesca Checchinato?

Returning to the classroom as a guest speaker was a very special moment for me. It was a way to give back—sharing my experience as an alumna and showing students how partnerships are developed in the world of sports.

I particularly enjoyed responding to their questions at the end of the lecture. I was impressed by their curiosity and the attention they showed toward the topics we covered. The students' final projects were very well done—some even touched on ideas similar to ones we've explored at Venezia FC.

During your meeting with the students of the Venice School of Management, you had a chance to review some of their projects and ideas. Which insights or outcomes stood out to you? How do you see them being applied in the world of strategic partnerships and sports business?

The students' final projects demonstrated both creativity and a strong grasp of the dynamics involved in strategic partnerships. Some focused on activations that could enhance the connection between the club and the territory, while others explored the potential of specific products, showing an understanding of athletes' needs.

In most of the work, I saw key concepts we had covered in class, such as the importance of consistency and authenticity between the club and the partner company. A successful partnership isn't just about visibility—it's about shared values and common goals.

Some ideas were different from the evaluations we typically make internally, but they were well-justified. These insights could be genuinely effective in our approach to companies for next season.

Other suggestions were so close to concepts we've already developed at Venezia FC that they confirmed the strength of our work. These projects have real potential in the sports business world—not only for their creativity but also for their focus on long-term strategies that generate value for both the club and its partners.

What advice would you give to students of the Venice School of Management who aspire to

follow in your footsteps and work in a field where sport, business, and communication intersect?

If I could offer one piece of advice to students who dream of working in a field where sport, business, and communication come together, I'd say this: even though I entered this world somewhat by chance, having a dedicated educational background is definitely a good starting point. This sector requires specific skills, so pursuing specialized academic paths is essential.

I'd also highlight something I learned through experience: the football industry, in particular, is built on a tight network of connections, and access to clubs rarely follows traditional recruiting channels. That's why cultivating relationships is crucial. It's important to build a strong network and maintain visibility—opportunities often arise from those connections, as I experienced firsthand.

Arianna Mazzon's story is an invitation for future professionals to take risks, innovate, and build genuine relationships—demonstrating that success is not measured solely by numbers, but also by the positive impact one creates on people, institutions, and communities. In a world where sport, business, and culture increasingly converge, figures like Arianna prove that with the right mix of skills and passion, it's truly possible to forge meaningful and lasting connections.

Alessandro Vecchiato, Saint Laurent

From Management student to luxury professional in Paris

Alessandro Vecchiato is a Management alumnus whose background blends **strategic vision with creativity**. After completing his studies in Management between Ca' Foscari University and ESCP Europe, he launched a brilliant career in the **luxury sector**, working with iconic brands such as Chanel, Céline, Armani, and Saint Laurent. In this interview, Alessandro shares his journey between Italy and France, the challenges he faced transitioning to an international market, and his advice for young graduates eager to break into this exclusive and highly competitive industry.

Alessandro, how did your studies in Management prepare you for an international career in the luxury sector?

My international career didn't begin with a pure focus on management but rather through a series of fortunate twists: from a passion for cooking that nearly led me to culinary school, to the dream of becoming a fashion designer, my path gradually shifted toward the business and economic sphere. I began with a diploma in accounting, followed by a Bachelor's in Business Administration, a Master's in Marketing and Innovation at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and a Master in Management at ESCP Europe. Having a strong creative streak, by the end of my bachelor's degree I found myself increasingly drawn to the world of fashion and luxury—a universe that felt distant, yet I never stopped observing. At the end of my academic journey, I faced a major decision: I had been admitted both to the London College of Fashion for a Master's in Fashion Strategic Marketing, and to the double-degree programme at ESCP Europe in Paris. I ultimately chose the latter.

Unfamiliar with the French grandes écoles system at the time, I found that my Italian academic background—mostly theoretical with some practical cases—gave me solid foundations. I was then able to apply them in France, where theory was less emphasized, but enriched by real-life business cases, guest speakers, and projects with luxury companies, thanks to the geographical proximity and strong academic and professional networks.

This duality of educational approaches is what ultimately equipped me to enter the workforce with a generalist background, enhanced by specialist



knowledge in Go-to-Market, Experience Management, and Fashion Marketing—core areas of the Master in Management—and by my own curiosity, which I continued to nurture beyond the classroom.

You've been living and working in Paris for nearly eight years. What motivated you to move to the global capital of luxury, and what drew you to the industry?

My move to Paris wasn't premeditated. Initially, I had intended to relocate to an English-speaking country, as I'd been accepted to a specialized Fashion Marketing programme in London. At the same time, I was working for a brand based near Venice that showcased its collections in both Milan and Paris—so I was already experiencing the French market from up close.

After just a couple of weeks in the City of Light, I knew that my near future would be unfolding there.

What enabled me to take that leap was a mix of courage and self-honesty. I still remember my mother's teary goodbye at the airport, telling me, "I know you won't be coming back from Paris."

My passion for the city, sparked during my studies, pushed me to stay longer.

My choice of industry stems from a personal sensitivity to creativity in fashion and art, paired with a strong desire to access the world of luxury—its products, its exclusivity, its uniqueness. These are concepts that resonate deeply in the roles I've held, which sit at the intersection of management and creativity—what Professor Monica Calcagno would call the "in-between spaces."

Key elements in shaping my career have included a passion for product, client experience both in-store and online, and perhaps, at a deeper level, a natural affinity with the clientele of the luxury world.

Transitioning from the Italian market to an international one can be difficult. What challenges did you face working in France, and how did you overcome them?

One of the most noticeable differences is cultural—how work is perceived and valued in Italy versus France, both in terms of professional ambition and financial rewards. What helped me most was the network I built through my academic journey, as well as the professionals I had the pleasure of meeting along the way.

Over time, I also gained self-awareness and confidence in my own value, which proved essential for positioning myself in the market.

A non-trivial challenge was language. French had a big impact on my self-esteem and natural introversion. Overcoming fear of others' judgment—and my own overly critical self-assessment—together with a genuine willingness to step outside my comfort zone, were crucial for my growth as both a person and a professional.

You've worked for prestigious companies such as L'Oréal, Chanel, Céline, Armani, and now Saint Laurent. What management skills proved most useful, and what key lessons did you learn from each experience?

Both in Venice and Paris, the key academic skills I developed were teamwork and analytical thinking, combined with attention to detail—without losing sight of the bigger picture.

Having worked across different environments, if I had to summarize the lessons learned, several practical points stand out: be courageous, know when to speak, when to stay silent, and when to push your ideas forward within a project; stay structured and keep your goals in mind, especially in situations of potential chaos. It's important to collaborate with colleagues and external partners, and to challenge existing ideas when necessary.

From a personal growth perspective, the younger version of me was eager to jump into a managerial role right away. I quickly realized that ambition is key, but so is staying grounded. It's important to dream big—but be pragmatic, too.

Adapting to different work cultures is the next big challenge: knowing when to challenge others and when to challenge yourself; accepting the pace of progress, enjoying the moment while never losing sight of your long-term goals.

In this context, kindness—and understanding how to navigate the environments you're part of—becomes essential to advancing as one team, even when things feel fragmented.

Paris is more than just a city—it's a true cultural and creative hub. How has living in this

environment influenced your work and your perspective on the luxury sector?

Once you get past the initial cultural differences between Italy and France, immersing yourself in the Parisian mood—where art, fashion, and luxury are omnipresent—becomes the starting point of a constant quest, a search driven by curiosity. Being constantly exposed to change, from new exhibitions in museums to spectacular brand events, this search becomes central to my work approach: a cultural search, an aesthetic one, and one rooted in experience, benchmarking, and networking. It keeps me informed about what's happening in the city and in key brands, and connects me with professionals from fields outside of pure management—people I can engage with in stimulating conversations that often turn out to be pivotal moments in my career.

What advice would you give to recent Management graduates who want to pursue a career in the luxury sector? Where should they start, and what experiences are essential to stand out?

If I could give advice to my younger self just starting out in academia and business, I'd reflect on three areas: personal attitude, professional experience, and side projects.

In terms of mindset: curiosity, humility, and openness are essential—but so is self-awareness: knowing who you are, what you dream of, and what you're capable of.

When it comes to experience, my advice is to develop a creative mindset based on your personal inclinations, which will help clarify which sector and role you want to pursue.

For me, working in retail was essential to accessing roles in luxury—especially those that support retail. I'm not just talking about a short internship, but a longer experience—at least a couple of years—to really understand the dynamics of a boutique and the store-HQ relationship. And why not, even growing your career within retail itself.

Finally, don't underestimate side projects—academic, personal research, events, association involvement... These may seem secondary at first glance, but recruiters highly value them because they reveal intellectual richness beyond your academic qualifications.

Agnese De Rossi, Alajmo Group

Turning a Management degree into a career in food marketing

Agnese De Rossi is a Marketing Manager with solid experience in the **food sector**. She has built her career by combining strategy, creativity, and deep market knowledge. From brand management to market research, from distribution to event planning, her attention to detail has led her to take on increasingly responsible roles in prestigious companies, including Cameo and the Alajmo Group, a benchmark in Italian fine dining.

In this interview, Agnese shares how her academic journey in Management at Ca' Foscari influenced her professional choices, which skills proved most valuable in the workplace, and what advice she would give to those dreaming of a career in food marketing. A journey through **innovation, sustainability, and branding strategies** in a constantly evolving and opportunity-rich sector.

What led you to study management, and how did your university experience influence your professional choices?

I've always had a natural inclination for organizing and managing activities—from childhood games to study groups, to planning trips with friends. When it came time to choose a degree, I looked for a path that would turn this inclination into a real profession. Management offered exactly that: a mix of structure, strategy, and creativity.

During my university years, I refined my analytical skills, learned to work in teams, and developed a problem-solving mindset—all of which have been essential throughout my career.

You now work with the Alajmo Group, a recognized leader in high-end dining. What are your main responsibilities, and what are the challenges you face in your role?

The Alajmo Group is internationally recognized for its excellence in fine dining, and in recent years has expanded its business by developing the Food & Design division, focused on branded product sales. I joined the company specifically to help strengthen this business unit and increase brand awareness in Italy and abroad through new distribution channels. The biggest challenge? The food sector is extremely competitive, and standing out requires strategic vision, innovation, and a strong connection with the



audience.

Working for a brand with such a high reputation demands a balance between honoring tradition and driving innovation—a combination that makes my role incredibly stimulating.

Working in a top-level food company requires a blend of managerial and creative skills. Which of the competencies you gained during university have proven most useful in the workplace?

University gave me a strong theoretical foundation in business management, strategic marketing, and market dynamics. In particular, learning about business operations has been crucial for managing the daily challenges of my job.

Beyond technical skills, critical thinking has been key—the ability to analyze a problem from multiple angles and find effective solutions.

Group projects and practical assignments also taught me the value of teamwork and effective communication—core competencies for anyone working in marketing and branding.

The food industry is constantly evolving, with innovation, sustainability, and shifting trends at its core. How do you see the future of this sector, and what opportunities does it offer to recent graduates?

The food sector is dynamic and ever-changing. Innovation, sustainability, and digitalization are the main drivers of transformation and create huge opportunities for those with skills in marketing, branding, and commercial strategy.

Companies that can anticipate and interpret trends—such as the growing demand for organic products, sustainability concerns, and online food retail—will strengthen their market position.

For young graduates, this means entering a sector that will never truly be in crisis, but which will increasingly require specialization and adaptability.

What's the most important lesson you've learned in your transition from university to the professional world, and what advice would you give to today's students?

The transition from university to the workforce can be a moment of growth—but also of uncertainty. The most important lesson I've learned is that academic preparation is just the starting point, but attitude and adaptability are what really make the difference.

My advice is to take advantage of every opportunity university offers: from internships to hands-on projects, from networking to international exchange programmes.

Being proactive, curious, and willing to step outside your comfort zone will help you enter the professional world with greater self-awareness and a real competitive edge.

What advice would you give to students who want to build a career path similar to yours?

My advice is to have clear goals and stay true to your long-term vision. Don't get sidetracked by short-term opportunities that may seem attractive but pull you away from your ideal path.

Be open to different experiences, but always with a strategic thread that allows you to build a solid professional profile. In food marketing especially, passion for the product, market knowledge, and staying on top of trends are essential.

Finally, never underestimate the value of networking—the right connections can open unexpected doors and accelerate your professional growth.

Andrea Zanon, Prospinity

From a Management degree in Venice to the Silicon Valley - the journey of a young entrepreneur driving fintech innovation

Andrea Zanon is a **young entrepreneur from Venice** who is already making his mark in the innovation landscape. He is the **co-founder of Prospinity**, a fintech startup based in Silicon Valley that recently closed a \$2 million funding round. Andrea has built an outstanding academic and professional path. Valedictorian of the Economics and Management programme in Venice, he continued his studies at prestigious institutions such as the University of St. Gallen and the Chicago Booth School of Business, enriching his education with experiences at global companies like Google. Alongside this, he founded a **YouTube channel** with over 16,000 subscribers and **Polo**, a platform dedicated to career guidance for university students.

In this interview, Andrea shares the origins of Prospinity, his approach to entrepreneurship, and the crucial role that universities can play in nurturing the talent and vision of the next generation.

Andrea, how did the idea for Prospinity come about, and when did you realize it could become a real startup?

The idea for Prospinity came from an informal pact between Sam and Aarya, two of my co-founders, who were roommates at Yale. One night, while talking about their futures, Aarya looked at Sam and said: "If I ever make a billion dollars, I'll give you 10%. And if you do, you'll do the same for me. That way, only one of us has to make it."

That was the spark: why not extend that pact to other talented students and create a way to invest in the human capital of people you believe in? That's when I joined, and we started building something more structured.

We quickly realized that the concept had strong economic foundations. A career is arguably the most important asset each of us possesses—yet there's no way to diversify it. In a world increasingly shaped by uncertainty, especially with the rise of AI, betting on the collective success of a carefully selected group of people makes deep sense—both human and strategic. The first people we shared the idea with were some very prominent professors, including recent Nobel laureate Daron Acemoglu and Steven Levitt. They became our first advisors. Then came our first



investment: \$100,000 from Patrick Chung, which allowed us to build the legal and tech infrastructure to launch the first "success pools."

Today, following our latest \$2 million funding round, we're ready to bring Prospinity to top U.S. universities.

What did your studies in Management at Ca' Foscari teach you, and how did they influence your entrepreneurial experience?

As I said during my valedictorian speech at graduation, I think of university as a big buffet: it offers many resources and experiences, but it's up to you to serve yourself—and how "full" you feel at the end of the journey depends entirely on you.

The Management programme at Ca' Foscari went well beyond the formal curriculum. It gave me the chance to live an international experience at one of the world's top business schools, to be actively involved in university life—even founding my own student association—and to combine classroom learning with real business exposure.

This rich and diverse environment helped me discover who I am. I was able to explore different paths, test myself in various contexts, and understand what truly excites me and what I'm good at.

But most importantly, it provided the perfect setting for my entrepreneurial spirit to emerge. In such a dynamic and open environment, I learned how to build projects, collaborate with others, and put myself out there—skills I use every day now as a founder.

Prospinity has attracted national and international media attention. Why do you think

your idea is generating so much interest?

With Prospinity, we're not trying to enter an existing market with a cheaper product or a differentiating feature. We're creating an entirely new market. The idea of investing directly in people has always fascinated many, but until now, the right conditions to make it truly viable didn't exist. Other models, such as income share agreements (ISAs), often failed due to structural issues or adverse selection bias. We're entering at a moment in history when growing uncertainty about the future of work, concentrated talent networks, and advancements in fintech make something previously unthinkable possible: investing in human capital as a new asset class - through our success pools.

Looking back at your journey, what has been your biggest challenge so far as a young founder, and how did you overcome it?

The biggest challenge was definitely balancing academics and work. I was fortunate to study at top universities, but I also felt a strong need to challenge myself practically—running a YouTube channel with over 16,000 subscribers, building a career guidance platform, and completing several impactful internships, including one at Google. It wasn't always easy to find the right balance, but that parallel track allowed me to graduate with the equivalent of a few years' experience already under my belt. I believe that, especially at my age, building professional credibility takes extra effort—and without that, I probably wouldn't have had the chance to raise significant capital with my co-founders and build a company in such a competitive environment as Silicon Valley.

Based on your experience, how can universities better support students who want to launch entrepreneurial projects?

Students need to realize that entrepreneurship is a full-fledged career path - it requires specific skills, and the sooner you start developing them, the better. The world of work is changing fast, and so is the way we build businesses.

In my view, traditional paths like spending ten years in consulting or multinational corporations are no longer the only or even the best route for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Universities should present entrepreneurship as a concrete, accessible option—not as an exception for a select few. It's important to normalize the idea that founders may need to start over multiple times. But they'll do so in pursuit of a deeper sense of impact and fulfillment.

We need more role models - people who've taken that path and can come into classrooms and show real steps worth following.

Living in Silicon Valley, I get to see trends early - trends that are reshaping our economic system. We're witnessing the democratization of skills: increasingly accessible technology allows more people to build

companies with fewer resources, while traditional career paths grow more uncertain.

Universities must prepare students for a radically different work environment: fewer employees, smaller organizations, more freelancers and founders, and shorter entrepreneurial cycles.

This requires hands-on labs, tech-updated curricula, and new ways to read market signals. It also means giving space to younger teachers—often the true experts in rapidly evolving sectors that didn't even exist a few years ago.

What advice would you give today to a Management student dreaming of founding a startup?

Start with what you're truly passionate about: find a space where you have something to say, something to change, or where you'd do things differently. But even before thinking about your product or service, focus on building your distribution channel.

Today, having an audience—on social media, in your university, or within your industry - is a critical asset. Build relationships, attend events, launch side projects, make yourself known. Technology is no longer the primary competitive edge - it's increasingly accessible.

What really makes the difference is your ability to identify meaningful, unmet problems - and your way of reaching the right people with your solution. In a world where everyone can build, the winners will be those who can distribute.

Finally, choose the right context. I believe building a startup in Italy is possible - but only if you're solving a distinctly Italian problem or if your product has a Made in Italy competitive advantage. The "American model" of startup building doesn't always work elsewhere.

May 2025

Rita Samiolo, King's College London

The Subtle Art of Questioning Accounting to Understand Society

Rita Samiolo is an alumna who graduated in Business Administration from Ca' Foscari University of Venice. After completing her degree, she moved abroad, where she earned a PhD in Accounting from the London School of Economics and Political Science. There, she received interdisciplinary training that explores accounting, finance, and economic calculation through a socio-political lens, engaging with economic sociology, political economy, and organization studies. She has worked at the London School of Economics, the University of Innsbruck, and is currently Senior Lecturer and Co-Director of the FinWork Futures Research Centre at King's College London.

In this interview, she retraces the key steps of her academic journey, reflects on the "society of numbers," shares the challenges she has faced, and offers insight into the value of critical and human-centered knowledge.

From Venice to London: what role did your management education in Venice play in shaping your academic career?

I was a restless management student. I was always interested in the historical, political, and social dimensions of business and organizational governance - topics that did not always emerge clearly during my undergraduate studies. So the few moments when those aspects surfaced were decisive. For instance, it was after a lecture on New Public Management by the unforgettable Barbara Czarniawska - delivered during a visit to what was then the Department of Business Economics - that I decided to write my thesis on the topic. From there, with the help of my supervisor, I began to establish contacts with the UK academic world, which eventually led me to pursue a PhD abroad. Once I arrived abroad, I realized that the Italian education system had given me important tools—for example, a 'generalist' training, open to different methodologies and paradigms. This helped me move comfortably across a wide range of theories and disciplines, unlike many of my peers, whose backgrounds were far more specialized.

Your work explores how accounting and numbers influence political and social decision-making.



What drew you to this field?

We live in a world increasingly governed and organized through numbers and calculation - both for better and for worse. Studying the processes of quantification, measurement, and evaluation that underpin how society is organized across diverse domains, and examining the often controversial methods used to make individuals and organizations 'calculable' - typically with the ambition to reform, progress, rationalize, democratize - means going straight to the heart of how the governance of contemporary societies works (or fails to work). In English, we often refer to this as the 'technopolitics' of the modern world.

Looking at the international landscape, what skills do you believe are essential today for building an academic career with global reach and real impact?

In the society of numbers and in the so-called 'age of machines,' I believe it is increasingly important not to become mere appendages of computational systems (and thus easily replaceable with each new wave of automation), or passive users of digital tools that appear to simplify our lives but may, as critics like Shoshana Zuboff suggest, also make us less intelligent and less free.

In my view, we need to cultivate knowledge, skills, and sensibilities that help us understand these systems from both within and without—recognizing their potential, but also their limits and dangers. This is crucial not only from a professional standpoint, to seize the best opportunities in the job market, but also

in the broader public interest: to retain and expand our capacity to govern this vast machinery that we are constructing, and within which we are increasingly entangled.

What has been the biggest challenge in your professional path, and how did you overcome it? What helped you stay motivated during difficult times?

Leaving behind family and friends, studying abroad in a major metropolis, and becoming a citizen of another country was an incredible growth opportunity - but, like all experiences that foster growth, it was also difficult, especially at the beginning. The sense of uprootedness I felt then has never quite left me. I've tried to balance it by staying open to the new, and by challenging myself - with a bit of irony, too.

Beyond your academic career, you are also a mother. What challenges have you faced in balancing academia and motherhood, and what message would you share with those who dream of building a career without giving up on personal life?

As all working mothers know, balancing a career with childcare requires enormous sacrifices - physically and mentally. There are times when you realize that you are not "performing" as well as you'd like, neither at work nor at home, and that the energy and motivation you took for granted before having children are no longer there. This is hard to accept, especially for my generation, which has witnessed a dramatic rise in expectations for women, who are now "free" to move across many roles, not just family care. There are no magic formulas, but we can start by recognizing the arbitrary, misogynistic, and extractive logic of the culture that constantly demands women do more. We must step away from the imperative of always having to "perform."

If you could go back, what advice would you give to your freshly graduated self in Venice, just starting out on a path that would lead you to the heart of international academia?

That's a hard one. Much of my journey has been shaped more by chance and luck than by deliberate choices. Perhaps the best advice would be: "Don't overthink it" and "Take it one step at a time."

Rita Samiolo's story is a reminder to embrace the complexities of the present without ever losing the capacity to ask meaningful questions. Across a career that spans Venice, London, and Innsbruck, she shows us how critical thinking, academic commitment, and personal life can coexist—without giving up one's humanity. One step at a time, without forgetting where it all began.

Giorgio Soffiato, Marketing Arena

Marketing as culture, not cult

Founder and managing director of the digital marketing agency "Marketing Arena," Giorgio Soffiato has built his professional path on the combination of academic rigor and strategic vision. After graduating in management in Venice, he consolidated a career spanning business and academia, contributing as adjunct professor at the Venice School of Management and the University of Padua. Furthermore, as adjunct professor, he teaches at Trinity College Dublin and SDA Bocconi. Together with Professors Cinzia Colapinto and Vladi Finotto, he manages the B2B Marketing Observatory [ITA] of the Venice School of Management, which captures the digital transformation and the adoption of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, in B2B companies. On June 5, 2025, at the Santa Margherita – E. Severino Auditorium of Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the results of the Observatory were shared in an event titled "Deliver Growth – The Solitude of the Marketing Manager," during which managers and professionals discussed insights and best practices.

Giorgio, let's start from your background. What did your studies in management in Venice leave you, and how did they influence the choices that led you to found Marketing Arena and to lead it over time?

The study path was fundamental. The truth is that after high school one knows little to nothing; I was about to enroll in law. Then a friend told me about the opportunity to study marketing in the most beautiful city in the world, and I realized it would be something interesting. I believe the influence that later led to Marketing Arena was substantial; it wouldn't exist without the two theses I worked on with Stefano Micelli and a program at the Venice International University. I think I carry with me a method, and that's the most important thing.

The B2B Marketing Observatory, a collaboration between the Venice School of Management and Marketing Arena, has reached its fourth edition. What are the main findings of the latest research, and how do these reflect the evolution of digital strategies in Italian B2B companies?

The observatory, designed with Vladi Finotto and Cinzia Colapinto and the entire VSM, is a little "gem" in the ecosystem of Marketing Arena—and I believe



also of VSM. Under the expert guidance of Cinzia and the whole team, we now obtain high-quality data and engage with companies of every level. This year's report is very clear: customer journey and AI are topics on the table in our companies, but there is still a long way to go. More than awareness, what's lacking are resources and skills.

What is your vision of marketing today? In a rapidly changing context, what role do you think marketing can and should have in creating value, not only for companies but also for society?

In my view, marketing is simply bringing a product to a market. I don't think marketing should be burdened with responsibilities that aren't its own, like improving society. It's a social and economic science in service of management. However, the point is the evolution of marketing, which today cannot ignore social impact for two reasons: the first is linked to the role of sustainability and culture in companies. The second is that many of the products marketing promotes are not tied to profit-making organizations. Fundraising marketing, for example, is a highly sought-after skill today.

Your work blends strategic vision, data culture, and creative capacity. How can one build B2B marketing that is both analytical and human, capable of creating relationships and real value for clients?

Building a marketing project focused on analysis starts with culture and competence. Having a working model, a framework, is essential. In B2B, the

complexity lies in a longer, more varied, and more complex purchasing journey. I believe that value generation comes precisely from relationships. Post-COVID, we've learned that everything changes—even the trade shows that B2B used to love so much. That's why we need to build a new customer-oriented marketing mix, where digital is certainly central, but the relational element must never be lost.

What skills and mindsets do you consider essential for new generations of marketing professionals who want to stand out and make a real impact in the field?

In three words: flexibility, culture, and a multidisciplinary approach. I work in digital marketing, but the two skills I'm focusing on most are strategic marketing and the sociology of consumption. We need to broaden the scope of our knowledge and perspective to stand out from the "tactical" professionals who are now well-trained in short courses. The value of a university path lies precisely in method, strategy, and culture. Curiosity and seeing the world will do the rest. I always tell my students that a six-month delay in graduating will not ruin a path of excellence—on the contrary, simply keeping your head down and grinding through books won't pay off. You need to be modern, curious, and open to change.

Those studying today at the Venice School of Management often dream of a future in business, innovation, and strategic vision. What advice would you give to someone who wants to build a solid and inspired professional path in this direction?

My advice is not to be dazzled by so-called "buzzwords." Words like startup and scaleup are great, but we won't all be selling t-shirts online. That's why it's essential to use university to understand what you truly love. Working in B2B or B2C, or even in different sectors, completely changes the structure of your work. Over time I've discovered that places I once found iconic, like football teams, are just companies like others—and conversely, a seemingly "boring" B2B company can be a hotbed of innovation. I think university should be used above all to catalyze relationships. Each course should be seen as a bell curve with a before and after the peak: every guest, every book cited should be taken as inspiration. I've had the privilege of teaching two contract courses between 2024 and 2025, and I've realized that we professors too must innovate in methods and assessments. The truth is that a new social pact is needed between those lucky enough to sit at the lectern and the students. University will become increasingly "costly," not in economic terms. We're faced with a place that distills knowledge and serves it gradually, compared to AI, which reduces its value to zero. Should we be afraid? No. But what is needed—for VSM as for any university—is brand, reputation, competence, and value. Today, this school embodies all of that, and I'm proud to be among its alumni.

The challenge to keep the bar high is steep. But it is a wonderful time to be an entrepreneur and to study marketing.

Giorgio Soffiato's experience shows how important it is to approach marketing with a critical, curious, and aware mindset, going beyond fleeting trends to rediscover the value of method, culture, and authentic relationships. His path—which intertwines academic education, teaching, and ongoing dialogue with the business world—offers valuable inspiration to students and alumni of the Venice School of Management: building a solid and meaningful career is possible when one nurtures the ability to learn deeply, interpret change, and always place the evolution of the profession and the value of human connections at the center.

Giovanni Costa, Università degli Studi di Padova

Shaping conscious managers in a changing world

Giovanni Costa, Professor Emeritus of Business Strategy and Organization at the University of Padua, is one of the most influential figures in Italy's economic and managerial culture. Over a long academic career, he has taught at SDA Bocconi, CUOA Vicenza, ESSEC Business School in Paris, and Ca' Foscari University of Venice, always combining teaching, research, and engagement with businesses. Through this work, he has significantly contributed to the development of strategic thinking in Italy and to the education of generations of entrepreneurs and managers.

He served as Vice-Rector for Relations with Businesses and Financial Institutions at the University of Padua and has held important governance roles, including Vice President of the Management Board of Intesa Sanpaolo and President of the Cassa di Risparmio del Veneto.

A member of prestigious academic institutions such as the Galileiana and Olimpica Academies, and an honorary member of AIDEA (the Italian Academy of Management), he is also a columnist for *Corriere del Veneto*, the regional edition of *Corriere della Sera*. Professor Costa was one of the key figures behind the founding of the Business and Management program in Venice, which today continues to evolve through the Venice School of Management.

In this interview, he revisits the origins of that pioneering vision, reflects on the evolution of managerial skills, and offers a clear and inspired perspective on the future of management education.

Professor, you played a fundamental role in establishing the Business and Management program in Venice. Can you tell us how this project came to life and what vision guided it?

The Venetian project was strongly supported by Pasquale Saraceno (1903–1991), who, despite coming from a background tied to large enterprises, recognized the need to create a school dedicated to managing the emerging miracle of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Northeast of Italy. It was a technically ambitious initiative, yet one that also paid close attention to the cultural dimension. Saraceno, for instance, insisted that half of the courses offered should be non-technical in nature. That spirit grew over the years, influencing both operational practices and theoretical reflection.



Traditionally, in the Faculties of Economics and Commerce, business studies were largely centered around accounting, which formed the core of the chartered accountant profession. However, the remarkable entrepreneurial development that emerged in Italy after World War II - alongside the growing international openness of our economy - inspired the group of young scholars around Saraceno to explore alternative approaches and tools that could integrate the financial-economic dimension with the managerial one. The challenge was to rapidly assimilate the North American experience and adapt it to the unique characteristics of Italy's entrepreneurial fabric, all while responding to the powerful push for change coming from younger generations.

The vision of the Venetian school can be summarized as follows:

- *the theoretical and practical centrality of the firm and the entrepreneur;*
- *the recognition of the active role institutions must play to ensure the proper functioning of the market and to correct its distortions;*
- *a pluralistic theoretical approach that avoids falling into mere eclecticism;*
- *attention to the diversity of stakeholders involved in the life of an enterprise;*
- *the importance of professional management in rationalizing business decisions;*
- *a constant focus on national systems and their aggregations in generating competitive advantage for firms and countries.*

In a constantly evolving academic and business world, what skills do you believe are essential for today's management students?

In a world marked by continuous change, it is not the specific technical solutions that will endure, but the method used to approach problems. And the method that should define good management is interdisciplinary. Technical skills are now taken for granted. What makes the real difference are meta-skills - the ability to regenerate one's competencies and develop new solutions to new challenges.

What challenges and opportunities do you see today for a School of Management like ours, tasked with preparing future leaders in an increasingly complex global context?

A School of Management located in a city open to international influences, rich in history, values, and beauty - and embedded in a region that acts as an open-air laboratory for innovation and entrepreneurship - is ideally positioned to speak to the world. It simply needs to choose to do so, with determination.

Throughout your academic journey, you've combined teaching, research, and engagement with businesses. How important do you believe this balance remains in management education today?

In management education - both then and now - I've always been guided by the belief that good research leads to good teaching, and that both are meaningful only if they contribute to the growth and evolution of businesses.

If you could give one piece of advice to current students and recent graduates of VSM, what would it be?

Be ready to embrace specialization without rigidity. Be flexible, able to move quickly and reconfigure your skills. Stay open to different cultures and perspectives, willing to learn from others and to challenge the primacy of your own views. Prepare to leverage technological change and recurring crises as opportunities to rethink management models, revisit tools, and interpret new roles.

Is there a memory or project from your time at what is now the Venice School of Management that you are particularly proud of?

Among many cherished memories, one that stands out is the initiative - promoted by our Department - that led to the awarding of honorary degrees in Business Administration to Luciano Benetton and Leonardo Del Vecchio in 1995. Both were first-generation entrepreneurs who built, from scratch, two companies studied and admired around the world.

With clarity, depth, and a mindset always open to change, Giovanni Costa reminds us that management education must go beyond technical knowledge. It should be grounded in a dynamic balance between culture, enterprise, context, and method. In an era defined by rapid and ongoing transformation, his insights offer a powerful invitation to shape leaders who combine critical thinking with practical vision, solid skills with adaptive capacity, local roots with global openness. A vital lesson for anyone walking the halls of the Venice School of Management today - ready to make their mark on the world.

Serena Ricci, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS)

Business schools of tomorrow with roots in Venice

After graduating in Business Administration at Ca' Foscari and helping to create and grow the Reimagine Education Awards & Conference, Serena Ricci has built a career at the intersection of storytelling, growth strategy, data, and international partnerships. Today, she is **Growth Marketing Manager** at QS, a global provider of analytics and services for higher education, best known for the QS World University Rankings as well as for platforms and events that connect students and universities worldwide. Her path, further enriched by experiences with UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and by her role on the Learning Committee of OpenUK—the non-profit representing the UK open technology ecosystem (open source software, open data, open hardware) — shows how a management education in Venice can become a springboard to a global career. Looking to the future of business schools, Serena brings with her a perspective that blends quantitative skills, international culture, and a constant focus on social impact and sustainability.

Looking at your professional journey, what were the key steps after your degree in Management at Ca' Foscari that led you to QS?

I graduated in July 2015 in Business Administration – Economics & Management with a clear idea of building a profile “spendable” abroad: courses in English, a solid quantitative base, and plenty of practice in communication.

The key steps that led me to QS, in fact, started well before graduation—and are the main reason I quickly found a job. The University's Internship & Placement Office was a constant point of reference in building my professional profile from the very first years at Ca' Foscari. Already in summer 2014 I had completed an internship in London in International Marketing at Raglan International, a start-up active in the luxury services & real estate sector. That was the first “UK stamp” on my CV and, above all, the test that confirmed I wanted to grow in an international environment.

In May 2015, while preparing my thesis, I took part in Let's Brand, a workshop on personal branding, social media, and web reputation, which brought me closer to the world of branding. Later, I was selected for the



“Brand Manager Specialist” program, organized in collaboration with the Veneto Region. This course, which combined classroom training with 400+ hours of internship at one of the partner companies, became my point of contact with the company I still work for today: QS Quacquarelli Symonds.

At QS, I joined the Communication & PR team working on the second edition of the Wharton–QS Reimagine Education Awards & Conference. It was a baptism by fire: brand, storytelling, media relations, CRM, community building, and event delivery, helping it grow over the years from 300 to 900–1000 delegates (in December 2025, it will reach its 12th edition). That experience gave me two key lessons: the first is ownership—when you build something end-to-end you learn more in one year than in three hyper-specialized roles; the second is that even in communication you must speak the language of data: leads generated, conversion rates, retention of partners and participants.

From there, the transition was natural: I took on the role of Product Marketing Manager for the thought leadership portfolio (conferences and publications), defining positioning, messaging, and go-to-market, and then moved into my current role as Growth Marketing Manager, where I combine narrative, channels, and continuous experimentation on funnels, pricing/packaging, and partnerships. Looking back, the key steps were three: choosing “T-shaped” roles (depth in marketing, curiosity for product and sales), asking for real responsibilities very early, and tying every activity to a metric understandable to the business.

Which skills or attitudes, developed during your years of study in Venice, helped you the most to position yourself as an international professional?

Ca' Foscari trained me in something that is pure gold in international marketing: applied data literacy. Statistics, quantitative methods, and accounting taught me to formulate hypotheses, test them, and make decisions. In practice: I know how to read a funnel, design a sensible A/B test, and explain why I choose one variant by aligning it with goals and constraints.

To this, I add clear writing in cross-cultural contexts: courses in English and mixed classes forced me to simplify without dumbing down—very useful when talking to rectors, product managers, and partners across time zones. Finally, university life—associations, projects, deadlines—gave me project management with limited resources: sharp priorities, a few well-executed deliverables, and the ability to “ship” by a given date.

If I think about the tools I would recommend today to those who want to accelerate: a solid base in Excel/Sheets (pivot and XLOOKUP), some basics of SQL and GA4 so as not to depend on others, familiarity with a CRM like HubSpot or Salesforce to really understand what happens to generated demand, and principles of on-page SEO/AEO and copywriting oriented to segments (Jobs-to-Be-Done helps a lot). Finally, AI is a multiplier: I use it for preliminary research, outlines, content quality checks, and as a creative sparring partner—but I always verify sources, numbers, and consistency with the brand.

In your opinion, what makes a business school truly competitive and attractive at a global level?

It partly depends on the school's identity and differentiation strategy, but in most cases competitiveness is measured by the actual value generated for the student. Elements that characterize a truly competitive and international business school include: a welcoming environment for international students combined with a genuine commitment to diversity; affordability—or at least the perception of affordability—through sustainable fees, scholarships, and support measures; academic rigor that combines theory and practice; strong partnerships with desirable employers; robust employment outcomes and compelling career trajectories for graduates; and a reputation based on a positive student culture and genuinely engaged faculty and staff.

In your work you have a privileged view of training trends: what are the main challenges and opportunities you see for business schools in the coming years?

There is a wealth of research on what worries and drives today's business school deans. The trends and challenges that experts such as my colleague Michelle Wieser (GME Proposition Lead) observe are, in reality, opportunities for schools that choose to address them proactively.

The first is the erosion of the perceived value of the degree: to attract students, schools must highlight the ROI of programs, otherwise they risk losing them to other academic paths or alternative learning models. The second is declining enrollment in some markets, due to demographics and changing preferences, compounded by geopolitical variables: staying competitive means launching the right programs and credentials in the right formats.

Third: the curriculum. The pace of technological innovation and the evolution of employer demand require integrating technology and keeping content updated, as well as adopting internal processes that allow rapid changes to learning outcomes and syllabi. Fourth: reputation. In a global market, managing it actively is crucial: those who want to attract international students must know how to interpret and communicate third-party evaluations of their quality, but also clearly position what makes the school unique.

Eventually, social impact and sustainability: these are central issues for both students and companies. Schools that know how to weave ESG into their programs and courses will be perceived as more relevant and impactful.

From QS's point of view, how important is the role of the alumni community in the growth and positioning of a business school like VSM?

The alumni community is essential for the growth, positioning, and vitality of a business school. Alumni are often the first ambassadors of programs and represent a living bridge between the school, prospective students, and employers.

On the recruitment front, their involvement is crucial for enrollment stability and growth: they can refer candidates, conduct admissions interviews, serve as speakers or panelists at events, and share their experiences—especially in terms of career advancement—through blogs, social media, and other outreach, generating trust among prospects. In mentoring and student support, alumni's professional experience is invaluable capital: they can act as individual or group mentors, guest speakers in class, judges of presentations, or even promoters of “live” case studies, bringing real-world problems into the classroom and making learning more experiential. On the employment side, alumni facilitate internships and placements, provide career coaching, host company visits, and conduct mock interviews; all of this contributes to better-prepared students and stronger employment outcomes, further enhancing the school's reputation.

Finally, continuing education also involves alumni: post-graduate certificates, executive education, and professional development programs for more senior profiles can bring them back into the classroom and open up new revenue streams. Whatever the engagement strategy, it is worth remembering that the relationship is bidirectional: alumni support the school, but the school must also support the alumni—with career coaching, free workshops, or seminars—

thus fueling a virtuous cycle of shared value.

What advice would you give to a VSM graduate who looks to the future with ambition but also some uncertainty?

The first piece of advice is to narrow the target: choose a precise junior role (e.g., product, content, or growth marketing), a sector, and—if possible—a compatible time zone. This clarity is not about “boxing yourself in,” but about giving coherence to your CV, LinkedIn, and conversations.

Next, I would suggest creating tangible proof of your value: in 6–8 weeks you can build a mini-portfolio with three real pieces, for example the audit of a university landing page with five priority fixes, a small growth experiment for a local association/SME (objective, hypothesis, execution, result), and a long-form piece of content with CTA (call to action) and UTM to measure performance. These artifacts count more than ten cover letters because they help recruiters imagine you “in the chair” from day one.

Then work on positioning and outreach. CV and LinkedIn profile must speak in terms of impact, not tasks: action, lever used, metric, or proof of result. The “Open to Work” setting must be applied surgically, and in the Featured section you should showcase your portfolio. At the same time, don’t limit yourself to applications: write to hiring managers and alumni with specific observations and a small gift of value. It’s the fastest way to turn silence into interviews.

When you get to the interview, prepare three STAR stories—success, mistake, constructive conflict—and a mini-presentation on “Your first 90 days on the team”: what you would measure, what quick wins you would try, how you would set up dashboards and experiment backlogs. It communicates execution, not just theory.

Finally, take care of logistics and mindset: you can start from adjacent roles (events, marketing operations, communication) if they offer fast learning and an international environment; the title of your first job matters less than the steepness of the curve. Dedicate 90 minutes a day to one technical skill and one communication skill, ask for feedback early (on drafts, not finished work), and remember to “put numbers into creative conversations.”

If I had to summarize: choose a global context, take ownership of something real, measure its impact, and tell the story well. It’s the most honest shortcut I know to getting started quickly—even abroad.

From Serena’s journey, one message clearly emerges: an international career is not the result of luck, but of deliberate choices, early responsibility, and the ability to measure and communicate impact. Her experience at QS confirms the importance today of hybrid skills—spanning data, communication, and project management—along with the capacity to adapt to the continuous transformation of higher education.

Her reflections, also enriched by insights from her colleague Michelle Wieser, remind us that the most competitive business schools are those able to combine academic rigor, accessibility, social impact, and a strong alumni network.

In a world where career paths are increasingly non-linear, Serena Ricci’s experience shows that the combination of international vision, ownership, and continuous learning remains the key to standing out and growing.

Matteo Fabbrini, Faba

Innovating to Educate: The Power of Ideas That Make Us Grow

Matteo Fabbrini, a graduate in Marketing and Business Management from the Department of Management – now Venice School of Management- at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, is an entrepreneur and innovator who has successfully turned vision into impact.

In 2007, he founded Exclama, a company specialized in promotional items, and a year later he launched Maikii, which became a key player in the market of customized USB drives and accessories. With Maikii, he also launched the brand Tribe, developing collaborations with international licenses such as Star Wars, Marvel, and Disney.

In 2019, he launched FABA, a startup that combines education and entertainment through screen-free audio devices designed to stimulate children's learning and creativity.

FABA quickly gained international recognition, reaching over 10 million euros in revenue in 2024 and winning the prestigious iF Design Award - a testament to its unique balance between technological innovation and educational values.

Recently, Matteo returned to class to engage with the next generation of managers, as part of Experior, a project of the Venice School of Management. This initiative offers students a unique opportunity to learn and be inspired through direct dialogue between academia and the business world.

In Matteo's case, the Experior project took place within the course "Integrated Marketing Communication: Digital and Physical Touchpoints", taught by Prof. Francesca Checchinato - where the dialogue between academia and business becomes a tangible opportunity for learning and inspiration.

Looking at your journey, how did your studies in Marketing at Ca' Foscari help shape your approach to innovation and entrepreneurship? Is there something you still carry with you from that experience?

My experience at Ca' Foscari was a fundamental stage for me, not only from an educational point of view but also on a human level. I came from an entrepreneurial family background, where I had been exposed to business since childhood, but university allowed me to acquire a more structured language, an analytical vision, and a critical mindset.

I particularly remember some courses that helped



me reflect strategically, to understand the value of segmentation, positioning, and brand as an intangible asset.

But what I carry with me above all is the ability to think in systemic terms: to connect markets, trends, behaviors, and social dynamics. This lies at the core of every true innovation. In a world that changes so rapidly, curiosity and the ability to read between the lines — to catch weak signals — have perhaps become my most valuable resources, and it all started there, in the classroom, discussing cases, scenarios, and possibilities.

The idea of FABA was born to offer children an alternative to screens, focusing on listening, play, and imagination. When did you realize that this project could become a real business?

There were several moments that built that awareness. The first, without a doubt, was seeing my daughter — who had just been born at the time — interact with the product with surprising naturalness. It wasn't just a toy, but an experience that created connection, emotional engagement, and stimulated her curiosity.

Then came the first feedback from parents, who didn't just give us generic compliments but thanked us for offering their children a concrete alternative to screens. Another turning point was the encounter with the market: at the first trade fairs we received much more attention than expected. The interest came not only from Italy but from different countries, which made us realize we were touching something universal. From there, a more structured reflection began on the business model, scalability, and growth potential. It

wasn't a sudden "click," but a gradual awareness that the initial intuition could truly become a real company.

Creating a product for children requires great care in design, content, and the messages it conveys. How does a new character or story come to life at FABA, and what criteria do you follow to ensure it aligns with the brand's values?

At FABA, every piece of content starts from a deep reflection on what we want the child to experience, learn, and feel. We never start from what "sells," but from what educates, inspires, and stimulates. The question we always ask ourselves is: what value are we offering the child through this story or character? Each new release is the result of teamwork involving very different figures: educators, psychologists, storytellers, illustrators, sound designers. Once the idea takes shape, a rigorous internal validation process begins: we evaluate the content from multiple perspectives — educational, linguistic, and ethical — also with the support of our committee of childhood experts.

The goal is to create a balance between entertainment and growth. For us, every product must reflect FABA's core values: inclusion, empathy, respect for diversity, and encouragement of imagination. Children are demanding, even if they don't know it yet: they sense authenticity, they recognize genuine messages. For this reason, if a piece of content doesn't convey something true and positive, we simply don't publish it.

Expanding a brand like FABA abroad requires strategic vision, cultural adaptation, and solid international marketing skills. Was there something you learned during your studies in management at Ca' Foscari that helped you handle this phase of growth and internationalization?

Absolutely. At Ca' Foscari, I learned that internationalization is not a linguistic translation, but a cultural one. I remember very clearly how much emphasis was placed on studying the local context, consumer habits, and the symbolic value of products in different markets. This approach proved essential when we decided to take FABA abroad.

Each country has a different sensitivity, especially when it comes to children and parenting. In some markets, the educational value is central; in others, the play dimension prevails. In certain contexts, people seek tradition; in others, innovation. The main lesson I carry with me is that of listening and intelligent adaptation: keeping the Italian heart of the brand, while being able to speak authentically to Spanish, French, and Belgian families. This balance between identity and flexibility has been one of the pillars that allowed us to grow without losing coherence.

Leading a fast-growing team, how do you build a strong corporate culture? What values do you try to transmit every day to the people who work with you?

Building a solid corporate culture requires time, consistency, and above all, example. I strongly believe

in the concept of "leading by example": you can't ask for responsibility, creativity, or teamwork if you don't live them yourself. Every day I try to convey the idea that, at FABA, everyone is an active part of a larger project and that each person's impact truly matters. Our culture is built around a few clear values: respect for childhood (which means care for every detail), mutual trust, listening, and a strong sense of purpose. We don't work "to produce objects," but to create experiences that help children grow better. And everyone must feel that — from marketing to logistics. In times of rapid growth, it's easy to lose focus; that's why we work constantly on internal communication, storytelling, transparency, and inclusion. A culture is not a slogan: it's a shared daily practice.

What advice would you give to young VSM alumni who dream of founding a startup, especially in complex and competitive fields such as education or children's entertainment?

My main advice is to start from a real and profound need. In fields like education or kids' entertainment, having a good idea isn't enough: you need to step carefully into a delicate territory where you carry great responsibility. You need to respect both the children and those who guide them: parents, teachers, educators.

Then, you need humility: start small, gather real feedback, fail early and often. The metrics of success here are not only economic: they are impact, engagement, transformation. And above all, don't rush. This is a sector where trust is built over time. Finally, surround yourself with people better than you. No one builds a company alone, and the best ideas often arise from open dialogue. If you work with passion, vision, and coherence, even in the most challenging sectors you can build something truly unique.

Matteo Fabbrini's journey shows how passion, curiosity, and vision can turn an idea into a project capable of changing the rules of the game. His return to the Venice School of Management through the Experior project symbolically closes one circle and opens another: that of dialogue between generations, where those who have built enterprises with courage choose to share their experience to inspire those who are just beginning to imagine their own future.

November 2025

Caterina Conte, KitchenAid

The endless paths of product

From the classrooms of the San Giobbe campus to the international teams of Safilo, Eastpak, Pandora, Reebok, and now KitchenAid, Caterina Conte's career is the story of a professional who has turned her management education into a compass — one that guides her across industries, cultures, and perspectives, while keeping her passion for product at the center.

Each step in her journey tells a story of growth, change, and a new way of seeing things. After starting out in demand planning, Caterina realized that behind the numbers lay what fascinated her most: the chance to create value through the product and to understand what truly drives consumers' choices. From fashion and sportswear to design, a red thread connects every stage: curiosity for the product, the ability to read numbers with a strategic mind, and a constant desire to learn something new.

Changing industries, cities, or perspectives might seem risky — but for someone who loves what she does, it's simply another way to grow, evolve, and discover new possibilities.

Looking back at your path through brands like Safilo, Eastpak, Pandora, Reebok and now KitchenAid, what made you realize that product and category management were your direction? Was it a planned choice or an intuition that developed along the way?

It was definitely an intuition that developed step by step, after the different academic and professional experiences I had the opportunity to undertake. I officially began my career in Demand Planning at Safilo, where numbers and planning played a crucial role. My main goal at the time was to stay somehow connected to the world of fashion and accessories, which had fascinated me after a brief internship at Golden Goose, while I was writing my master's thesis. The experience in Safilo's demand planning team, however, allowed me to really understand what I wanted — and didn't want — to do, and to discover the various roles and departments within a company. This is something you can only fully grasp once you enter the working world, because every company is structured differently — something you can't truly experience at university.

Thanks to that experience, I realized that product was my true passion, though numbers (given my



economics background) were still a part I didn't want to lose — the rational side.

That combination helped me move to the Product Merchandising team at Eastpak (VF Corporation) in Antwerp — a role where the analytical and the creative meet, giving me the opportunity to influence both sides.

How did your Management studies at Ca' Foscari influence your approach to product and category management?

My Master's in International Management at Ca' Foscari definitely influenced my career choices — especially thanks to the group projects carried out with local companies.

During those projects, I started to understand how brands and organizations are structured, and I got an early idea of what I might want to do after university. Working on assignments such as developing a business from scratch, launching a new product, or expanding a company helped me build the mindset I needed to enter the corporate world with confidence. The most valuable part of the program was its hands-on approach — workshops and collaborations between students and companies — which inspired me and gave me the right push to continue after graduation with clearer ideas.

The fact that the program was taught entirely in English, in an international environment, also motivated me to seek work experience abroad — which led me to VF Corporation and Eastpak in Antwerp, Belgium. That was a wonderful experience, both personally and professionally, allowing me

to return to Italy with a broader skill set and new opportunities, such as working for New Guards Group as Category Manager for Reebok's premium line.

You recently moved from Reebok to KitchenAid, changing not only company, but also industry and city. Every shift brings new questions and expectations. Tell us about yours.

After eight years in the fashion and sportswear industry, I felt the need for change. And after three years, I also realized that Milan didn't fully reflect my ideal city or lifestyle.

One of the reasons that pushed me to change industries was the overall slowdown the fashion and sportswear sector has faced in recent years. So I thought: "why not explore a new opportunity, in a different industry that could open new doors, allow me to learn new things, and represent a longer-term investment?"

Right now, my main goal is to learn as much as possible and immerse myself in a world completely new to me — that of small domestic appliances. A brand like KitchenAid, part of the Whirlpool Group, is a globally recognized name in appliances, design, and food — a solid company that actually grew in demand during the COVID period.

I've also had a personal passion for food, cooking, and pastry for years, so this opportunity truly feels like a dream come true.

Joining a strong, healthy company can foster both soft and hard skill growth, especially when the company invests in people's development. Of course, change always involves risks — but I feel ready to take them, 100%, as an investment in my future.

After all, I can always go back to fashion if I want — or even to Italy.

KitchenAid has a heritage rooted in home and tradition, but also in innovation and design. How did you prepare to approach a brand with such a different identity from Reebok?

My passion for cooking, which I've cultivated for years, definitely helped.

I had long wanted to do something linked to this field — which, like fashion, remains connected to design, branding, and innovation.

I leveraged my Category Management skills so that they would be relevant in this new sector, because at the end of the day, it's still about understanding consumers, analyzing performance and trends, and creating value through the product.

The key skills needed to perform this role — whether in fashion or in electronics or food — are very similar. What truly matters is the mindset and the ability to adapt your skills to different product categories.

I'm convinced that passion is essential in any job, especially when it involves products and brands. If you work closely with a product, you need to love it.

That personal passion came through even during my interviews — and I think it showed how genuine interest can make you more adaptable across sectors and products.

Knowing the brand and the product — and building a relationship with them — allows you to navigate new environments with confidence. Whether it's keeping an eye on competitors or showing curiosity in your spare time, that engagement makes a real difference.

What do you take with you from Reebok — on a human, professional, or strategic level — that you think will make a difference in your new role at KitchenAid?

My time at Reebok — and in Milan — was short but intense, so I'll carry a mix of experiences with me.

On a human level, collaborating mostly with Italian colleagues (after years of working with people from over twenty nationalities) gave me a new kind of flexibility and perspective. Working in an international environment is a huge plus — it teaches you to appreciate different working styles and mindsets.

But working in Milan, in fashion, is unique — it's where authenticity and passion come into play 100%.

On a professional level, entering the sneaker world taught me to analyze processes and data differently — with shorter lead times and the need to react quickly to trends and market changes.

The world of small domestic appliances is less dynamic in terms of product cycles and innovation, with longer production and launch timelines.

That said, my experience in fast-paced environments will help me adapt quickly to this new industry and embrace a different way of thinking about product and category. I believe that flexibility will make a real difference.

What advice would you give to VSM students who want to enter category management and work in international companies like KitchenAid?

My main advice is to gain international experience.

Besides being a life experience that makes you grow and become independent, it's also professionally invaluable. Working in structured, competitive, international environments gives you new perspectives — it shows you other ways companies operate and how different corporate cultures function. If I could go back, I'd do it all again. Starting out with internships in Italy allowed me to understand what I really wanted, and then moving abroad helped me find my path and grow into the professional I wanted to become.

Sometimes we think we want to work in a certain industry, but once inside, we realize it's not the right fit.

For instance, my dream was to work in luxury — but after my first internship, I realized that world wasn't for me.

Then I moved to Eastpak, where I found my direction and felt completely myself — surrounded by people who believed in me and in what I was doing. I think it's essential, especially early on, to take time to experiment and even make mistakes — because that's how you discover what truly excites you. Don't be afraid to take detours or to "waste" time exploring: that's often the most valuable time you'll ever spend.

Every role, every city, and every industry has added a piece to Caterina Conte's way of looking at the product — with curiosity, precision, and passion. Her story shows that skills have no boundaries and that even the most diverse experiences can speak to each other and create value. In the end, as her own journey suggests, the paths of product — just like those of life — are truly endless.

Massimo Grigolin, Natixis Investment Banking

A journey through financial markets and digital transformation

After graduating in Business Administration in Venice with a statistical–quantitative specialization, Massimo Grigolin built a successful international career in the Capital Markets across Italy, France, and the United Kingdom. The strong analytical background developed during his studies enabled him to enter the world of investment banking with solid technical foundations and a strong quantitative mindset.

After an initial experience in retail banking, choosing to pursue an MBA in Rotterdam opened the door to global and multicultural environments, which over time became the defining feature of his career path. At Natixis, he has held roles covering the entire spectrum of markets: from credit to rates, from derivatives to securitizations, and ultimately the management of commercial teams operating in highly competitive environments. A keen observer of industry evolution, he has closely followed the digital transformation of the markets and the growing role of artificial intelligence in operational and decision-making processes.

Today, his strategic focus is on the new balance between traditional banks and private credit and equity funds in an increasingly disintermediated Europe, with particular attention to the intercultural and relational competencies required to lead global teams in a rapidly changing landscape.

How did your studies in Business Administration in Venice contribute to building your professional profile? Looking back, which skills acquired at university were truly useful in the world of investment banking?

I have to say that when I attended university, the environment was much more theoretical and less connected to the job market compared to what it is today. The skills students acquired were more oriented toward theoretical enrichment rather than practical application.

That said, by choosing the statistical–quantitative track, I developed strong foundations in statistical and quantitative analysis, which I could immediately apply in my work in investment banking, particularly in the markets division, where we deal with interest rates, credit spreads, FX, derivatives, and securitizations. These skills were essential to start my career.



At the same time, the competitive university environment—entry barriers, large classes, and limited resources—taught me how to work toward goals, build an effective network, and find quick and efficient learning methods. These skills helped me a lot when transitioning into the professional world, especially when I moved into commercial roles and later into sales team management.

What was the most challenging step between university and entering the world of investment banking? And how did you turn your academic knowledge into practical tools?

The most challenging step was definitely moving beyond a very local dynamic. I studied between Padua and Venice, and at that time English was still perceived as marginal. Entering an international environment was the real challenge.

After university, I worked briefly in retail banking at the old Credito Italiano in Padua, but I quickly realized that my real passion was investment banking and the markets, not retail.

To bridge the gap and gain the international exposure I was missing, I decided to pursue an MBA in Rotterdam. More than for the technical skills—which I had mostly gained during university—it was an essential experience for opening myself up to a global environment and learning how to operate in an international context, which later became the key to my entire career.

Digitalization is now crucial even in corporate banking. How do you experience digital transformation at Natixis, and which innovations have most improved operational efficiency?

The world of markets has been radically transformed by digitalization. When I started, every transaction—FX, interest rates, corporate bonds—was done over the phone with clients: you talked, agreed on terms, and executed the trade. Today, I'd say that 90% of this business goes through electronic platforms.

This has profoundly changed the role of salespeople: the more standardized, low value-added activity is handled by machines, while the human component remains fundamental for everything requiring advisory, relationships, and the ability to interpret the market. When most volumes are executed electronically, the sales role becomes essential in maintaining trust and adding value to the relationship—ensuring that clients remember you in key moments.

The second major transformation concerns artificial intelligence. Since we handle a huge amount of data and reports daily, AI makes it possible to extract relevant information very quickly, making our work far more efficient. Being able to upload complex documents and get the key sections in seconds is a real game changer, and I believe its impact will become increasingly central.

Looking ahead, which emerging trends do you think are redefining European corporate banking? How is your team preparing for these changes?

One of the most significant trends reshaping European corporate banking is the disintermediation of the banking system. Increasingly, non-bank institutions—especially private credit and private equity funds—are able to arrange large transactions quickly, without the need for syndicated lending among multiple banks. This makes them extremely effective in responding to clear and immediate financing needs, putting traditional banks at a disadvantage as they must go through longer processes such as credit committees or the creation of investor pools.

We see this phenomenon both on the corporate side—with large financial operations managed by funds—and on the retail side, with platforms that were born as peer-to-peer lending networks and then, growing, began accessing capital markets for funding.

The challenge for us, as a corporate and investment bank, is to understand what role we can play in this new paradigm. The new objective is to figure out how to collaborate with private credit funds, private equity funds, and the various non-bank lenders. With my team, we are working to position ourselves precisely on this, trying to structure tailor-made solutions. That's where we can still make a difference.

You are now an established manager in an international group. Which soft skills do you consider essential for someone graduating in business administration who wants to grow in a competitive, multicultural environment like Natixis?

In my view, the most important soft skill in an international context is not just speaking the language, but understanding and interpreting the culture of the people you work with. In my case, working within a French bank deeply rooted in its country but with a global presence, it was essential to learn how to navigate the dynamics typical of a French institution without losing sight of the multicultural context in which we operate.

I also spent several years in England with Natixis, and there I experienced firsthand how crucial it is to translate not only the language but also the mindset and way of working: explaining to a major Anglo-Saxon investor how a French organization works, and vice versa. They are two very different worlds, and being able to act as a bridge between them is a decisive skill.

To this, I would add the ability to work toward clear objectives and never lose sight of the final result: whether it's a negotiation or a commercial relationship, knowing your goals and adapting your communication and working style to the cultural context truly makes the difference.

What advice would you give a VSM student interested in pursuing a career in investment banking, especially in a Franco-Italian context like yours?

My advice is to gain hands-on experience as soon as possible in a bank that does serious investment banking. It doesn't matter whether it's in Milan, London, Paris, or New York: what matters is stepping outside your comfort zone and experiencing a real, competitive environment.

In Italy, most investment banking activity is concentrated in Milan, and that's where you need to challenge yourself.

Students shouldn't feel inferior to graduates from Bocconi or Luiss: Ca' Foscari provides excellent preparation, but it's essential to build the right network, learn how to navigate an international environment, and understand that—beyond technical skills—relationship-building and seizing opportunities are crucial.

Looking at the Anglo-Saxon model can be helpful: less theory and more real business cases, contact with companies, practical problem-solving, networking. In short, don't settle for a comfortable experience close to home—aim straight for an internship in a major investment bank. It may be tough—you may end up living in a small room with a tight budget—but that experience truly shapes you and opens the doors to your future career.

Massimo Grigolin's international experience is a concrete example of how solid technical skills, a global outlook, and strong relational abilities can come together to build a successful career in financial markets. His story offers valuable insight into a sector undergoing constant transformation, driven by digitalization, the growing impact of artificial intelligence, and the rise of private credit and private equity funds in an increasingly disintermediated Europe.

His career shows how a rigorous academic foundation—combined with the courage to step outside one's comfort zone—can open meaningful professional opportunities. His experience highlights the importance of cultivating an open, curious, and innovation-oriented mindset: an essential approach for navigating a rapidly changing sector that increasingly demands new, transversal, and international skills.



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