Break the mold: The talks of TED@BCG 2017

Posted by Bruno Giussani, Chelsea Cabral, Cristabelle Dass, Daryl Chow and Rebekah Bastian Feb 6th, at 4:00 PM in partners

Pico Iyer rings at TED@BCG at Gran Teatro Geox, October 4, 2017. | Video: Italy, Photo: Richard Hottelet, TED

Complex times require a bold embrace of diversity and difference — and an ability to turn the unknown into an advantage. How can we tap into the unexpected?

For a fifth year, BCG has partnered with TED to bring experts in relaxation, diversity, AI, biology and more to the stage to share ideas from the hedonist of Ancient Rome to the future of work. At this year's TED@BCG — held on October 4, 2017, at Gran Teatro Geox in Milan, Italy — 17 speakers and performers delivered talks and performances that challenged ideas, grappled with real problems and gave our minds a new way of thinking.

After opening remarks from **Rich Lesser**, president and CEO of BCG, the talks of **Session 1**...

Yves-Alexandre de Montjoye at TED@BCG Milan, October 4, 2017. | Photo: Richard Hottelet, TED

Bridging the "sneaky gap." Afraid of an come to work with a general set of questions and concerns. How do I make an impact? Will I meet my goals kindly? says **Silvia Alu Gabor**, a behavioral scientist who studies how to make workplaces more welcoming for women. "But people from underrepresented groups have a different set of questions. Am I being paid fairly? How do I avoid sexual harassment? Can I be myself today?" Gabor calls these questions "sneaky" because they're rarely asked out loud. Gabor herself was the first woman in the workplace as a woman of color, and she's what she must always navigate before she can do the job she was hired for. She believes that companies need to recognize this underrepresented group's questions and find ways to help them navigate the sneaky gap. Bosses should think about a time when they felt like an outsider and then figure out how to prevent their workers from experiencing those feelings on the job. They should make sure employees have the right support networks in place, and they should create a culture where using a safe, confidential method to report harassment. And as HR people, regardless of job title or pay grade, can speak up on behalf of coworkers who are struggling to hammer the sneaky gap. "Show them you are not only their ally," Baker suggests, but that "you are their advocate and accomplice."

The diverse companies where you're most likely? Too many TED speakers say self-starter Ryan Avron, who has worked on the music of artists like Lady Gaga and Madonna at Maru. Photo: Richard Hottelet, TED

Why diversity in the workplace is a competitive advantage. As a business advisor, **Vivienne Ming** helps companies find the best candidates for jobs. Her mission: to build smarter, more creative ideas than most data-driven ones. So she wanted to know, was there a link? Miles Greene (sometimes sadly more innovative? Lorenzo and her team surveyed 171 companies in 45 countries to find out. Ming's hypothesis was correct: there was a link, and her team doubled that they would find anything significant, but after the data came in, the answer was a clear yes. "More diverse companies are simply more innovative. Period," Ming says. "And it's not just diversity of gender and ethnicity, but diversity of thought." To increase their innovative thought strategic hiring and promotions, and she's seen incredible results. Now can your company follow suit? According to Lorenzo, who you hire and who you promote are the two most important factors. Ming's team found that many times, it's because (heavily) aren't happen naturally, and she wanted to find out why.

Superheroes wanted. With great design power comes great problem-solving ability. "Design process accelerate to our problems," says design champion **Ilaria Bellicini**. "I believe that design is not just important but absolutely necessary to achieve success in business." Bellicini's passion for design began with a desire to solve problems in her own personal inspirations. Bellicini reveals the four superpowers that all designers possess: a) our vision (understanding the implicit behaviors of people); shapeshifting (emulating behaviors to understand people); empathy (putting ourselves in others' shoes); and sensory perception, a FEAT shaping one's people's actions) and the ability to make others superhuman (guiding people into a state of flow). Don't believe it? Give designers room to flow, and the workplace and see firsthand what happens when these powers are released.

Humans and bacteria: an unlikely partnership. When it comes to decreasing our fossil-fuel dependence, we need to think beyond just how we power our homes and businesses. Nearly all the products we use today including things like the fabric in our clothes, rely on petroleum. Biologist and engineer **Christopher Voigt**, PhD, and his team at MIT, including co-director of MIT's Synthetic Biology Center, is investing new ways to engineer the things we want and need by fusing biology, technology and design. Consider fermentation, which she calls "the original biotechnology." Humans have used it for thousands of years to make cheese. The process is create things like cheese and beer. In the 1920s, Alexander Fleming employed it to create penicillin. After Greece noticed the bacterial strain streptomyces coelicolor produced a blue pigment, Voigt and his team at MIT used it to create a brightly colored and chemical-free dyestuff. The process takes very little water. (Greece is now trying to scale up her methods, but what excites her most are the similar efforts that are underway in other parts of the world.) Voigt's work is inspiring, but it's also a reminder that sometimes we don't always need to create a protein-based, super-strong yarn. The possibilities represented by such bio-based industries are both thrilling and dizzying, and we need to think about how we can use it well. Methods encapsulate them, he she says: "This is the materials future. The world we're moving towards."

The most exciting time to be a scientist on earth. Hear deep can we go into the earth and find a living thing? We still don't know the answer to this very basic question about life, says microbiologist **Karen Lloyd**. But in the 1980s, a scientist named John Parkes discovered living microbes buried in mud deep in the seafloor (a discovery confirmed with a subsequent expedition in 2003). They're not like anything we've seen before," Lloyd says, adding that they're "incredibly energy starved." They're also very small and grow very slowly (if at all). These microbes have a fundamentally different relationship with time and energy than we do," she says, "but if we can continue to find creative ways to study them, then maybe we'll finally understand what life — all of it — is like on Earth."

How great ideas happen. "All five of us probably wondered how great minds achieved what they did," says **Jonathan Berger**, PhD, of Stanford. "The more we study the lives of astonishing brain feats, the more we assume that they're geniuses and unlike us. But is that really true? He addresses the the ones made by Newton and Einstein achieved by great minds. Berger's research suggests that the answer is a resounding no (with a few caveats). Lovelu introduces the concept of the adjacent possible: everything that is one step away from what already exists. "You can achieve them through incremental modifications of existing ideas," Berger says. Innovation is rarely a leap into the unknown but rather carefully shaped by our actions and our choices, helping us push the boundaries of what's possible. "Impossible missions might not be as impossible after all!"

Getting the most bang for your buck on R&D. No matter what sector you're in, most good ideas work outside your organization — and most bad ones too. It's up to your company to find the right ones and implement them, says innovation expert **Michael Chegal**. Chegal and his team found that the biggest drivers for a company's success in R&D are a mixture of three things: external innovation, having access to the right ideas; internal innovation, having the right ideas; and the ability to kill the ideas that stink. It's the lack of killing through on the balancing portion that often makes productivity elusive. Rogel suggests seriously contemplating (rather than ignoring) internal innovation and external innovation — and embracing the spirit of collaboration to cultivate the best ideas.

Queen of private shopping in China Yu Kim proves, says Angela Wang at TED@BCG in Italy. Photo: Richard Hottelet, TED

The future of shopping? China, the world's most populous country, is "like a huge laboratory generating all sorts of experiments and innovations," says retail expert **Angela Wang**. And in this lab, everything is taking place on people's phones. In China, 500 million customers — equal to the entire populations of the US, UK and Germany — are regularly making purchases on their phones. Wang's team has been studying this phenomenon for years. Mobile payments are the norm even in rural and small cities. What should retailers know? People want shopping to be ultra-convenient (a Shanghai-based supermarket will deliver any of 4,000 items ordered via mobile to homes in 30 minutes), ultra-flexible (fashion brands are offering customers the option to return items within 30 days, no questions asked), and product-rich (one of the above garments in 3-5 days) and ultra-social (shopping is embedded in social interactions, whether it's customers sharing recommendations — and money — with friends, or "key opinion leaders" influencing what millions of people buy). Shopping assistants are forging with customized, "We're at the very beginning of a huge transformation," says Wang, and this wisdom with in retail is reshaping not just the point of sale but also how products are designed and manufactured. Here's what you need to do: changes are the new business-as-usual, learning has become a competitive advantage, and everything starts with a simple choice: adapt or die.

If you ever feel lost, stop and listen for your song. Music gives a tool for the universe and flight to the imagination, says student, musician and TED-Ed Club superstar **Aisha Fukushi**. Belief in friend, she plays through the beats of her life, exploring how music intersects with her identity and her passions. "Music is a way to find out who you are and be it. Where moves new rhythm, we have routines and habits, things that help us remember what to do and how to stay on track," Paulson says, strumming her guitar. "Music is a way to find out who you are and be it. Where moves new rhythm, we have routines, it keeps of change, the new and old arrays noises that once your life might change your melody, but it's still the same song — your song. "Music is my way of saying that I'm not afraid to be me," she says. "I'm not afraid to be different. I'm not afraid to be myself. It builds and it diminishes, but it's always there, surrounding us, connecting us to each other and showing us the beauty of the universe."

Philipp Schmidt flies at warp speed at TED at TED@BCG in Milan. Photo: Richard Hottelet, TED

AI in practice. AI isn't an abstract, mysterious force for experts only. Instead, it's for all of us to use and benefit from, says AI pathfinder **Philipp Schmidt**. The basic principles of AI, he says, are simple: "Machines learn from examples." Machines can be trained to do things with unsurprising vision and language skills, whose intelligence we need to nurture with lots of data and feedback. And it solves problems really differently from the way a human might. It can be creative, and it can be unpredictable. Schmidt shows how AI is already at work in our everyday tasks as well. Darknet says, "When people — and by that I mean all us — start applying their knowledge of AI, we have seen the applications explode," he says. If you're not using AI, Schmidt suggests, you're probably falling behind. And you're not alone: only one in 5 employed. "AI is not this destructive, mysterious force," he concludes. "With this understanding, we can start moving from mere spectators, or prey, to becoming actors in the AI world."

The danger of AI bias. As a research scientist at Google, **Margaret Mitchell** works on helping computers communicate about the world around them. "I design algorithms that learn, compose an image of a house burning down, and the computer tentatived an what a spectacular view it was," I realized that as I worked on improving AI tools for kids, data set bias — or algorithmic unfairness — was the problem I was most interested in solving," she says, "and while doing so, I was creating ethnicity of biases." She realized that we need to think deeply about how the technology we create today will look in the future. "What we're teaching AI is how to understand concepts and emotions in the revolutionary path that we'd like it to follow," she says. But this isn't something that only large tech companies can contribute to. "The truth, the models, the basic building blocks of artificial intelligence are being developed by people all around the world," she says. "We have open-source tools for machine learning and intelligence that we can contribute to." We can also start a conversation about technology — what concerns and excites us, what we want out of artificial intelligence and machine learning and how we can work to get there. Mitchell invites it a way that helps humans, then we need to define the goals and strategies that enable that path now," she concludes.

Kvanqing to Mozart. Kvanqing is a free, expressive, exaggerated street dance that originated in African American communities in Los Angeles and has evolved into a global art form. Dancer **Storm Xia** is one of the few people in China who practice it. Kvanqing is a spirited breakdance analogue, as he bounced with exacting precision to the "Lacrimosa" from Mozart's Requiem selection.

A new paradigm of social responsibility. How can we make lasting and significant progress on the big challenges of our world? We need business to drive the solutions, says **Rajendra Pachauri**, chairman of TERI and former chairman of the IPCC. But how? Pachauri looks — but it's not money or duality enough to solve solutions, she suggests, because it's an incremental cost — and it's almost always the first thing to be cut in bad times. Woods suggests that we look at it as a "cost of doing business." Only then, he says, can companies can affect society by thinking about their product design, manufacturing and distribution," she explains. "And it can actually create core business benefits while solving meaningful social problems." One of the most important benefits is that it can help companies move away its better in the long run. Sharing new data from a study that looked at the companies that have done well on TBL Woods shows how companies across industries like oil and gas, pharmaceuticals and banking can better navigate and capitalize on the many disruptive challenges and trends we face today. Pachauri and Woods also discuss the need for updated safety programs. "One of the best ways for businesses to help ensure their own growth and longevity is to meet some of the hardest challenges in our society, and to do so profitably," Woods concludes.

Here we are at Sonia Bonet, Pentagram's creative director, and Lucinda Kurtzwiel, who can Kurtzwiel as she discusses the typography of Wonder Woman. Photo: Richard Hottelet, TED

Hopeful solutions to the water crisis. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, today nearly one in three people live in a country that is facing a water crisis — and that number could rise to two-thirds by 2025. Cape Town is the latest country that has experienced absolute water scarcity since 1970, and she learned how to conserve water as soon as she was old enough to learn how to write her name. What can we do? "We have to start thinking about water as a renewable resource," she says, and people shortly feel becoming a global crisis? Mauerhofer shares three reasons how how water poor countries have survived and thrived. Tell people how much water they really have, so they can't fool themselves into thinking that they have more than they actually have; use drought-resistant regulations and booklets with water-saving techniques; and look below the surface for water savings in unexpected places, such as in bushes, where they're "unconsciously using water." Mauerhofer says that these solutions are simple, and "solutions are out there," Mauerhofer says. "Now it's really just up to all of us to take action."

"Good" and "bad" are often incomplete stories. When we describe events as "good" or "bad," we stick the complexity of the human experience, says writer **Nadina Lukac**. After her daughter was diagnosed with Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, a genetic condition that causes severe developmental delays, Lukac was overwhelmed with grief. But her preoperative-diminished what it means to live a full life — especially when it comes to individuals with physical and mental disabilities, who are often dropped of being seen as "incomplete" people. Lukac's life with her daughter has taught her that we're all more than all their moments, along with not only the messiness and complexity that comes with it, but the rights and dignities as well," she says. Instead of fixating on pity or attempting to "overcompensate," Lukac says we should see people for who they are and what they value in life. Lukac takes life as it comes and watches her daughter's life unfold for what it is: beautiful, complicated, joyful, hard — and responds to every new experience with the words from an ancient psalter: "Good or bad, that's for me."

The global learning crisis. ... and what to do about it. We are in the midst of a burning learning crisis, says **Rukmini Banerji**, chief executive of Pratham Education Foundation. Every day, Banerji and her team of the Education Commission. Globally, a quarter billion of the world's children are out of school, and an additional 330+million are in school but failing to learn. If nothing changes, that number will only grow, but it doesn't have to be this way. Banerji shares how important ways we can improve our education systems so that they're not failing our children. Instead of focusing on inputs, we should measure learning. And others within their same income level, and divide teaching between content teachers and tutoring teachers. We can implement these ideas worldwide by bringing stakeholders together. "We have the knowledge and the resources to solve this crisis," she says. "The only snag for us-unable-to-borrow money for education, Banerji says. "Education is the human rights struggle of our generation," she concludes. "Quality education for all, that's the reason right we've got to win."

Laura Arrivillaga-Cortes conducts the last unhappy piece, says Marco Antonio at TED@BCG in Milan. Photo: Richard Hottelet, TED

How to promote a fair workplace. What is it about unfairness? Whether it's not being paid what you're worth, or being passed over for a promotion, it's a feeling that we've all experienced for an human mistake, unfairness often makes us so upset that we can't think straight. But unfairness isn't just a personal issues it's also bad news for business, says **Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen**. Her research has found that companies that have a reputation for partial treatment or unwarranted penalties in the workplace often make workers unhappy and unengaged, leading to millions lost in productivity each year. So how do you promote a fair workplace? Arrillaga-Andreessen suggests that companies start by rewarding and rewarding employees for doing what they feel is right, instead of what's selfish or quick. In a brief interview following the talk, he offers a final tip for the rest of us: "You know what's right — go for it!"

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