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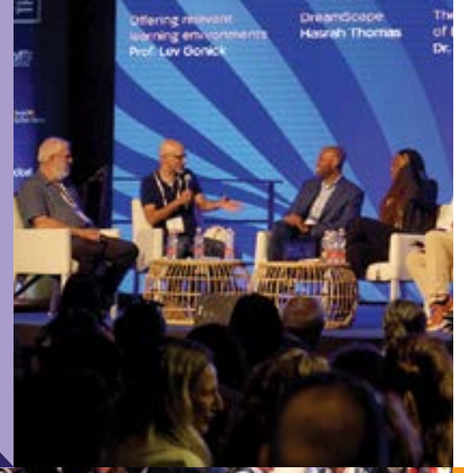

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THE EDITORIAL

Mastering Navigation in the Shaky Waves of Uncertainty

Uncertainty has always been a powerful catalyst for learning, pushing us to adapt and engage with our ever-changing environment while fostering independence.

As humans, we thrive on the thrill of life's adventurous surprises, while also fearing its unforeseen dramatic shocks - we continually strive to master new skills in order to find balance amidst turbulence. Throughout history, humanity has sought ways to mitigate uncertainty - whether through religion, science, or other - to ease the exhausting pursuit of stability.

Today, in what we call The Age of Uncertainty, we're embracing this perpetual state of flux as an integral part of our growth and learning processes. But why now?

The past four years have served as a profound reminder of life's unpredictability as well as the resilience and adaptability it demands. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of our interconnected world, accelerated by global mobility. We face the reality that our planet is neither secure nor stable, aggravated by the uncontrollable consequences of our lifestyle choices.

Simultaneously, the unparalleled adoption of GenAI is transforming our interactions, emphasizing the growing symbiotic relationship between technology and humans.

The omnipresent power of networks, amplified by smartphones, has woven us into an endless and ever-present stream of information exchange, constantly reshaping how we think, questioning who we are – and inhibiting our capacity to stop the flow and be with ourselves.

This edition of EdTech Mindset offers a glimpse into the dynamic Israel EdTech Week 2024, where thought leaders explored how EdTech is uniquely positioned to provide value and support in navigating the Age of Uncertainty. The issue highlights the extraordinary ingenuity and resilience of individuals who, driven by a strong sense of social responsibility and commitment, continue to innovate, develop, and build even amidst the turmoil of a war following the devastating terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

It emphasizes the importance and urgent need of enabling the incorporation of agile systems, designed to respond swiftly and effectively to educational challenges as they arise. This versatility proves essential not only in times of difficulty but mostly in mastering navigation in the ever-moving digital landscape.

I hope it inspires you to help build a more harmonious world to us all,

Dr. Cecilia Waismann
Editor
ceciliaw@cet.ac.il

Educating in the Era of Black Swans

by Avi Warshavsky

What Is Normality?

At the end of 2023, AI researcher Eliezer Yudkowsky shared on X (formerly Twitter a dialogue he had with one of the AI-based image generators. Yudkowsky asked the engine: *"Can you draw me a very normal image?"*

The question is brilliant in its originality and simplicity—the engine was tasked with creating a visual representation of an abstract concept: normality. The image produced in response depicted a pastoral street in a typical American suburb: a straight road surrounded by identical houses, neatly trimmed lawns, abundant greenery from trees, and soft light creating a fairytale-like atmosphere.

Yudkowsky wasn't satisfied and asked the engine whether it could provide an image that was "even more normal." The next image depicted a living room: a deep sofa, a TV screen, a small bookshelf, and a coffee table with a cup of coffee resting on it.

Yudkowsky continued asking for increasingly "normal" images, receiving depictions of a meticulously organized workstation, another suburban street, a cup of coffee, a light switch, and more. At a certain point, as often happens with AI engines, the logic of the responses became increasingly erratic, diverging from what common sense might call normality.

However, assuming AI engines are based on vast datasets that capture a significant proportion of what exists in human culture, the answers Yudkowsky received could reflect the Zeitgeist - "spirit of the times," something embedded in our cultural fabric and indicative of widely shared attitudes.

The stance conveyed by these images suggests that normality is tied to order, cleanliness, and control. In all these images, there are almost no humans. Everything is sterile, organized, and, above all, predictable. A key feature of a normal world, as depicted here, is its predictability.

This sentiment aligns well with findings in neuroscience. Contemporary theories describe the human brain as a prediction machine. We operate in the world based on a long sequence of forecasts about how it functions: the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening; water flows when we turn on the faucet; and behind the door we open, we expect to find a room, not a chasm.

The last example of certainty is articulated in Ludwig Wittgenstein's final work, On Certainty, where he arrived at philosophical conclusions similar to those found today in neuroscience. Both Wittgenstein and modern brain researchers emphasize that we cannot function in a world where our predictions lack certainty. When there's a contradiction between our expectations and reality, something profound is shaken, forcing us to update our predictions and form new ones.

Human cognition thrives when it can predict and reduce uncertainty, maintaining a sense of control. This tendency is deeply rooted in Western culture. The ancient covenant between God and Noah promises: ***"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease"*** (Genesis 8:22). The covenant guarantees that the seasons will function as we expect—summer in summer, winter in winter.

The Era of Optimization

The technological culture of the information age, which has become part of our lives over the past three decades, has given us tools to further enhance our sense of certainty. The keyword here is "optimization."

The technological tools surrounding us allow us to reduce uncertainty even further. Navigation apps ensure we don't get lost. Productivity apps save us time. We can plan to walk exactly a certain number of steps per day, date only partners who match our preferences, and follow precisely the diet that suits us. Technological culture has created the promise of a surprise-free world.

In Radiohead's prophetic 1997 album OK Computer, Thom Yorke vividly captures this optimization—and its pitfalls—in the monotonous semi-song, semi-recitation Fitter Happier. Yorke describes a life devoid of uncertainty and surprises, optimized to the last detail:

"Fitter, happier,
More productive,
Comfortable,
Not drinking too much,
Regular exercise at the gym (3 days a week)...
Sleeping well (no bad dreams),
No paranoia..."

The song ends by describing the human figure in this surprise-free world as: ***"A pig in a cage on antibiotics."***

Yorke's scathing critique of technological culture and its obsession with optimization highlights the other side of the coin. While it's true we cannot function in a world we cannot predict, a world of absolute certainty and perfect planning is lifeless. What we call "life" must include wandering, inefficiency, uncontainable excitement—and all of these inherently involve uncertainty.

The Era of Black Swans

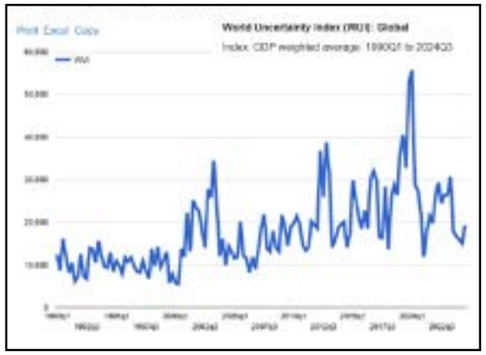
Yorke's prophecy has partially come true, primarily because technological advancement has brought an unprecedented wave of global uncertainty. Like a tale born from ancient mythology, the same technology that gave us a sterile, predictable world also brought countless events we could never have foreseen.

In recent years, the world has entered an era of "black swans." The term "black swan" was coined by Scottish philosopher David Hume. In 17th-century England, only white swans were known, and black swans were discovered

only after Australia was found. Hume used this as a metaphor for the unexpected.

Many years later, Lebanese-American economist Nassim Nicholas Taleb made this metaphor central to his theory. In Taleb's theory, a black swan is not just an unforeseen event but one with a massive impact on our lives. The most influential events in economics, he argues, are those we cannot predict.

In recent years, the world has experienced a series of events that could be considered black swans: COVID-19 pandemic, prolonged violent wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the emergence of artificial intelligence, political instability, civil unrest, and the climate crisis. Each of these developments has shaken human culture, changed habits, influenced economies, and rearranged societal power dynamics.



The feeling of living in an increasingly unpredictable world is not merely a subjective sentiment. Consistent data validate this experience. In the mid-1990s, researchers at Stanford created the World Uncertainty Index. Based on official reports and publications from countries worldwide, this index monitors expressions of uncertainty over nearly three decades, correlating them with other data. A glance at the global graph leaves no doubt: expressions of uncertainty have sharply risen over the years.

One clear yet almost self-evident finding from these data is the correlation between rising uncertainty and declining economic performance in countries where this uncertainty is reflected. The steep rise in global uncertainty since the 2000s is no coincidence. Humanity has integrated powerful technologies into daily life, introducing countless new scenarios that are unfamiliar and unpredictable.

Each of the black swans of recent years is tied to technology and its use. They wouldn't exist in their current intensity without technology. This insight is obvious when it comes to GenAI but applies equally to phenomena like COVID-19 (spread through the globe, enabled by tech) or wars accelerated by social networks no less than by planes and missiles.

How do We Educate in an Era of Chronic Uncertainty?

Broadly speaking, two approaches, or two families of perspectives, can be identified when it comes to education in the Age of Black Swans: the first "business as usual" and the second "making lemonade out of lemons."

The "business as usual" approach tries to adhere to existing routines, habits, and roadmaps, functioning within them despite the challenges. This approach has a clear logic, one familiar to anyone who raises children, educates, or manages. Uncertainty generates distress, confusion, and anxiety, while clinging to familiar habits and the implicit assumption that "this nightmare will soon end" provides an anchor and a sense of security. Unfortunately, this strategy, which can work in isolated crises and intimate circles, is ineffective for large systems or chronic crises.

The most striking example of this failure was the attempt to address the COVID-19 crisis with Zoom. We were under the illusion that we could cut out the classroom in its entirety - students, teachers, social dynamics, levels of attention and interest - and paste it into a Zoom window. This illusion shattered in real time, and the ripple effects of this failure are still evident, as reflected in the latest international evaluation results.

The "making lemonade out of lemons" approach is well represented by a series of popular books published in the past five years, which advocate embracing uncertainty. For example, Mark Miller discusses "informational chaos," a byproduct of uncertainty. He convincingly shows that, in the right doses, this chaos can play a crucial role in fostering creativity, solving problems, and leading healthier, more balanced lives. Maggie Jackson, in her book, coins the term wakefulness. She describes this unique state of alertness that arises when we internalize the instability of the ground we walk on. This wakefulness is not anxiety but rather a special openness to the world, born from a deep awareness that it cannot be predicted.

Educational derivatives of such perspectives are gradually emerging, attempting to apply these theories—originally aimed at individuals—to educational systems. These pedagogical versions treat life in uncertainty as a skill that can be learned and practiced. Examples include exercises like ordering unfamiliar items from a menu at a restaurant. While such exercises may suit situations where restaurants and menus exist and can be regularly visited, they are inadequate for uncertainty arising from situations where the restaurant is closed due to missile threats, it no longer exists, or where there is real hunger.

The discourse around practicing uncertainty resembles the rhetoric of "embracing failure." Typically, those promoting this philosophy are successful individuals; true "losers" are unlikely to extol the virtues of this approach. The "making lemonade out of lemons" approach is tailored to individuals, not systems, and is suited to moderate uncertainty, not the dramatic conditions we've experienced in recent years.

The uncertainties of recent years have been mostly difficult and negative, making it hard to imagine anyone voluntarily practicing them.

The "business as usual" approach, in a sense, suppresses the existence of uncertainty. The "making lemonade out of lemons" approach domesticates it, thus repressing it in a different way.

Lean Learning for a Turbulent Age

It seems that the educational response required for an era of chronic uncertainty cannot exist within the current structure of educational institutions. Systems, institutions, and organizations are built on the assumption of "normalcy"—that the world has a certain regularity and permanence, enabling the creation of structured systems to support this stability.

Black swans dramatically impact all types of organizations, especially schools—institutions whose value proposition often includes representing a stable world. The COVID-19 crisis, the advent of GenAI, and ongoing wars, pose challenges to education and educational systems that go far beyond the immediate difficulties of providing education in tough conditions.

These phenomena and their frequency accelerate doubts about the relevance of traditional educational institutions. They compel us to change habits and invite new alternatives that were previously unimaginable. These doubts manifest in the growing number of students opting for homeschooling (a 50% increase in the U.S. over the past four years), the sharp decline in actual school attendance, and the growing trend of young people choosing not to pursue higher education.

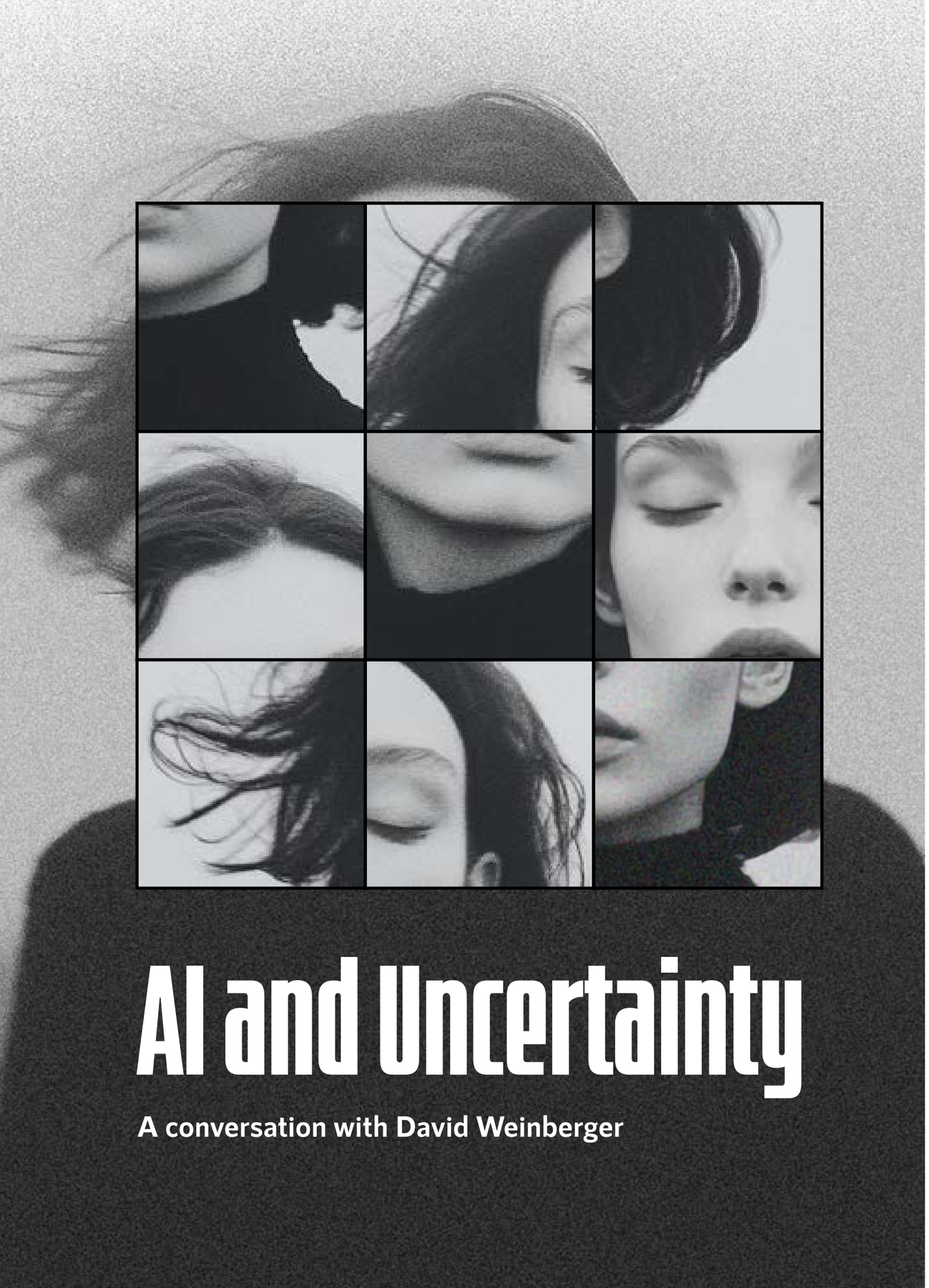
In a world devoid of regularity, a different type of organization is required—one capable of quickly digesting changing realities and adapting its operations accordingly. There is no need to invent such an organization from scratch. The era we live in has already created organizations specifically designed to deal with uncertainty.

Eric Ries, one of the prominent voices in Lean Startup methodologies, defines a startup as: *"A human institution designed to deliver a new product or service under conditions of extreme uncertainty."* A startup is an organizational structure designed to operate in conditions of extreme uncertainty. It functions cyclically, creating a product that reflects its creators' core assumptions, testing it with users, and adapting it based on the feedback.

These principles can also be applied to education. One can envision educational institutions offering *Lean Learning* - learning that constantly updates and adapts to a dynamic reality. For such a process to occur, not only pedagogical changes are required but also a structural reorganization of schools. Like a startup, the organizational structure of an educational institution must be flexible, with high involvement from all stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, and the community.

This transformation requires not just a new approach to learning but also the courage to shift from viewing schools as "knowledge factories" to dynamic, adaptive, and learning organizations. Educational institutions adopting this model could become not only responders to change but also leaders in shaping the new reality.

The educational institutions of the Black Swan Era should embody less of NASA's slogan, *"Failure is not an option,"* and more of Samuel Beckett's words: *"Fail again. Fail better."*



AI and Uncertainty

A conversation with David Weinberger

During a conversation with Dr. David Weinberger, we asked him about his perspective on uncertainty as a defining aspect of contemporary life that has become particularly pronounced in recent years. Dr. Weinberger is currently, among other things, a researcher at Harvard metaLAB, and was until recently a writer consulting with Google's Moral Imagination group, exploring the moral edges of AI, and editor-in-residence in Google's Transparency group in Responsible AI. From the earliest days of the Web, he has been a pioneering thought-leader about technology's effect on our lives, our businesses, and most of all on our ideas. His best-selling and award-winning books provide conceptual insights about technology and its impact on society, and especially on learners.

Uncertainty, a defining aspect of contemporary life?

According to Dr. Weinberger, the sense of uncertainty is not new. Historically, human life has been defined by unpredictability - natural disasters, diseases, and the constant threat of death have always existed, but modern societies have grown accustomed to the illusion of control. But with the advances of science, and the security afforded by the increase in overall wealth – certainly not evenly distributed! -- a culture of certainty developed at least in the United States, which is often expressed as a sense of entitlement: if a flood damaged your house, you ought to be able to demand to be made whole. It was as if disruptions in life's stability were violations of the natural order, rather than being the natural order.

This attitude has been enabled to a large extent by our reliance on broad principles, laws, and other generalizations that we apply to particular circumstances, thereby deriving answers and predictions that would amaze people even a single generation ago. These successes have given us a sense of control, which has driven much of the uncertainty out of our lives, if we are fortunate enough to be in the mainstream of society.

Our reliance on knowable laws for control, predictions, and a sense of security has had a price. Many prices, actually, including the concentration of power in institutions with the resources to develop and apply the rules and principles we've discovered. Less obvious has been the price we've paid by thinking the model we've developed — general laws governing particular events, yielding accurate and reliable predictions — describes most of life. In fact, it excludes most of life. For example, we predicted within 90 seconds when the New Horizons space probe would travel past Pluto, nine years and 7.5 billion kilometers away, but we can be off by hours in how long it will take us to drive a hundred kilometers because of traffic accidents, traffic jams, and our own car breaking down. So much of human life on earth is wildly unpredictable: We fall and knock a tooth loose. The waiter tells us the restaurant is out of spinach quiche. Who will be in the crosswalk with us tomorrow when we go to work? Not to mention far more consequential events. Our lives are less controllable and predictable than the sorts of events we take as confirming that life is orderly, controllable, and governed by principles and laws.

Moreover, as the world becomes more interconnected, general rules and principles are no less true but yield less reliable results. Go ahead and predict what will come in your email today or what the next viral video will be. The consequences of actions or events in one part of the world can ripple across the globe with unprecedented speed. Life increasingly outstrips our traditional notions of rule-based causality.

How is AI related to the human search for certainty and truth?

Dr. Weinberger suggests that the rapid pace of change, coupled with the increasing unpredictability of interconnected global systems, fosters a climate of anxiety and insecurity. People may seek certainty to find comfort, but the truth is that the world has always been uncertain; our understanding of it has simply evolved.

We might continue to seek certainty because it provides a sense of security, but while we strive to control the uncontrollable, we must also learn to live with uncertainty as an unavoidable and essential aspect of the human experience. And, he says, this is far from only a negative belief: There is joy in uncertainty as well.

In fact, he hopes that the rise of AI will put the uncertainty of complex systems in a new and positive light. For this to occur, we need to resist the temptation to think that AI, and especially machine learning, extend our certainty. While they are already extending the reach of predictability, how these systems work tells far a more nuanced story about certainty and knowledge. Traditionally, knowledge is built on established generalizations such as what we know about medicine and the human body: blood passing through the lungs picks up oxygen, white blood cells help fight infections, and so on. Machine learning, however, operates differently. Rather than being programmed with this hard-won knowledge, machine learning programs itself based on what it learns from data. For instance, in training AI to diagnose diseases, we don't give it any of the medical knowledge we have gathered over the centuries and across cultures. Instead, we provide data, and the machine learning identifies patterns in that data. This approach allows AI to uncover patterns of correlations that are often beyond human comprehension.

One example of this comes from a study at the University of Leeds in 2022, where researchers trained an AI on a dataset of 5,600 retinal scans along with basic health records. The researchers didn't tell the system about the relation of cholesterol levels and heart health, or anything else we've learned about heart health. With just the scans and health records, the machine learning system trained itself to predict heart disease — simply from retinal scans! — more accurately than human doctors can using traditional methods. It does this by finding correlations in the data and retinal scans that humans could not find or understand. What's significant here is that the AI's findings are based on the interrelationships among a vast number of factors, far more than humans can process. The relationships the AI identifies are so complex that neither medical experts nor computer scientists have been able to fully understand how the machine learning system comes up with its predictions.

This ability to analyse vast datasets and identify intricate patterns suggests that AI may be surpassing the limits of general principles and laws,. By learning from data without relying on established generalizations, AI uncovers new insights that often defy human understanding, pushing the boundaries of what we know and how we know it.

For example, the machine learning chatbots, like chatGPT and Google Gemini, that are now common on the Web can offer remarkable insights by processing vast numbers of human-generated texts and now paintings, videos, and so on. The ability of these systems to respond meaningfully to our questions, exhibiting an unheard-of range and depth — along with hallucinations — is staggering. And humbling. And at least a little scary.

Despite this, AI doesn't know anything at all. Everything these chatbots produce are "hallucinations" even when true because they are not based on any knowledge of the world, but only on the relationships among the words we've used when talking about the world. Furthermore, central to Western concepts of knowledge has been the idea that knowledge is additive: it accumulates over time in a structured way. We've thought in the west that knowledge is built on foundational ideas and frameworks, creating a structured system in which each new piece of information builds upon what came before. This results in a growing body of interconnected knowledge that's useful and easy to navigate.

AI doesn't follow this model. When an AI chatbot generates a response, it produces a result based on statistical analysis of how we've used words but doesn't "remember" it for future use. And it doesn't carefully put it in its place in the edifice of knowledge. It doesn't build on or relate new information to existing facts in a meaningful way.

AI systems are powerful tools for identifying patterns and providing answers, but they do not possess knowledge in the way humans do. And yet, these systems in many ways and many instances "know" more than any human alive ever has or ever will. It leaves you wondering how this might change our own human ideas about the nature of knowledge.

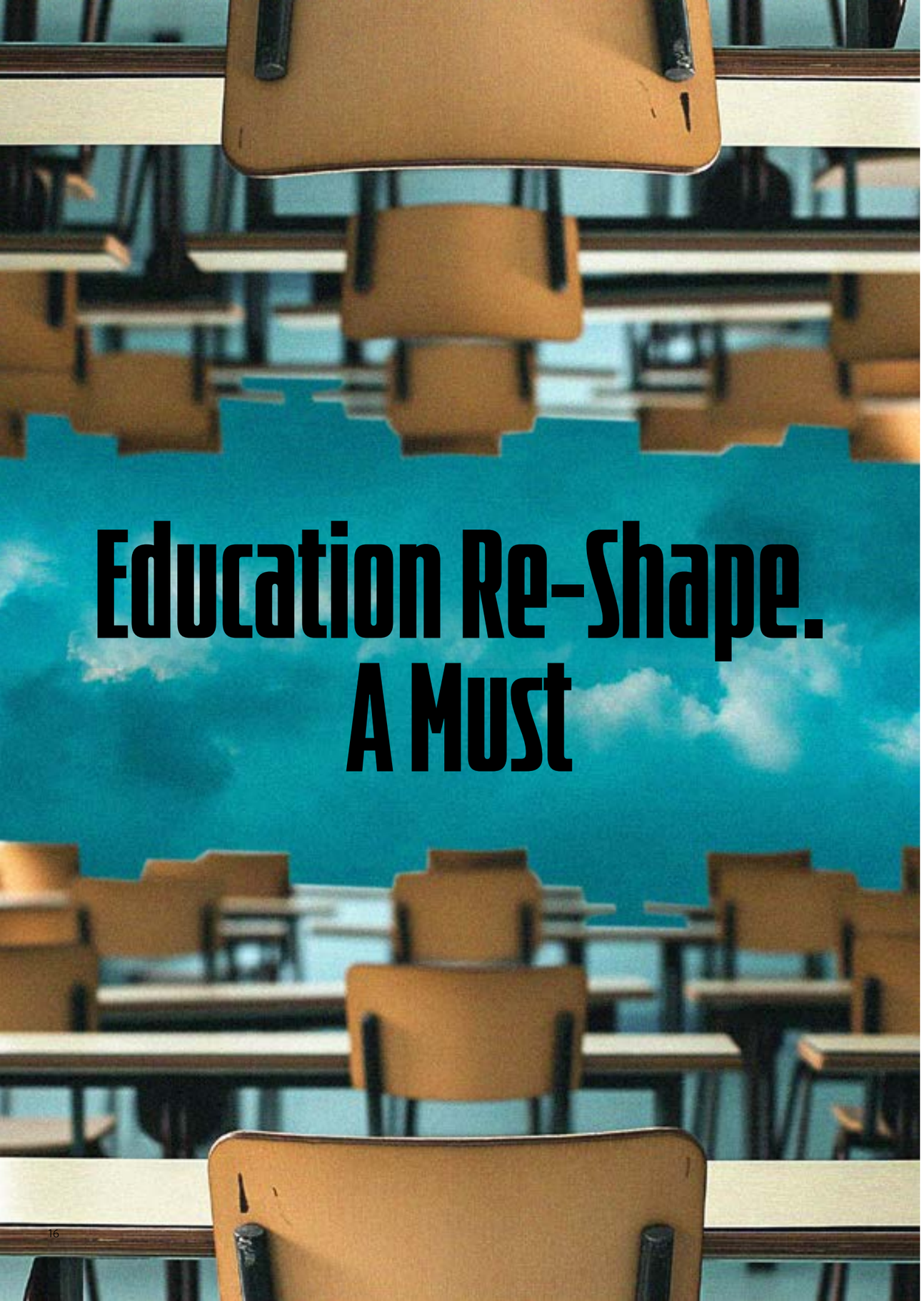
What is the impact of chat AI systems on learners and learning?

Dr. Weinberger thinks these AI systems offer a step forward from previous tools, such as the internet and search engines, by not only providing access to vast amounts of information but also allowing for interactive conversations. The internet and resources like Wikipedia give us an enormous pool of information, but they still leave gaps in topics and especially in the interrelationship of topics. And, most of all, they remain texts that do not respond. The machine learning chatbots, on the other hand, address one of Socrates' arguments against literacy: written objects can't respond to questions. Well, now they can. Learners can ask chatbots follow-up questions, challenge the AI's responses, and go deeper or back up and ask for a clearer explanation. This interactivity can stimulate critical thinking, as students push back, ask for clarification, and test their ideas in real-time, much like having a dialogue with a professor or expert. It provides the opportunity to explore questions that have not been asked before or to approach topics from a different angle, which may be difficult with traditional methods of learning.

The AI can be a tool that facilitates deeper engagement and fosters the development of critical thinking skills.

Additionally, chat AI systems can intersect ideas from different disciplines, offering a broader perspective on a particular question. For example, learners can ask how a specific thinker, like Plato or Martin Buber, might react to recent concepts or events, or how they might respond to each other. This can help students see how ideas that are far removed from us in terms of age or culture might apply to our own thinking and lives. On the other hand, while AI can provide insightful answers, it might create a false representation of these figures because it lacks the lived experience, perspective, and the social and cultural influences that shaped their thoughts. For example, asking what Plato would think about the rise of social media could be misleading, as his views were grounded in the context of his time that obviously had no concept of services like Facebook or TikTok. Still, it could be extremely useful for students to directly confront the effect of incompatible contexts, and to do so in a safe environment. In short: It's complicated!

In sum, Dr. Weinberger strongly believes that AI systems can enhance learning by offering interactive, real-time engagement with complex topics, stimulating critical thinking, and drawing connections between ideas across time and disciplines. While these systems do not "know" in the traditional sense, their ability to generate responses based on vast amounts of data makes them a powerful tool for learning and intellectual exploration. However, learners must remain mindful of the AI's limitations, particularly in terms of context and the potential for misrepresentation.



Education Re-Shape. A Must

In a compelling talk, Prof. Ami Moyal, President of Afeka College of Engineering, shared his transformative vision for reshaping education to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world. With 15 years of experience in high-tech and 15 years in academia, Moyal offers a unique perspective, blending practical industry insights with academic rigor. His address focused on the necessity of equipping students with critical thinking, creativity, and other vital skills and competencies to navigate the uncertainties of the modern job market.

The Need for Change: A World in Flux

Moyal began by addressing the profound changes shaping the world, particularly the job market. Technological advancements, driven by innovations in artificial intelligence and other fields, are disrupting traditional occupations at an unprecedented pace. Referencing a 2016 report by the World Economic Forum, he noted that over half of today's occupations would undergo significant change within a decade. More recently, reports indicate that AI's influence will dramatically alter the job market in just four years. "The continuing change in the job market cannot even be predicted," Moyal remarked, highlighting the challenge educators face in preparing students for an uncertain future.

The shift toward a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) economy is undeniable. However, Moyal argued that technical knowledge alone is insufficient. He emphasized the importance of skills like critical thinking, creativity, and multidisciplinarity, which are increasingly sought after by employers. "We are not preparing students to function effectively in a new model society," he observed, noting a growing disconnect between educational outcomes and workforce needs.

The Shortcomings of Traditional Education

Moyal suggested that educational systems are outdated and misaligned with the demands of the modern world. Surveys in North America reveal declining public confidence in the relevance of education, with many parents turning to homeschooling. Employers, while still valuing higher education, often highlight a lack of essential skills, attitudes, and experiences in graduates.

Moyal underscored that higher education is not solely about finding a job but also about personal development and functioning in modern society. Yet, he noted that the slow pace of change in academia has left it lagging behind societal and technological advancements. "If we sit and wait for someone to invent the solution, that's not the right way," he asserted.

Defining the Vision: Competency-Based Education

To address these challenges, Moyal proposed a comprehensive shift toward competency-based education, spanning from pre-kindergarten to higher education. His vision prioritizes a holistic approach, integrating knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences to create well-rounded individuals ready for the future.

At Afeka College, Moyal has championed this transformation, implementing a series of changes over seven years:

- Curriculum Redesign: Afeka's engineering programs now emphasize skill development alongside technical knowledge. The curriculum maps a student's journey from basic to advanced competencies over four years.
- Extracurricular Engagement: Students are encouraged to "pursue their passion" through clubs and projects that merge engineering with art, music, and other fields. Despite initial skepticism, these initiatives have flourished, with hundreds of students actively participating.
- Innovative Pedagogies: Faculty members have adopted new teaching methods that cater to modern learners, moving away from traditional lectures to more interactive and flexible approaches.
- Revamped Campus Design: Afeka's campus now resembles a coworking space, fostering collaboration and creativity. Moyal described it as "one large learning space" designed to support dynamic learning environments.
- Graduate Profile Development: Collaborating with high-tech companies, Afeka has defined a set of competencies that graduates must possess, including scientific and engineering knowledge, programming skills, and values. These competencies guide the design of both curricular and extracurricular activities.

Implementing Change: A Collaborative Process

Moyal highlighted the importance of collaboration in driving institutional change. At Afeka, the transformation involved the entire organization—350 faculty members, 350 administrative staff, and 4,000 students. Faculty

members worked in groups to define and align on the skills required for modern engineers, creating a shared vision for the institution. Critical thinking, for example, was broken into three stages: basic, intermediate, and advanced. These stages were integrated into courses, allowing students to develop their competencies progressively. This systematic approach ensures that every graduate meets the defined profile of an Afeka engineer.

"The steady state, the constant, will be continuous change," Moyal noted, emphasizing that transformation is an ongoing process rather than a one-time initiative.

Afeka's journey is marked by annual reviews and updates to ensure the curriculum remains relevant and effective.

The Vision for a Global Framework to Address the Changing Industries

While Afeka's achievements are noteworthy, Moyal's vision extends beyond the college. He advocates for a unified, national approach to education reform, encompassing:

- Collaboration: Schools, universities, the military, and the workforce must work together to create a seamless educational continuum. This requires a shared language and common goals.
- Design: Starting with the desired graduate profile, educators can design programs and curricula that build the necessary skills and competencies.
- Adaptability: Education systems must be agile, continuously evolving to meet new challenges and opportunities.

Moyal's approach also emphasizes the importance of integrating values and ethics into education. "Israel's only resource is its people," he noted, stressing the need to provide excellent, relevant education to nurture the next generation.

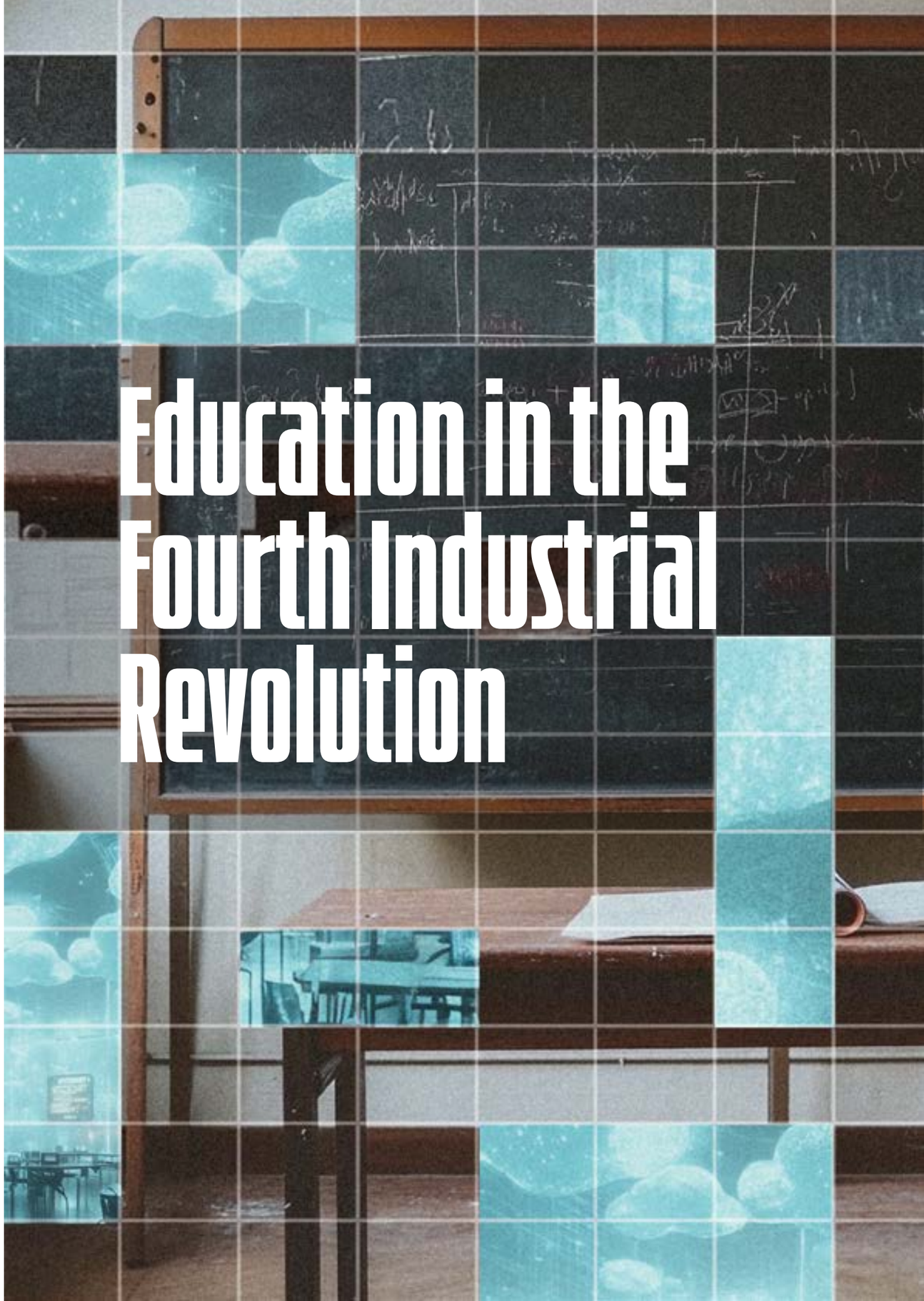
At the heart of Afeka's transformation is its commitment to fostering competencies that align with industry needs.

Moyal described how the college surveyed high-tech companies to identify the most important skills for engineers. The top priorities included multidisciplinary teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, and effective communication.

"Engineers need to know how to present their projects effectively in three minutes," Moyal explained, contrasting this with traditional engineering education, which often prioritizes technical equations over personal skills. He also highlighted the growing importance of self-learning, noting that students must be able to independently acquire new knowledge and adapt to changing circumstances. To support this shift, Afeka has implemented: (1) Skill Definitions - Each skill is clearly defined, with learning outcomes categorized into basic, intermediate, and advanced levels; (2) Integrated Skill Development - Courses are designed to build skills alongside technical knowledge, ensuring a balanced approach to education.; (3) Continuous Review - The curriculum is updated annually based on feedback from faculty, students, and industry partners.

Moyal concluded his talk with a call for a broader adoption of competency-based education. He envisions a system where pre-K to 12th grade education, the IDF, academia, and the workforce work together as a unified continuum. By defining clear graduate profiles and reverse-engineering curricula to meet these goals, education systems can better prepare students for the future.

"We must adapt to a world of continuous change," Moyal stated. His vision offers a practical yet transformative roadmap for educators, policymakers, and institutions worldwide. By prioritizing skills, creativity, and collaboration, Moyal's approach ensures that education remains relevant and empowering in an ever-evolving world.



Based on a fascinating talk given by Dr. Tomer Simon, proving a vision of a new era of technological advancement, when the education sector faces a daunting yet exhilarating challenge: bridging the growing chasm between the rapid pace of innovation outside the classroom and the traditional systems entrenched within. He describes it as a fourth industrial revolution, driven by generative AI and other transformative technologies. Simon highlights the profound opportunities this revolution offers, but only if educators, policymakers, and technologists rise to meet the moment.

Dr. Tomer Simon is currently the Chief Scientist at Microsoft Israel R&D Center, he has over 24 years of experience in the high-tech industry in a variety of senior management, development and technology positions, including Chief Architect for the Ministry of Justice, CTO and futurist at Amdocs, degree in geophysics and public health, emergency management and artificial intelligence research.

A Unique Period of Change

The fourth industrial revolution began around a decade ago, ushering in a wave of generative AI capabilities that are reshaping industries. Unlike the revolutions of steam, electricity, and computing that preceded it, this era is marked by an unprecedented acceleration in technological evolution. Autonomous vehicles, robotics, synthetic biology, and AI-driven personalization are not just theoretical concepts. They are active, disruptive forces in our daily lives.

The education system, however, remains rooted in practices born of the first industrial revolution. Classroom layouts, school bells, and even educational hierarchies mirror factory systems established in the 19th century. Despite minor updates, like the shift from blackboards to whiteboards, the core framework has changed very little. Young students entering school in 2025 are, in many ways, stepping into a time machine that takes them two centuries back in time. This, says Simon, is a crime against future generations and must be addressed with full force.

Generative AI: A Game changer for Learning and Teaching

The emergence of generative AI tools like ChatGPT epitomizes this revolution. These tools democratize access to knowledge and capabilities, previously restricted to experts. Today, tasks such as designing a logo or creating a website can be completed in minutes by AI, often surpassing human output in both speed and cost.

This democratization extends to education. For example, AI has made it possible for anyone, anywhere, to engage in advanced learning, from coding to creative writing. It has also introduced new challenges. How do we ensure the integrity of learning? What role do teachers play in a world where students can use AI to pass medical exams or write academic theses?

Despite these advancements, education systems remain resistant to change. Policymakers, wary of disruption, often double down on outdated practices. For example, Israel's labor laws, designed during the second industrial revolution, still govern much of its education system today. Meanwhile, higher education institutions are slow to adapt, introducing lengthy degree programs for skills that may be obsolete by the time students graduate. This resistance extends to how schools view technology.

Decades ago, calculators were banned in classrooms to ensure students mastered long division. Today, many schools approach AI with the same skepticism, failing to see how these tools can free learners to focus on higher-order thinking.

Opportunity and Responsibility – Rethinking Education

The printing press offers a compelling historical parallel. When Johannes Gutenberg revolutionized information dissemination in 1450, Europe experienced an explosion of knowledge. Literacy rates soared, new ideas flourished, and education systems evolved to meet the moment. GenAI, similarly, democratizes access to information and creates opportunities for profound shifts in how we teach and learn.

Yet, with opportunity comes responsibility. The printing press also necessitated new skills: critical thinking, skepticism, and discernment, as people grappled with the proliferation of content. Similarly, today's educators must prepare students to navigate the complexities of an AI-driven world, where distinguishing fact from fabrication is increasingly challenging.

The current pace of external change demands a fundamental rethinking of education. GenAI has already made significant strides: in March 2023, AI systems earned medical and law degrees, passed CPA exams, and produced research papers in record time. These capabilities, once reserved for the most elite institutions, are now accessible to every learner.

What does this mean for educators? First, it requires a shift from rote learning to fostering creativity, adaptability, and critical thinking. Second, it demands that we integrate AI tools into teaching, not as a threat but as a partner. Finally, it calls for bold leadership to design systems that prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow, many of which don't yet exist.

Call to Action

As we navigate this revolution, the question is not whether to embrace change, but how. To ignore the potential of generative AI is to risk irrelevance. The key lies in finding balance: leveraging AI to enhance learning while preserving the human elements of curiosity, connection, and critical thought.

A tension lies at the heart of the education system's struggle to change. But as waves of technological transformation continue to rise, the challenge for educators and EdTech professionals is to surf those waves, equipping the next generation with the tools to ride them into the future.

Whether by reimagining curricula, integrating AI into classrooms, or fostering global collaboration, education has a unique opportunity to shape this revolution. The question is: will it rise to meet the challenge?

AI: A Challenge to Human Intelligence in Education?

In a thought-provoking conversation, Eli Hurvitz, CEO of the Eddie and Jules Trump Family Foundation, and Pierre-Antoine Ullmo, CEO of Tyme Education, explored how AI is influencing the role of human intelligence in education. Hurvitz has long been a thought leader in philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, while Ullmo has contributed extensively to the conversation on EdTech's role in modern education.

The discussion began with Ullmo questioning whether AI is prompting education to reconsider the importance of human intelligence. Hurvitz referenced MindCET CEO Avi Warshavsky's observation about our tendency to look for precedents during uncertain times, citing hospital "beeping" machines that reduce anxiety by creating the illusion of certainty. He also noted how data, while comforting, can lack nuance and context, offering only partial truths.

They then explored the idea of a "revolution," comparing today's AI-driven changes to the transformative impact of the internet 30 years ago. Hurvitz recalled how the OECD's creation of the PISA test, designed to assess problem-solving and creativity, shocked countries reliant on rote learning. With AI now outperforming humans on tests like PISA, the question remains: What should be taught in schools today?

Ullmo cautioned against calling this a "revolution," quoting a historian who argued that true revolutions don't exist. Hurvitz, however, highlighted advancements in AI, such as its ability to self-learn and create, suggesting this could indeed be revolutionary. However, Hurvitz also questioned whether such changes would improve our lives, acknowledging that revolutionaries often envision a better world, but this isn't always the outcome.

The conversation then shifted to time and attention in education. Ullmo used the hospital analogy to discuss how AI might disrupt the attention learners receive. He warned that while AI might save time for teachers, it could also lead to discontinuities that harm the educational experience.

Hurvitz emphasized that in Israel, where teacher shortages and workforce shifts are prevalent, technology in education is no longer optional. He shared how his daughter's self-study program uses AI avatars that encourage students to solve problems independently. This, he suggested, might point to a new pedagogy. Ullmo reflected on the educational theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, noting that the avatar, though automated, could be seen as a modern tool to guide students toward discovery rather than simply providing answers.

In response to a question from the audience about elite college students not reading full books, Hurvitz argued that even if the younger generation isn't reading as much, they are likely engaging with learning in different, potentially more effective ways. Ullmo, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of the "question" in pedagogy, suggesting that understanding the right question is as crucial, if not more so, than finding the answer.

Ultimately, the conversation highlighted that the role of AI in education challenges traditional methods, urging a re-evaluation of how we teach and learn.

Eli Hurvitz and Pierre-Antoine Ullmo at IEW24

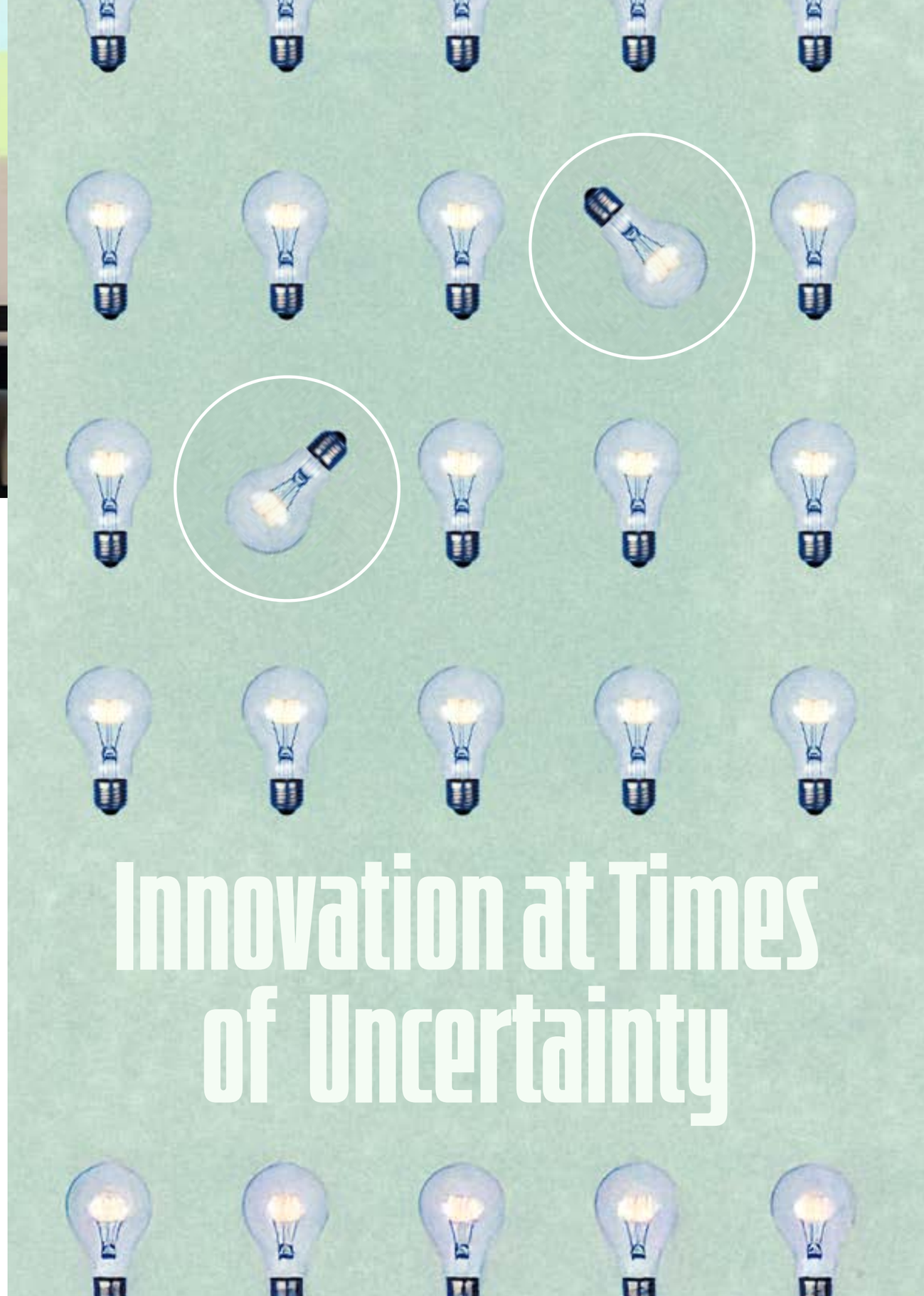
AI in education: Are we losing faith in ourselves?

by Pierre-Antoine Ullmo

Hayao Miyazaki, the Japanese director of wonderful animation films such as “My Neighbor Totoro” was presented a few years ago an artificial intelligence model which learned certain human movements. He asked the researchers a very simple question : So what is your goal? The answer was: “Well, we would like to build a machine that can draw pictures like humans do.” Miyazaki, visibly upset, said: “We humans are losing faith in ourselves...”

The one thing we know that matters most for education achievement other than family background is the quality of teaching. Would the best teacher in the world say the same when facing the irruption of AI in education? Are we, teachers, losing faith in ourselves? No matter how spectacular their results, neuralnetworks are still merely mathematical incarnations, not intelligent entities. So, human intelligence in teaching remains paramount to transmit knowledge, values and inspire other human lives.

AI should then provoke education to re-think the way we teach, departing from data-driven strategies and enhancing our ability to flourish as individuals and communities.



Israel's High-Tech Industry: Resilience Amidst Turmoil

Dr. Alon Stopel provides an overall look at the state of the innovation technology growth in Israel during the current very challenging times. Dr. Stopel is the Chief Scientist for Innovation and Chairman of the Board of Israel Innovation Authority, Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology of Israel.

Dr. Stopel affirms that in the face of adversity, Israel's high-tech sector stands as a beacon of resilience, innovation, and strategic foresight. Despite the ongoing geopolitical instability, the country's tech ecosystem remains one of the world's leading economic engines. The ongoing conflict, following the terror attack in October 2023, has introduced unprecedented challenges for Israel's industry, but the government's response, coupled with the sector's inherent strength, paints a picture of determination and adaptability.

Israel's economy is highly affected by its high-tech industry, which plays a crucial role in its overall GDP. The sector accounts for approximately 6.1% of the nation's GDP, a testament to the country's commitment to research and development (R&D). Furthermore, tech companies and their innovations constitute nearly 20% of the national GDP, with more than half of Israeli exports being derived from high-tech. As such, the tech industry is not just a key economic driver, but a cornerstone of Israel's global competitiveness.

A Global Tech Powerhouse

When comparing Israel's tech sector to that of other nations, it becomes clear that Israel does well above its weight. The country is home to over 500 multinational companies, ranging from tech giants like Google, Microsoft, and Intel to emerging startups with the potential to reshape global industries. Israel's unique positioning as a tech hub is a result of deliberate national strategy, institutional support, and an ingrained culture of innovation.

One of the driving forces behind this success is the Israel Innovation Authority (IIA), which fosters collaboration between government bodies, the private sector, and academic institutions. The IIA plays a pivotal role in strengthening Israel's tech ecosystem by supporting startups, removing regulatory barriers, and investing in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and bio-convergence. The government's proactive approach to fostering innovation is reflected in its investment in groundbreaking technologies. For example, Israel has led efforts to integrate AI with sectors like healthcare and agriculture, and it continues to make strides in sectors like fintech, cyber security, and medical devices. This forward-thinking mindset positions Israel as a global leader in high-tech and attracts international investors, bolstering its economic stability.

Emerging Technologies and National Programs

Israel's investment in research and development does not stop at traditional fields of technology. In recent years, the country has focused heavily on pioneering sectors such as bio-convergence, quantum technology, and clean tech. Israel has made notable advancements in synthetic biology, nanotechnology, and AI-driven solutions to address global challenges in healthcare, environmental sustainability, and more.

The government's efforts extend to fostering talent and collaboration in these emerging fields. National programs have been initiated to advance disruptive technologies, with AI and bio-convergence being major focus areas. In fact, Israel ranks second globally in food-tech investments, with the country's innovations in sustainable food production making waves in the global market. However, while Israel's strengths are undeniable, the recent downturn in the global economy, especially in tech investments, presents a unique challenge for the industry.

A Changing Investment Landscape

Since mid-2022, the global tech investment landscape has experienced a slowdown, and Israel is not immune to these shifts. The war that began in October 2023 has further strained the financial landscape, complicating access to foreign capital. In response to this dual challenge, global economic downturn and local geopolitical tensions, the Israeli government has launched several initiatives to stabilize and support its high-tech industry. One such government-backed initiative is aimed at providing short-term relief for tech companies struggling with cash flow. This fund offers $100 million in investment, which is then leveraged by private investors to inject up into struggling startups with disruptive technologies. This measure has helped to preserve the core of Israel's high-tech ecosystem, ensuring that innovative companies continue to thrive despite external pressures. Additionally, the government introduced a program designed to encourage institutional investors to participate in venture capital by providing them with an incentive in the form of a bonus on every dollar they invest. This mechanism, which aims to inject $1 billion into Israel's startup ecosystem, further demonstrates the government's commitment to nurturing innovation even in times of crisis.

The Road Ahead: A Strong but Challenged Sector

Despite these efforts, the high-tech industry is facing significant hurdles. Israeli startups, particularly those in nascent fields like EdTech, remain underfunded compared to other sectors. While Israel excels in cyber security and fintech, its share of the global EdTech market is relatively small - just 0.7%. This represents a significant opportunity for growth, especially as technologies like AI, machine learning, and blockchain have the potential to transform education on a global scale.

While the EdTech sector in Israel is still developing, there is room for collaboration between startups, academia, and the government to build a stronger ecosystem. The use of cutting-edge technologies, such as generative AI and privacy-preserving machine learning, could help propel Israel into the EdTech spotlight. By integrating the country's cyber security expertise and addressing the privacy concerns of students, Israel has the potential to leapfrog into a leadership role in this sector as well.

Israel's Commitment to Innovation and Collaboration

Looking ahead, the future of Israel's high-tech sector remains optimistic, but not without its challenges. The government's swift and strategic interventions, coupled with a robust innovation culture, will be key to sustaining growth in the face of economic and geopolitical turbulence. Moreover, the high-tech sector's ability to remain flexible and adapt to emerging global trends is essential for maintaining its competitive edge.

The government's support for startups, removal of regulatory barriers, and investment in emerging technologies will continue to drive Israel's position as a global tech leader. However, the continued influx of international capital, as well as a renewed focus on sectors like EdTech, will be crucial to ensuring the long-term health of the ecosystem.

Israel's high-tech industry is more than just an economic pillar but a symbol of the nation's resilience and ingenuity. Amidst the challenges of war and global investment slowdowns, Israel remains steadfast in its commitment to innovation, ensuring that its tech sector remains a global powerhouse for years to come.

Leveraging the Power of Rituals to Empower Learners

Prof. Cristine Legare was asked to ponder about the value of self-regulation for education at times of extreme uncertainty. Prof. Legare is a professor of Psychology and the founder and director of the Center for Applied Cognitive Science at The University of Texas at Austin. Her research examines how the human mind enables us to learn, create, and transmit culture, addressing fundamental questions about the psychological and cultural foundations of the human experience.

Prof. Legare asserts that uncertainty and adversity are enduring facets of the human experience. As much as we might wish otherwise, these elements have always been with us, and they likely always will be. This reality triggers a crucial question: how can education best prepare youth for adversity in the face of uncertainty?

The challenge lies in the very design of formal education. As an institution, it was created to resist change. This formalization explains both its immense success and its limitations. With its potential for rapid adaptation, EdTech can address gaps in traditional schooling. While schools are still transmitting the sort of information that they were designed to transmit, reasonably well, they struggle to impart essential 21st century skills, socioemotional learning and promoting resiliency through regulation.

The Cultural Roots of Resilience

An intriguing avenue for building resilience lies in exploring its cultural roots. Across human history, every society has developed "cultural technologies" to navigate adversity and uncertainty. Commonly referred to as rituals, these practices are powerful mechanisms for self-regulation and group cohesion.

Cognitive anthropologist Prof. Richard Sosis, for instance, studied psalm reading among Israeli women during the Lebanon War. His findings were striking: women who engaged in more psalm reading, specially those living under high-stress conditions, experienced better coping mechanisms and lower anxiety levels. Similarly, studies show that rituals promote trust, affiliation, and cooperation, all of which are vital for group survival. Remarkably, the longevity of religious communes correlates with the number of rituals they practice. Rituals serve as a commitment signal, fostering unity and resilience within communities.

Why Rituals Matter

Consider Israel, a society often cited for its resilience. Judaism, practiced continuously for over 4,000 years, is steeped in rituals that vary in type and frequency. This cultural repository of practices likely contributes to the remarkable resilience observed in Israeli communities. Rituals, in this context, function as both coping mechanisms and bonding technologies. There's also excellent evidence that rituals support the longevity of groups. We know rituals promote trust, affiliation, cooperation. The longevity of religious communes is related to the number of rituals they practice. Rituals signal a commitment to the group.

The Case of Rituals for EdTech

Rituals are palliative coping and bonding technologies - it's what their functions are. Therefore, how do we leverage the power of rituals? How do we harness the power of rituals to enhance education? The first step is documentation. By using EdTech to catalog rituals from diverse cultures, we can identify those that serve regulatory functions. This approach opens the door to leveraging rituals as tools for teaching resilience and self-regulation.

Prof. Legare shares that one of her current initiatives, in partnership with other relevant organizations, will collect data on regulatory rituals worldwide, aiming to integrate these practices into educational frameworks. The ultimate goal is to empower students with the tools they need to navigate uncertainty, drawing on the wisdom embedded in cultural traditions. Partnerships between cognitive scientists and EdTech experts will allow us to leverage the power of rituals to promote resiliency through regulation in the face of uncertainty.

Renewal After the Storm

Fostering human connection, emotional resilience, and adaptability: Lessons from Kinneret Educational Space

In October 2023, amidst the chaos following the shocking horrific terrorist attack, the consequent war and the collective trauma in Israel, an extraordinary story of resilience, creativity, and community unfolded in the Galilee. It began with a call to action: an immediate educational solution needed for hundreds of displaced school-aged children in northern Israel. The challenge was accepted by Noga Gil-Bassi, an experienced leader in educational policy and management in the public sector. Within four days, a school was established. It accepted 850 students who were displaced from their towns and villages in the northern region and dispersed across the country. What emerged was not just a school but a powerful testament to the strength of the human spirit and the transformative power of education and community.

The Birth of a School Under Fire

Noga Gil-Bassi, who had never served as a school principal until that October, was handed a monumental task: to instantly establish an educational institution for displaced students. There was no team, curriculum, or materials. There was also a significant data challenge: students were scattered, their information in multiple spreadsheets or nowhere at all. The school was to serve those whose lives had been upended by war and trauma, but who and where were they? By leveraging simple tools like Google Forms and endless determination, the project took shape. Within 48 hours, 1,140 children were registered, and 850 students began attending classes daily -140 staff members joined, many volunteers meeting each other for the first time on the day the school opened its doors.

The "Kinneret Educational Space" became a makeshift home for displaced students and teachers. The staff was an eclectic mix: evacuated educators, soldiers, retirees, and volunteers, many of whom were displaced themselves, dealing with their own personal strife. Classes were held wherever space could be found, sometimes outdoors with the Sea of Galilee as a beautiful, at times distracting, backdrop to this surreal learning experience.

An Example of Social Commitment

The early days of Kinneret Educational Space were marked by improvisation. With no textbooks, notebooks, or even pens, teachers were encouraged to rely on their expertise and adaptability. "You are professionals," Gil-Bassi reminded them. "Use your skills and judgement." For some of the educators, this autonomy was liberating, allowing creativity to flourish. For others, it was overwhelming - a stark reminder of how challenging a cultural shift can be when the norm is built on routine and structure.

Creating meaningful relationships was also a challenge, as students and staff alike were strangers to one another. Name tags were a requirement, as the student turnover was high, a constant reminder of the volatile nature of the unstable reality outside.

Nevo Buzaglo, an 18-year-old student, described the challenges of constant relocation. Nevo was born in Kiryat Shmona, a northern city significantly impacted by constant rocket attacks, driving a majority of its inhabitants out into temporary housing or hotels further from the border. Nevo's family and friends were scattered across the country, displaced and uprooted. In early. Only days after the October 7th attacks, Nevo was on an airplane, returning to a very different Israel, and a very different concept of "home". For months, he lived out of a suitcase, moving between hotels and attending classes in museum halls and youth hostels. Despite the instability, he and his peers showed remarkable perseverance. Nevo often called friends daily, urging them to attend school, knowing that a semblance of normalcy could anchor their fractured lives.

Building Foundations for a Resilient Future

The project's success wasn't simply a logistical one, but an effort of emotional resilience and a stronger community. Teachers worked tirelessly to connect with students, many of whom were grappling with mental instability and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). One teacher shared that her student was struggling with his own self-worth, always outside, never attending classes. He eventually discovered his talent through art. "I wanted him to see himself the way I saw him," she said, reflecting on the transformative power of one educators' trust and encouragement.

Renewal After the storm

The school's physical journey mirrored the emotional one. Initially housed in the classrooms of Kinneret College, the space had to move multiple times as the college resumed its activities. "As we finally got used to the setting of Kinneret college, despite its inadequacy, we were informed the college students are going back to campus and we had to find a new home." Gil-Bassi shared. Each relocation tested the community's adaptability, from makeshift lessons in a local museum to classes in temporary caravans. Weeks of nomadic schooling required a great deal of flexibility to maintain continuity in learning and hold a strong connection with students. Finally, in January 2024, the school settled into a colorful, purpose-built facility in Poria.

A simple sign decorating the wall, made by students with paper and marker, was a constant reminder that their reality is filled with longing. It read "Every day brings us closer to home."

Creative Leadership & Human Connection

The Kinneret Educational Space initiative offers profound lessons for education systems in times of crisis. First, it underscores the importance of flexibility and human connection. Initially, many offered help and support with tech tools and platforms. Technology played an important supporting role for both students and staff, but in order to make good use of these tools, a significant level of dynamic adaptability was necessary. At the core were the relationships. "We had to go back to the foundations", Gil Bassi said. "Eye to eye, heart to heart - human to human."

Second, it highlights the value of resilience and creative leadership. With no precedent to follow, the team created a model that prioritized emotional well-being alongside academic progress. This dual focus not only kept students engaged but also empowered them to see beyond their immediate challenges. The journey was complex. Insights from the field showed that social-emotional learning didn't always bring the students to class. "We had to find a way to reach them." Gil-Bassi explained. "So we offered math classes, which got them out of bed and brought them to school, allowing us to connect with them and provide an open channel for self expression."

The Kinneret experience reminds us that learning can thrive even in the most unconventional settings when driven by purpose, passion, and human connection.

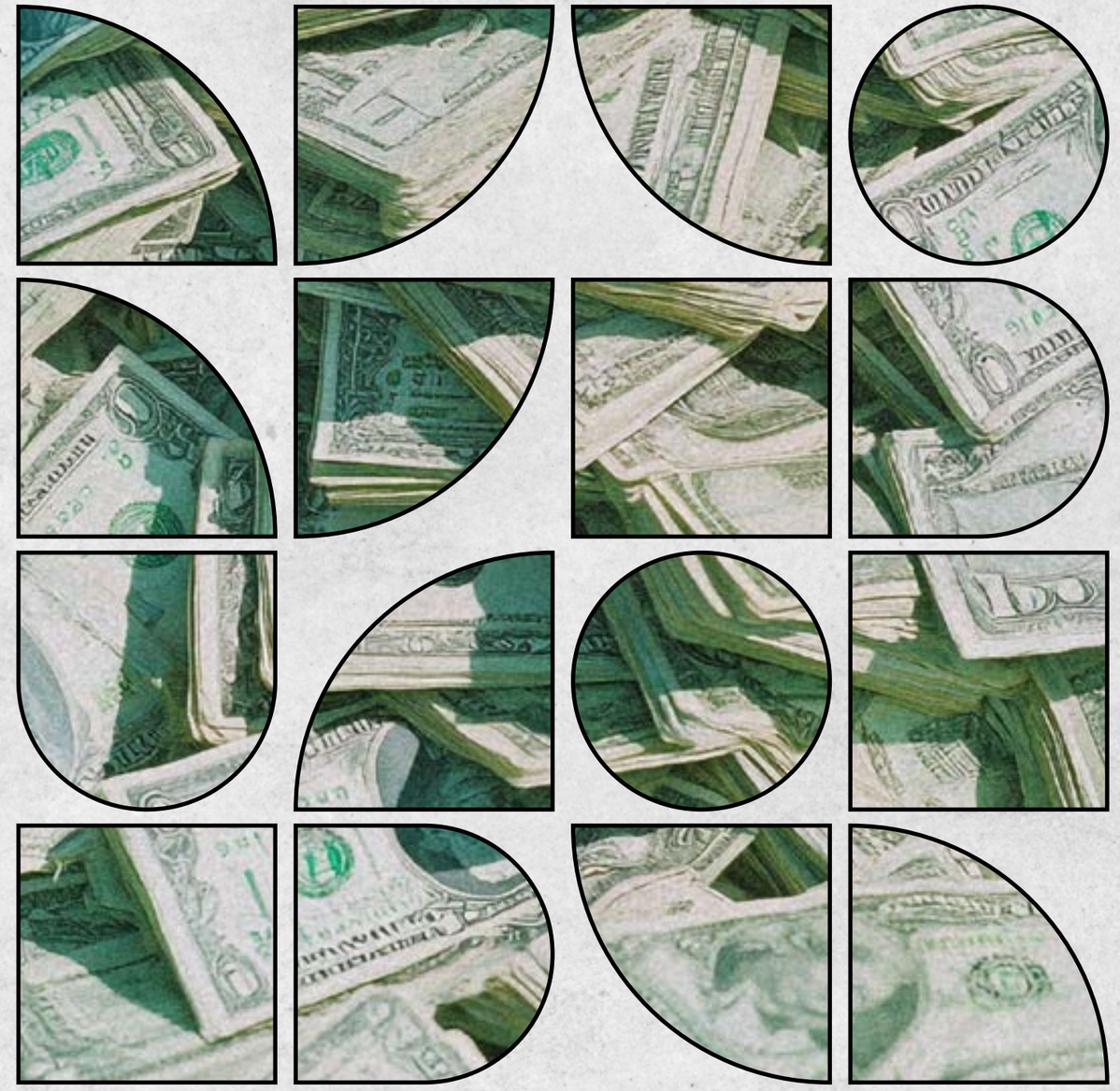
A Journey of Hope

As the school's founders reflect on the past year, they acknowledge the immense challenges but also the deep sense of accomplishment. "We held on to hope," Gil-Bassi shared. "In a world full of uncertainty, this space became our anchor."

The story of the Kinneret Educational Space underscores the extraordinary resilience required to sustain learning under war and crisis. But it also illuminates truths that should resonate deeply with education leaders worldwide. At its core, this experience was not about delivering content or transmitting knowledge. It was about seeing students for who they truly are and creating an environment where they can thrive, despite overwhelming challenges.

In times of crisis, the focus naturally shifts to fostering human connection, emotional resilience, and adaptability. Yet these priorities are not exclusive to moments of turmoil; they are precisely what education systems everywhere should deeply consider. When students experience this journey, they come out stronger, more connected, and ready to embark on the long path of rebuilding their own future. At its best, education isn't purely a preparation for life, it is where life's most profound learning takes root - it is life itself.

Why Investors Should Embrace Uncertainty



Why Investors should Embrace Uncertainty

Michael Eisenberg provides an energizing argumentation to the role of investors in betting on uncertainty, and of the relevance of asymmetric thinking. Eisenberg is the co-founder and general partner of Aleph, a venture capital fund for early-stage companies. Eisenberg has decades of experience in investment, building a strong reputation on the field, as well as author of numerous articles and books.

Eisenberg explains that for two years, COVID-19 defined our lives. Meetings were cancelled, plans disrupted, and masks became part of our daily attire. Yet COVID-19

was not an isolated event but the culmination of a lineage of SARS viruses - each an evolutionary process. Unlike predecessors, COVID-19 struck the perfect formula: it was infectious enough to spread widely but not so lethal that it halted its own transmission. This process - trial, error, and eventual breakout success - mirrors creativity and innovation in other fields. Take Walt Disney's Snow White. Before it became a cultural phenomenon, Disney had experimented with multiple characters and stories that faded into obscurity. Much like the virus's evolutionary path, Snow White emerged after several iterations, combining characteristics that resonated deeply with audiences. Whether in nature or storytelling, predicting what will succeed is nearly impossible until it happens.

The Mask Phenomenon

Eisenberg invites us to rewind to April 2020. Masks were still a new concept for many outside East Asia. At the time, knowledge about the virus was sparse and conflicting. Some experts said masks helped; others were skeptical. Yet people wore them. Why?

He believes that the answer lies in asymmetric thinking. The cost of wearing a mask— a few cents and some mild inconvenience—was negligible compared to the potential upside: avoiding a life-threatening disease. Even with incomplete information, the decision made sense because the downside was minimal, and the upside was enormous. This same logic applies to many decisions we make in uncertain environments.

So, Eisenberg asks, how do we prepare for the unpredictable? The answer lies in understanding the nature of uncertainty, as opposed to traditional risk management, and adopting frameworks that embrace asymmetric opportunities.

Venture Capital: Betting on the Unknown

Eisenberg follows, with the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB). It began with a single concerned customer on a Wednesday afternoon and snowballed via WhatsApp into a full-blown bank run by Thursday. Despite the bank's structural weaknesses being evident, no one acted until it was too late. This sequence repeated across other banks shortly after, underscoring a critical point: traditional systems are ill-equipped to address rapid, uncertainty-driven phenomena.

He asks us to reflect on why noone saw it coming. The information was there, but centralized structures and risk-averse mindsets prevented action. This isn't unique to banking; it's a recurring issue across industries and institutions.

Eisenberg asserts that in venture capital, uncertainty isn't a challenge - it's the game.

That, his job is to invest in early-stage companies with promising ideas but no guarantee of success. Often, it's not clear which investments will thrive. The numbers tell the story. From 2004 to 2014, 21,000 startup investments were made. Of these, 65% lost money. Yet a mere 0.4% achieved returns of 50x or more, driving the bulk of the industry's gains. This is not a risk management exercise; it's a game of embracing uncertainty and positioning for outsized returns.

AI & Betting on Uncertainty

Eisenberg makes the case that asymmetric opportunities share common traits: (1) Minimal Downside - Whether it's a mask, Bitcoin, or a PowerPoint pitch, the cost of entry is low; (2) Unlimited Upside - The potential gains can be transformative, far outweighing initial costs; (3) Unpredictable Success - There's no formula to guarantee success. The "breakout" often depends on timing and conditions beyond anyone's control.

In this framework, it's okay to be wrong most of the time. What matters is being right on the rare occasions that count.

AI provides a vivid example of long-term asymmetric thinking. In 2013, Eisenberg's team invested in an AI-driven company, Windward, and in 2015, in Lemonade. At the time, AI was far from mainstream, and many doubted its commercial potential. Fast forward to today: AI is revolutionizing industries, and these early bets have paid off handsomely. Similarly, he invested in a robotics company that automates grocery picking and packing. For years, the company struggled to gain traction. But with inflation driving labour costs higher, the economics of automation finally clicked. Today, the company's technology reduces grocery costs by 30%, transforming an industry once resistant to change. These successes highlight the value of patience and foresight in uncertain domains.

The Institutional Problem at Times of Uncertainty

Eisenberg suggests that most institutions are built for risk management, not uncertainty. They optimize for predictable outcomes, often at the expense of innovation and resilience. This centralized approach stifles creativity and limits the ability to respond to fast-changing realities. To navigate an uncertain world, we need new frameworks: (1) Distributed Decision- Making: Empower teams at the edges to make bold moves without waiting for centralized approval. This fosters innovation and speed; (2) Resilience Over Optimization: Focus on building systems that can absorb shocks rather than squeezing out every last efficiency. This ensures longevity in turbulent times; (3) Opportunity Mindset: Shift from avoiding losses to maximizing potential gains. This requires embracing failure as part of the process. History offers countless examples of asymmetric thinking. Pioneers in technology, science, and entrepreneurship often face ridicule before achieving breakthroughs that change the world. The same mindset applies to education, where traditional institutions struggle to adapt. As centralized schooling systems falter, the future may belong to decentralized, personalized learning models. The value of credentials is already diminishing, and those who embrace new paradigms will shape the next era.

Embracing Uncertainty in order to Thrive

Eisenberg concludes by providing a firm and optimistic approach to facing the future. The world is becoming faster, more connected, and less predictable. From pandemics to technological revolutions, the events that define our lives are increasingly shaped by uncertainty. Traditional approaches to risk management—centralized control, cautious planning, and incremental change—are no longer sufficient.

Instead, we must adopt an asymmetric mindset. This means taking small, calculated bets with minimal downside and massive upside. It means building resilient systems that can adapt to shocks and empowering individuals to make decisions without fear of failure.

Above all, it means recognizing that uncertainty is not a problem to solve but an opportunity to seize.

According to Eisenberg, as the future unfolds, those who embrace this mindset will not only survive but thrive. Whether in venture capital, education, or life, the principle remains the same: take the bet, wear the mask, and prepare for the infinite upside.

EdTech Capital Market Landscape

Over the last two decades, the EdTech industry has evolved into a dynamic segment of global economy. While no stranger to the ebbs and flows of the global market, today it stands at an important inflection point, poised for additional expansion, value creation, and social impact. Josh Schwartz, founder and managing partner of East Wind Advisors, took the stage to provide an overview of capital markets in EdTech. Schwartz has decades of experience in investment banking, corporate law, and EdTech. Formerly a Managing Director at Bear Stearns, he has advised companies across media, education, and emerging markets. From the resilience of public companies to the nuances of private market investments, Schwartz laid out a roadmap for understanding where the industry stands and where it's headed. "As we navigate 2024, the industry finds itself at an intriguing juncture, with public markets reflecting resilience and private investments rebounding."

Public Markets: A Resilient Indicator

Schwartz began by addressing the performance of publicly traded EdTech companies. He categorized these firms into three segments: EdTech and education services, higher education, and workforce development. Despite recent volatility in broader markets, the first two categories have performed relatively well against the S&P 500, showcasing the sector's overall resilience. Duolingo, the language-learning app, emerged as a standout performer. Its stock has risen over 100% since 2021, outperforming the broader market. Schwartz noted, "Duolingo has been a rock star in the public markets, demonstrating the potential for growth and innovation in EdTech."

However, not all stories are success stories. Schwartz highlighted two companies - Chegg and 2U, as examples of how missteps can affect public perception. Chegg faced criticism for its perceived vulnerability to AI disruption, signaling the challenges AI poses to established players. Schwartz clarified, "Chegg's issues stem more from a poorly handled earnings call than from a lack of AI strategy. In reality, they have a robust AI plan." Meanwhile, 2U's aggressive acquisition strategy left it over-leveraged. When market conditions shifted, the company's financial struggles culminated in bankruptcy. Schwartz emphasized that these cases, while notable, are isolated and should not overshadow the sector's broader resilience.

Private Markets: A Rebound in Progress

Turning to private markets, Schwartz pointed to a rebound in mergers and acquisitions (M&A) activity in 2024, following a dip in recent years. While financing levels remain below the highs of 2021, Schwartz stressed that strong companies continue to attract capital.

"We're seeing billions of dollars invested annually in EdTech," Schwartz said. "The idea that there's no financing available is a misperception." Two recent examples illustrate this point. In October, Eruditus, an executive education platform, raised $150 million at a $3 billion valuation. Though this is modest compared to its 2021 valuation, Schwartz noted that 2021's market conditions were an anomaly. Similarly, SchoolLinks, a K-12-focused college and career readiness platform, raised $80 million in a Series B funding round, marking a tenfold increase in valuation over just a few years.

Schwartz also addressed the role of venture capital (VC) and private equity in driving the EdTech ecosystem. Firms like Reach Capital and Renovus Capital Partners have significantly scaled their assets under management over the past decade. Reach Capital, for instance, grew from a $53 million fund in 2015 to a $215 million fund in 2023. Renovus, which focuses on middle-market investments, recently raised nearly $900 million, a stark increase from its $100 million fund in 2011.

"If EdTech weren't a good investment," Schwartz asserted, "limited partners wouldn't continue allocating increasing amounts of capital to these funds."

AI impact on EdTech

AI has emerged as the defining trend in EdTech. Schwartz referenced a report from Reach Capital, an early-stage investor that reviewed 280 business plans to create a taxonomy of AI-driven EdTech startups. The analysis revealed that most funding has gone to personalized learning tools, career development platforms, and teacher assistance systems. Subcategories like study tools, language learning, and AI copilots have been especially active.

"This data serves as a heat map for where innovation and funding are concentrated in EdTech," Schwartz explained.

He also emphasized the importance of strategy for entrepreneurs: "To scale effectively, startups must assess whether they can disrupt incumbents independently or if they're better positioned as acquisition targets."

One illustrative case is Soapbox Labs, a Dublin-based speech recognition company specializing in children's voices. The company chose to be acquired by Curriculum Associates, enabling it to reach 12 million students almost overnight. "Integration with an established player can accelerate market penetration in ways that are difficult for standalone startups," Schwartz said.

The Virtuous Financing Cycle of EdTech

Schwartz highlighted the close relationship between financing and exit markets. Early-stage investors provide the initial capital that helps startups grow. When these companies reach maturity, they often become acquisition targets for larger firms, creating liquidity for early investors and fueling further investment. To illustrate, Schwartz presented a case study on consolidation in the K-12 market. Financial sponsors have backed platforms that have, in turn, acquired smaller companies. This wave of consolidation underscores the sector's maturation and the ecosystem's ability to recycle capital into new ventures. "This virtuous cycle fuels ongoing interest and innovation in EdTech," Schwartz explained. "What was once an underfunded corner of the education market is now attracting significant capital and attention."

The Rising EdTech Powerhouse

Schwartz closed his remarks by spotlighting Israel's potential as a global hub for EdTech innovation. Drawing parallels to Israel's success in sectors like cybersecurity and autonomous driving, he argued that the country's entrepreneurial and technological ecosystem is well-suited for the education market.

"Our hypothesis is that Israeli entrepreneurs have the attributes needed to excel in EdTech," Schwartz said. He cited the ongoing partnership with MindCET, CET, and Ronnie Kenneth to launch mindcet Capital, a fund focused on this opportunity.

Investing in EdTech towards a better future

Josh Schwartz's analysis underscores a sector brimming with potential despite its challenges. Public markets show resilience, private markets are selectively rewarding strong performers, and AI continues to redefine the landscape. Meanwhile, Israel stands poised to become a global leader in EdTech innovation, leveraging its unique strengths to address the world's educational needs.

"Investing in education isn't just about financial returns," Schwartz concluded. "It's about outcomes that improve lives and build a better future. That's a vision worth betting on."

Commitment & Support to Teachers and Students – The key to Successful Change

A conversation with Marc Sternberg

In an insightful interview, Josh Schwartz, Managing Partner at East Wind Advisors, asks Marc Sternberg about the evolving state of education at times of deep technological disruptions, and the potential of investment to address some of the consequential pressing challenges facing the sector. The conversation touches on Sternberg's personal journey, the shift in how education is viewed and delivered in the U.S., and the critical intersection of policy, technology, and investment in shaping the future of K-12 education.

Marc Sternberg, began his career as a high school teacher, later principal in the Bronx, working in New York City public schools, advising on policy, and eventually moving into the realm of philanthropy and investing. He served as Senior Deputy Chancellor at the New York City Department of Education and education advisor on policy and strategy to Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. His time as a deputy chancellor under Joel Klein in the Bloomberg administration, he says, was foundational in shaping his understanding of the educational system and its flaws. Sternberg worked with the Walton Family, who are known for their significant contributions to education through their foundation. Later, he helped launch A-Street, a growth equity firm focused on the U.S. K-12 market. Sternberg is currently the Managing Director of A-Street and serves on the board of Great Minds.

Sternberg's decision to move into investing, after years of working in education and philanthropy, may seem counterintuitive at first, but he offers a compelling rationale. He believes that after decades of watching problems in education worsen, the U.S. is finally at a tipping point. The public education system, which has been slow to change, is facing mounting pressure as parents increasingly seek alternatives to traditional schooling. The growing demand for charter schools, homeschooling, and other non-traditional education models is a clear sign that parents are dissatisfied with the status quo. Sternberg observes a shift in the way people view education in the U.S., with many questioning the effectiveness of the current system and looking for something different.

Long-term Investment for Transformative Results

Sternberg sees this moment as an inflection point, a rare opportunity for change. However, he emphasizes that this change must be handled with care. "We need to listen to the educator, to the parent, and to the student," he says. For Sternberg, the key to solving these deep-rooted problems lies in developing solutions that prioritize quality, coherence, and sustainability. At A-Street, the investment approach is

grounded in these principles, aiming to develop scalable solutions that address the real needs of educators and students. He underscores that quality in education is not a vague or abstract concept, but something concrete that can be identified by teachers, parents, and students themselves.

He critiques the way educational technology has been deployed thus far, suggesting that the tools currently available to educators often lack coherence and fail to integrate well into the existing teaching structures. Teachers, he says, are often overwhelmed by the variety of tools they are expected to use, not always enhancing practices. Sternberg is passionate about the need for technology to support teachers, not add to their burdens. This emphasis on coherence and ease of use is a core element of A-Street's investment approach, which aims to support solutions that make the educator's life simpler and more effective.

When asked to compare his approach to that of a typical venture capitalist (VC) in Silicon Valley, Sternberg acknowledges that many of the principles align, but there are key differences. Venture capital and private equity are often associated with a focus on rapid financial returns, typically measured by internal rate of return (IRR), a metric that focuses on short-term performance. Sternberg, however, proposes a different approach. He believes that the problems in education are deep-rooted and will require a longer time horizon to address. A-Street's investment strategy, therefore, is focused on metrics like multiple on invested capital (MOI), which considers returns over a 10 to 15-year period. This longer-term view allows for a focus on building solutions that may take time to scale but will ultimately have a profound impact on the education system.

Despite the long-term nature of investments, Sternberg remains optimistic. The slow pace of change in education has been frustrating, but he believes it is on the verge of transformation. He is particularly excited about the potential for data to revolutionize the classroom experience. In the past, teachers would manually collect data on student performance, often on paper, and use it to inform their learning. Today, technology offers the opportunity to capture both structured and unstructured data more efficiently, providing teachers with a more complete picture of student progress - critical for improving practice and making the teaching experience more effective and enjoyable. However, he acknowledges that there are significant barriers to the widespread adoption of these technologies. One of the main challenges is the entrenched culture within schools, which can be resistant to change. Schools have established routines and practices, such as procurement processes, that create barriers to the introduction of new solutions. Additionally, government funding, particularly in the U.S., has not always been effective in driving meaningful change. Sternberg suggests that the recent influx of federal funding for education has often been deployed without clear expectations or accountability, making it less effective in achieving the desired outcomes.

Despite these challenges, Sternberg believes that as the status quo begins to erode, the pace of change will accelerate - the key to transforming education lies in making it easier for educators to do their jobs. If technology and new investment models can provide the support teachers need, they will be able to focus more on creating a joyful, more sound experience for students, easier to scale, which is ultimately the goal. If we can make teaching more efficient, it will create more space for the emotional and intellectual growth of students.

Innovation in education is inevitable and around the corner

Sternberg points out that the classroom remains the one area in teachers' lives where digital tools don't yet simplify their work. Technology makes every other aspect of their life easier - banking, transportation, food - yet in the classroom, that support is still lacking. This is the challenge we must address, and he is incredibly optimistic. At this conference about uncertainty, one thing is clear: change is coming. In a decade, perhaps sooner, we'll look back at today's teaching practices the same way we now view the methods of surgery from 50 years ago.

At the heart of this vision is a deep respect for the educators who are at the frontlines of the battle to improve education. By investing in innovative solutions that empower educators, Sternberg hopes to help make the teaching profession more fulfilling. He emphasizes that this is about ensuring that the people who shape future generations have the tools and support they need to succeed.

Sternberg ponders about the fragmented nature of the education market, increasing the challenges of scaling innovative solutions. However, he acknowledges that while change is difficult, it is inevitable. Through careful investment, thoughtful policy, and an unwavering commitment to improving the lives of both teachers and students, Sternberg is confident that the future of education can be brighter and more effective than ever before.

Shahar Botzer, Hilla Ovil Brenner, Josh Schwartz at IEW24

Unique Times for Edtech

Josh Schwartz, Managing Partner at East Wind Advisors, led an insightful panel, with Shahar Botzer and Hilla Ovil Brenner who delved into the growth and potential of EdTech, sharing personal experiences, market insights, and forward-looking perspectives. The discussion centered on the state of EdTech and the importance of cultivating a robust ecosystem to support innovation in this critical field.

Hilla Ovil Brenner: A Trailblazer's Perspective

Brenner, a pioneer in Israel's EdTech landscape, brought significant experience and insight to the discussion. As the founder of WhiteSmoke, one of the first grammar-check tools leveraging artificial intelligence before AI became

mainstream, Brenner's journey has been one of innovation, resilience, and lessons learned. WhiteSmoke's path to success involved raising USD 40M, licensing to Pearson Education, and going public - all while navigating the steep learning curve of working with global corporate giants.

Reflecting on her early days, Brenner emphasized the unique challenges of building an EdTech company in Israel at a time when the field was nascent. She recalled her lack of understanding about the timelines and complexities of working with large corporations, sharing how it took two years to implement a deal she initially thought would materialize overnight. Today, as a partner at Ariel Capital and a champion for female founders through the Yezamiyot organization, Brenner's focus has shifted to investing in early-stage startups. Her experiences underscore the importance of perseverance, adaptability, and ecosystem support for budding entrepreneurs.

Shahar Botzer: Investing in Impact for Good

Botzer is a Managing Partner at Good Company. He shared his perspective as a mission-driven investor focused on addressing humanity's most pressing challenges. Good Company invests in education, climate, and digital health, prioritizing solutions that deliver both societal impact and financial returns.

For Botzer, investing in EdTech is part of a broader commitment to leveraging innovation to solve global problems.

As a father of four, Shahar's stake in the education system is both professional and personal. He emphasized that building a scalable and profitable EdTech company requires addressing significant global issues, such as inclusion, personalized learning, and workforce digitization. Shahar's fund looks for early-stage startups poised to ride waves of infrastructure shifts and technological advancements, such as the adoption of generative AI to create more inclusive and efficient learning environments.

Despite acknowledging the relatively small size of Israel's EdTech ecosystem, Botzer expressed optimism about its potential. He believes that fostering an environment where entrepreneurs feel supported by a vibrant ecosystem is crucial to encouraging them to choose EdTech as their life mission.

EdTech, Through Broader Lens

One of the key topics discussed was the definition of EdTech itself since traditional definitions often limit the perception of the sector's scope, which can downplay its significance. For example, the chief scientist of the Israel Innovation Authority identified only 113 EdTech companies in the country, but panelists argued that this figure reflects a narrow interpretation. Brenner emphasized that many startups avoid labelling themselves as EdTech due to the restrictive connotations of the term, even though their innovations address educational challenges.

Botzer expanded on this idea, framing EdTech as any technology impacting human capital across a range of environments, from K-12 education to corporate training and lifelong learning. By broadening the definition, he believes the sector can better reflect its true scale and potential. This shift in perspective also helps attract more investors and entrepreneurs who might otherwise overlook the opportunities in EdTech.

The discussion also touched on the unique challenges and opportunities within Israel's EdTech landscape. While Israel is renowned for its technological innovation, panelists noted that the EdTech sector has historically been slower to develop compared to other industries, such as cybersecurity or digital health. Botzer attributed this to the ecosystem's relatively small size, which can deter founders from pursuing EdTech ventures due to concerns about limited investment and market opportunities.

Brenner, however, highlighted the significant progress made in recent years, pointing to the increasing number of promising EdTech startups and the growing interest from investors. She noted that when she began her entrepreneurial journey, there were few resources or role models for EdTech founders in Israel. Today, events like the MindCET IEW annual conference and organizations like Ariel Capital and Good Company are helping to create a more supportive environment for innovators.

The Major Role of Ecosystem Development

Both Botzer and Brenner stressed the importance of ecosystem development in fostering a thriving EdTech sector. For Botzer, this involves not only investing in startups but also building the infrastructure and networks that enable entrepreneurs to succeed. He noted that successful ecosystems often rely on a virtuous cycle where first-generation founders who achieve exits reinvest in the next wave of startups, creating a self-sustaining community.

Brenner echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the need for Israeli founders to gain experience working with international markets and corporates. She recalled her own learning curve with Pearson and highlighted the value of mentorship and knowledge-sharing in helping new founders navigate similar challenges.

EdTech Emerging Trends

The panelists also discussed emerging trends shaping the future of EdTech. Botzer identified several key areas of opportunity, including:

- Digitization of Workflows: Streamlining processes in education and workforce training to improve efficiency and accessibility.
- Inclusion and Neurodiversity: Developing tools and systems that cater to diverse learning needs, recognizing that neurodivergent individuals are becoming the new norm.
- Personalized Learning: Leveraging AI and other technologies to create tailored educational experiences that adapt to individual learners' needs.
- Content Creation: Enhancing the creation and delivery of educational content using generative AI and other advanced tools.

Brenner added that the human factor—specifically, founder-market fit—is critical to the success of EdTech startups. She argued that the best innovations often come from entrepreneurs who are deeply passionate about their mission and have firsthand experience with the problems they're trying to solve.

Overcoming the Challenges in Attracting Investment

Despite the sector's potential, attracting investment remains a challenge. Brenner mentioned that geopolitical uncertainties in Israel have made some LPs hesitant to invest, creating additional hurdles for startups seeking funding. However, she expressed optimism that the situation will stabilize and that the global appetite for EdTech solutions will continue to grow.

Botzer emphasized the importance of aligning with specialized funds that bring deep domain expertise and connections to the table. He noted that early-stage EdTech startups often require more capital than other types of ventures, particularly those developing hardware or operating systems. Ensuring that startups have access to sufficient funding is critical to their success.

The panel concluded on a hopeful note, with all speakers expressing confidence in the long-term potential of EdTech. They acknowledged the challenges but emphasized the opportunities for Israel to establish itself as a global hub for education innovation.

By cultivating a strong ecosystem, embracing a broader definition of EdTech, and supporting passionate entrepreneurs, the sector can continue to grow and make a meaningful impact on learners worldwide.

The ultimate goal is clear: to create technologies that not only transform education but also empower individuals to reach their full potential. As the EdTech landscape evolves, their insights and leadership will undoubtedly play a key role in shaping its future.

Opportunities at Startling Times

Entrepreneurs, leading significant innovative initiatives, shared their insights, during a compelling panel moderated by Dana Michaelovich, head of MindCET accelerator program and deal flow at mindcet Capital. The dialogue offered a deep dive into navigating the current volatile market landscape. Joining Dana were Tomer Haims, Yair Shapira, Ron Kirschenbaum, and David Bleicher, each representing unique experiences within the EdTech ecosystem.

Michaelovich began by framing the discussion: "In view of the significant changes in the markets and the opportunities created by them, we want to explore how these shifts are experienced by EdTech founders. These are the doers, the people who experience firsthand the responses of customers and investors, navigating rough waters with determination."

The Power of Startups to Significantly Enhance Society

Tomer Haims, strategic business development manager at Next October, shared the organization's mission. "Next October is our way to turn grief into hope," Haims explained, his voice heavy with emotion, referring to the October 7, 2023, massacre suffered by Israel citizens. "We commemorate over 1,750 lives lost by partnering each startup in our program with a person to honour. This unique approach combines remembrance with innovation, building a better future while ensuring those we lost are never forgotten." Next October offers resources, mentorship, and connections to venture capitalists, empowering startups to grow while carrying the legacy of those they honour. Haims's heartfelt delivery reminded the audience of the profound connection between innovation and resilience in the face of adversity. Shapira is part of Next October initiative "We're proud to commemorate Amichai Vaitin, an educator and father of five who tragically lost his life on October 7th, protecting his family and community."

Yair Shapira, co-founder and CEO of Novodia, introduced his company's mission to revolutionize publishing with AI. "Novodia creates full curricula using AI, distributing them to school districts, state agencies, governments and non-profits". It is a new generation educational publisher, combining a proprietary pedagogical-AI platform and subject-matter experts. NovoDia develops full curricula that are standards aligned, pedagogically rigorous, highly engaging, differentiated and personalized.

Ron Kirschenbaum, managing partner at ReadTheory, described their solution for adaptive learning. "We help K-12 students improve their reading skills with effective, data-driven resources. Over 20 million students have benefited from our platform, and we're committed to reaching even more."

David Bleicher, founder and CEO of Jotit, highlighted his company's approach to bridging traditional and digital education. "Jotit offers a unified learning space that integrates handwriting with digital tools, creating an organized and seamless learning experience. We aim to modernize how students interact with educational content while respecting the preferences of educators." Bleicher reflects on the contrast between the technological advancements in the industry and the traditional approach in schools, which still rely heavily on handwriting, paper, and books. With over 20 years of experience in product development, Bleicher acknowledges that "the customer is always right", so teachers have valid reasons for sticking with these methods. However, also as a parent, he sees the challenges this creates for children, especially those with organizational difficulties. To address this, he focused on creating a unified learning aiming to enhance significantly learning for students globally.

Navigating Uncertainty as a Natural Process

Michaelovich delved into the challenges posed by economic and political events, including the rapid adoption of generative AI, market uncertainty, and the ongoing effects of global crises. Bleicher noted, "GenAI is both an opportunity and a challenge. Educators are overwhelmed by its potential, yet they struggle to identify its most effective applications. At Jotit, we integrate GenAI thoughtfully, enhancing traditional tools without succumbing to hype."

Kirschenbaum added, "While the K-12 market faces funding challenges with the drying up of Essa funding, smaller companies like ours may find opportunities to adapt more easily than larger organizations burdened by legacy structures."

Shapira emphasized the opportunities amid chaos: "Uncertainty is the bread and butter of startups. Generative AI enables us to rapidly create tailored content, addressing district needs while staying agile. We see these disruptions as openings to bypass slower, more entrenched competitors."

Michaelovich highlighted the evolving perception of EdTech. "The sector has often been underappreciated, but success stories are changing that. Companies that demonstrate value and scalability are poised to redefine the ecosystem."

How GenAi is Impacting EdTech

The panelists explored how GenAI is reshaping their products. Bleicher shared, "We've integrated Gen AI into handwriting tools, offering features like grammar checks and math problem hints. It's a seamless way to enhance traditional learning methods."

Kirschenbaum described a cautious approach. "We've developed an external tool for teachers to create content but haven't fully integrated it into our platform. Quality remains our top priority."

Shapira concluded that GenAI has fundamentally changed the content creation process, making it faster, cheaper, and more flexible. This shift enables us to address diverse standards and student needs in real-time. "The main premise of publishers, the main reason that everything is so slow, so expensive, and not used in the classroom, it is because they still think that creating content is difficult. What if it could be different? What if creating content is not that difficult? Then you can actually address every topic. You can address every student. You can provide different versions, move fast, be flexible, fit different standards, and so on. This is what Novodia is doing."

2025, Thriving Through Innovation

Reflecting on their aspirations for 2025, Haims expressed Next October's ambitious vision: "Our goal is to support 1,750 startups, matching each with a fallen individual. We invite all of you to join this meaningful mission."

Shapira, Kirschenbaum, and Bleicher echoed sentiments of growth and impact, each committed to driving innovation in education while navigating the challenges of a complex world.

Michaelovich concluded, "Resilience should be a valuable asset, not a necessary trait. We look forward to a future where innovation thrives, unhindered by adversity." The panel underscored the transformative power of perseverance and collaboration, offering hope and inspiration to entrepreneurs and investors alike.

Dana Michaelovich, Yair Shapira,Tomer Haims, Ron Kirschenbaum, and David Bleicher at IEW24

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