

*The charismatic and endearing Chairman of Microsoft Europe, Jan Muehlfeit gave a truly thought-provoking keynote speech at the Opening Plenary, urging us to focus on developing our strengths, and the strengths of our students rather than fixating on weaknesses. Having studied Computer Science at university, Jan firmly understands the promise technology holds in unlocking human potential – potential which the world is currently squandering on a grand scale.*

**What was your main interest in coming to speak at the EAIE Conference?**

JM: In addition to being the chairman of Microsoft Europe, one of my responsibilities, and, you could say my calling, is education – especially higher education. I'm an adviser to the Commissioner for higher education in the European Commission, and I have a strong belief that education can positively change the situation around the world.

**Could you briefly sum up your keynote speech?**

JM: There is a lot of discussion today that we are wasting the world's natural resources – mostly human resources – and this stems partly from the fact that the education system we have today is not sustainable. Education needs to be based much more on the strengths and talents of students, as opposed to fixing their weaknesses. You can fix your weaknesses and struggle or you can experience exponential growth by focusing on your strengths. I'm a strong believer that you need to be more of who you are as a person to succeed.

My daughter was always enrolled in international schools because we travelled around a lot and right now she's in the British School in Prague. I believe that mixing kids in school from different cultures and nationalities is how we develop. It is the same in large corporations like Microsoft: if you have diversity you get better productivity. On a social side, it is also better because people are happier and they are learning from each other, connecting hearts, and that is the true goal of international education.

**How much input do you think the business sector should provide in educating future employees?**

JM: The world of practice and the world of teaching should be brought much more closely together. I'll give you one example: if kids are working together in the classroom it's called cheating, yet in the office it's called teamwork and they will probably get a bonus for working in that way. Learning and working in the future is going to be much more focused on teamwork.

Business people need to be involved in teaching. In many countries, if you are not a qualified teacher you are not allowed to teach anything, even if you have global experience which is of great value to students. We need to change that. We need to have 'functional professors' to add another dimension to learning.

**One of the topics for debate over the next few days is the current mismatch between graduate skills and what employers want. What do you feel should be done to close this gap?**

JM: Recently I met the Minister of Education for Spain and in Spain, as you know, the unemployment of youths aged between 15 and 22 years is 55%. There are two reasons for this high number: under education of youth and a structural problem in the education system. In our industry, there are 700 000 open positions in Europe. We simply don't have enough engineers. One reason why the German economy is still doing very well is because they have enough engineers – they made it a priority a couple of years ago.

The job market is moving so fast and universities and schools are lagging behind.

