

The Young Marco Polo Accelerator Programme

A leadership accelerator programme with universities and businesses, jointly addressing the new borderless commerce in the NewSpace Economy

Introduction

The Young Marco Polo Accelerator programme (YMP) is an accelerator for the right pioneers, currently bright and engaged university students -- bachelor's, master's, and postgraduates. This programme is an intricate part of OASA's Mission. It aims to accelerate bright talents to help demonstrate use cases to businesses, enabling companies to sell their products and services outside Hong Kong.¹ Through this program, OASA is working with universities and businesses that have the vision to win and invest in their young leaders for the future, leveraging on the Space Economy platform.

OASA, the Orion Astropreneur Space Academy, a not-for-profit leadership development academy, has developed this Astropreneur Young Marco Polo Programme specifically to address current needs to harness the new digital and Space Economy. The programme is a unique and proprietary leadership development programme for students and businesses entering the complex realm of new market acquisition in a VUCA²) world. This program provides an action-learning leadership and market development path that ranges from 3 months to 6 months (depending on the length of the academic semesters at the university.)

Why are we doing this? OASA would like to see how it is possible to create the new specifications and connectivity for a few trade highways in the sky as the Space Economy begins to form. The Space Economy has arrived following the establishment and the prevalence of the Digital Economy, the Belt and Road Initiative, and of course, the arrival of the New Space. Hong Kong, being an entrepreneurial centre of the world, can be at the heart of the NewSpace economy.

The New Borderless E-Commerce World

In a borderless world, an owner can be living in Hawaii, set up his company in Hong Kong -- set up an e-commerce platform with the right payment gateway and customer acquisition strategy -- design his eDM in San Francisco, make a sale online, drop-ship his products to anywhere in the world or make his product using 3-D printing on-site, deliver using local couriers, and use online dispute resolution³ to manage product returns and disputes.

¹ OASA has a similar program called Mission Moonshot. That program works explicitly with corporates who would initiate the request and provide the project manager for the transition. The YMP works mainly with universities and SMEs, and where the university students are the project managers. The journey for the corporates is called Mission Moonshot. The journey for the students is called YMP.

² (Volatile, Uncertain, Chaotic, and Ambiguous)

³ This can be done through eBRAM, a Hong Kong government-funded mediation and arbitration institute.

All these processes are possible today, although very slowly and not scalable...and the disconnects are sufficiently many, so that scaling such business is extremely difficult. Nonetheless, some Hong Kong companies may discover a new market by themselves through dedication, time, and unique discovery.

Suppose more scouts, or instead, Young Marco Polos, can search and find these new markets, lay down new trade paths, and use the digital platform. In that case, we may come to identify the specifications and required connectivity along the way. Hong Kong companies need young Marco Polos who can map such new market linkages on their behalf. These new workers should help businesses in Hong Kong connect the disconnected links. Exploration, venturing into the unknown, building bridges using technologies, and extending Hong Kong's global reach is the essence of the Young Marco Polo Accelerator Programme.

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

We are trying to solve a complex problem for two groups. The first is from the companies' perspective, and namely, SMEs in Hong Kong. They are increasingly being marginalised and left behind in the new digital world. The second is the young pioneers that we need to nurture and be connected to the real world. Interestingly, the need for the first provides an opportunity for the second, and the solutions arising from the second should help to resolve the first.

For the Companies: The world of Disruption, Chaos, and Complexity and COVID has now dawned on us. It is everywhere, present, and affecting nearly everything we do, in mainly, how we manage and lead our modern employees as our company becomes "digitalised" is now a necessary and required discussion. The world is evolving borderless. Every entrepreneur knows they must have a digital solution to reach into new markets or extend into the current ones. Every forward-thinking CEO is seeking new extended markets that can leverage the current operations and facilitate the development of new ones. How can companies seriously and realistically prepare for the future of the digital and space economy? **How indeed?**

For the Students and the New Young Executives: As this new COVID and VUCA reality begins to settle, those working in the traditional industries will find it increasingly impossible to catch up. Every CEO knows that execution with a new digital mindset is critical for any plan to work. Execution without the right leaders, adequately groomed and challenged, all plans are just academic. A plan can work without systems leaders who would make things happen. To make this transition into becoming a digital business for new economies, the CEO knows they need new, young, and entrepreneurial leaders to help take their company to their next level of market relevance. There isn't a set job description for these scouts. **But where to find these young leaders?** These leaders must leverage a new mindset formed from new digital technology, grounded on the company's existing people, network and strengths, and reflective on the new VUCA world of COVID, trade tensions, and travel restrictions. But many of these young leaders today are lost, clueless, unengaged, and rebellious. If only we can steer that energy to positive change...but how indeed?

Objectives

This program aims to help the young leaders become a solution for businesses, majority of which are small and medium-sized businesses, to help them fit better to their new challenges and environment. It does this by allowing **both parties** to perceive broader environmental changes, prepare them to discuss and practice new methods that they can introduce into their organisations, and help them reassess how "Smart" they would need to be as competition heats up for limited talents, resources, and markets. OASA's role is to build a platform at the universities so such actions can happen in a controlled laboratory environment as much as possible.

This program's ultimate purpose is to prepare young change champions for new leadership challenges, which should help transform local SMEs onto a new path of digital transformation and connect them to the new borderless highway.

Upon completing this program, the participant will develop this understanding for positive action plus awareness for disruptive change but will have gained a few critical management skills that can help him or her kick-start that innovative process at a potential employer. To round up the training, on the Demo Day, OASA requires *each participant is expected to present how she or he would change and prepare their selected company for the new digital space age*, which revolves around data as the new gold -- data privacy, data integrity, data storage, data migration, and data ownership. This is done in front of the board of directors of the business.

This program is an action-learning program that solves three problems at the same time.

1. **For the companies**, the setup allows companies to experiment with setting up a new digital platform that can cut across borders and expand their markets. They have a Moonshot challenge.
2. **For the young leaders**, the programme helps to take a dreamer into becoming a deliverer at his or her new and potential employer. Through a series of well-tested training methodologies for start-ups, the participants would develop a new online business idea, validate it, and create a new business that wasn't there before. In business, talk is cheap—action counts and ventures that can deliver a positive contribution count the most. A leader who can articulate a new business model for the company, understands experimentation, and can provide a solution that fits the latest market and can also leverage the current company resources and their know-how in the Digital Economy, is a true winner for any business.
3. For OASA, the programme provides more use case that the Academy can share with the world. Through this programme, OASA offers the placement office an unparallel opportunity for their students to work on digital transformation challenges for the right university. OASA can also take on the onboarding, logistics, quality assurance, and coaching role on behalf of the university. OASA can also provide a mentor or coach to every team. The mentor is a professional problem-solver, while the coach would be an experienced executive coach. In

future years, OASA expects to provide online competency-based skills training for these troubler-shooters.

Sample Series of Saturday Workshops for Clients and Young Marco Polo's for Semester One

Jan Roundtable and Saturday Workshop

- **Jan Roundtable at Client's (TBC with each client, typically first two weeks of the month):** Reframing and Problem Identification.
- **22 Jan 2022 Workshop at OASA (Fourth Sat of the Month): Reframing and Introduction to OASA, Client, and Business Canvas. (Gregg)**
- **Deliverables:** Introduction of OASA and client, Initial Problem Statement, Scope, Team Roles, and Dialogue.

Feb Roundtable and Saturday Workshop

- **Feb Roundtable at Client's (TBC with each client, typically first two weeks of the month):** Investigative Roadmap
- **26 Feb 2022 Workshop at OASA:** Establishing Trust with Customers. Client's Magic. Collecting information on Customer Preferences. (Gregg and Michael)
- **Deliverables:** Project Plan, Project Schedule and Reporting, and Survey Targets. Market Sizing and Competitive Analysis.

March Roundtable and Saturday Workshop

- **March Roundtable at Client's (TBC with each client, typically first two weeks of the month):** Business Canvas for the New Venture. Market sizing: TAM, SAM, SOM, and 2% of SOM.
- **March Workshop at OASA:** Digital Transformation Gap Analysis.
- Lean Canvas. UX. Interviewing and Observing Techniques on Assessing and Determining Wants and Needs (Gregg and Thomas)
- **Deliverables:** Lean Canvas of the New Venture.

April Roundtable and Saturday Workshop

- **April Roundtable at Client's (TBC with each client, typically first two weeks of the month):** Two extra boxes on the Business Canvas. SDG and Consumer Advocacy.
- **23 April 2022 Workshop at OASA:** SDG Game. (Gregg and Perry)
- **Deliverables:** SDG linkages. SDG achievement goals and Consumer Advocacy Boxes. The MoonShot Test.

May Saturday Workshop

- **May Roundtable at Client's:** Dry run presentation to the Client's Board and University Funding Committee.
- **28 May 2022 Final workshop:** Executive Presence. Presentation Wrap up and next steps. Certification handout and preparation for next phase. (Gregg and Perry)
- **Deliverables:** Final Presentation and Final Business Canvas. Linkages to University Funding. Draft written report and draft presentation.