

# Executive Leaders' Program

IESE Custom Program  
SWIRE GROUP

Executive Education





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# FRONTISPIECE

## Executive Leaders' Program

IESE Custom Program for  
SWIRE GROUP

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The Swire Group is a diversified conglomerate going back to 1816 with holdings across multiple sectors, including property, aviation, beverages and food chain, shipping, and the trading and industrial sectors. Many of the group's core businesses are located within the Asia Pacific region, where traditionally Swire's operations have centred on Hong Kong and Mainland China.

Group subsidiaries include the airline Cathay Pacific, Swire Properties, HAECO, Steamships Trading Company, Swire Beverages, and Swire Foods. It has over 130,000 employees around the world.

Swire's top people rotate through the various businesses, sectors and global regions in which the group operates.

This requires executives to be both grounded in an overarching corporate culture and adaptable to local conditions - a tricky balancing act that must be learned over time.

Many are recruited straight out of university - *the crème de la crème* from the finest academic butteries. They will spend decades spiralling up the ziggurat, acquiring the skills and experience that qualify them to play at the highest level. Once at such lofty heights, what more have such people got left to learn?

**"Swire is a very sophisticated company, providing its executives with world-class training."**

**Xili Wu**

Executive Leaders Program Director

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**"Do I possess knowledge?  
No, I do not possess it.  
I clear my mind completely  
and thoroughly investigate  
a matter from one end  
to the other."**

**Confucius**



### The Executive Leaders Program

To create the Executive Leaders Program, the IESE team were asked to prepare a program which would conform to a basic set of requirements yet would be tailored (from the bottom up) around the particular profile of each individual participant.

There are many custom programs which are designed and built around groups of individuals (X number of executives from function Y in region Z), but few are *customized* programs designed around where an individual is now, and where they are going to be in five years time.

The in-depth needs analysis began with the academic and program team interviewing prospective participants and their bosses. Gaps in training were identified, the challenges they are (and will be) facing were scrutinized.

**The Executive Leaders Program** (ELP) which emerged was a supercharged learning delivery vehicle, streamlined to the exact needs of each participant, with serious academic engineering under the hood. While participants were given a reading list, and asked to do some preparation before and after each module, there was no online delivery - everything was face-to-face.

**“Swire was very pleased to partner with IESE on such a prestigious programme. We respect their expertise in providing a customized executive learning experience.”**

**Carol Hamilton**  
General Manager, Swire In-House Learning and Development



**“The participants are high potentials with very busy lives. To get their attention, we made sure the first module was the hardest.”**

**Bruno Cassiman**  
Professor of Strategic Management

## Module 1

### What is your strategy?

In this module the question was: **What is your strategy?**

The module's key content focused on strategy formulation and evaluation and dealt with the following topics:

- Dynamics of Competitive Advantage
- Creating Value in Multi-Business Corporations
- Digital Transformation: New Mindset for Innovation
- Strategic Decision Making
- Innovation Strategy

Delivered over four days, Module 1 included lectures focused on real world business trends. These included detailed evaluations of low cost airlines Vueling and Ryanair, Ducati, Tesla Motors, Pfizerworks, Abbott Pharma Europe, as well as the Maersk Group.

The keynote speaker from Swire was Rupert Hogg, Chief Executive Officer of Cathay Pacific. Also introduced (on day 3) was the Executive Challenge, an action learning methodology that allows each participant to focus on a particular strategic challenge that they are facing in their current role, and create an action plan to tackle it.



## Module

# 2

### How to bring the frameworks discussed in the classroom to life?

This module revolved around an on-the-ground study tour. Held in Barcelona, Dusseldorf, and London, the module asked, **How to bring the frameworks discussed in the classroom to life?**

Specifically in terms of:

- Looking at Best Practices
- Leveraging on Technology
- Multi-Business Portfolio Management
- Strategy Communication
- Operations as Source of Competitive Advantage
- Structured Decision-Making
- Agility, Innovation
- Stakeholder Management

Day 1 of Module 2, held in Barcelona, looked in depth at ISS (the facility management, cleaning, security, technical, catering and support services company). ISS was examined in terms of strategy development and transformation; creating value in a multi-business portfolio; acquisition integration; building a strong culture; people empowerment, as well as corporate social responsibility.

This was followed by a dinner and cava-tasting at Cavas Codorniu (the world's oldest and second-largest producer of bottle-fermented sparkling wine.) In addition, Cavas Codorniu was considered in terms of managing a family business while maintaining continuous innovation.

Day 2 (Barcelona) focused on the Spanish clothing label Mango and included visits to facilities at Parets, Llicá, and to the Hanger (Design Center). There was detailed problem solving via two business cases as well as overviews of fast fashion / fast follower business models, strategy execution, stock allocation and keeping client preference.

Day 4 (London) involved an internet panel with Expedia/Hotel.com, Boxever (the Customer Intelligence Cloud that connects customer, product and operational data) and 2degrees (whose purpose-built technology makes their online collaboration programs the solution of choice for many global brands). The conversation touched on technology trends, consumer behaviour, tech business models, and agility.

Finally, the day ended with a visit to a major customer in the shipping field along with lunch at Swire's London HQ.

## Module

# 3

### How to get there?

This module took place over five days asking the question **How to get there?**

Its key strategy execution content included:

- Strategic Leadership – Taking Charge
- Aligning Strategy and Operations
- Leading Change
- People, Team, & Capability Building
- The Challenges of Strategy Execution
- Communicating Strategy

Lecture titles included Aligning Strategy with Operations, Customer Centricity and Service Excellence as Key Strategic Advantage, and People, Team, & Capability Building. In addition, there was a workshop and computer simulation for participants, and they also heard from guest speaker Guy Bradley, the CEO of Swire Properties.

During Module 3, participants also worked further on their Executive Challenge. They received structured feedback and peer recommendations on the particular issue that they face, enabling them to fine-tune their action plans.

## Module

# 4

### What's next?

The final module asked the question: **What's Next?** and provided participants with an opportunity to share and reflect on key learnings and findings.

Specific attention was given to the implications for participants' businesses and Swire going forward.

# Conclusion

The first cohort to progress through the ELP developed by IESE and Swire numbered just 13. Many had been with Swire for the better part of two decades. For Bruno Cassiman and the academic faculty at IESE the greatest challenge going into a program aimed at such senior, high-achieving and experienced individuals was going to be proving that their customized program merited the participants’ attention and focus. The high relevancy of the course, tailored precisely to each individual participant, had their attention from day one.

The ELP takes high achievers and improves them still further. It does so not simply in terms of what they are doing already, but

in how this unique customized program prepares them to take on even greater responsibility, in even more senior roles.

The ELP represents a massive investment in each participant both as an individual and as a player on the corporate team. It’s a team that spans the globe, delivering products and services under brands that are familiar from Beijing to Birmingham, from Hong Kong to Houston.

The essential question posed by the team at Swire, and answered in collaboration with the IESE faculty, is whether the tried and tested can also be agile and adaptive. ELP is a very strong response to that question.

**IESE**

Since 1958, IESE Business School has been committed to developing exceptional leaders who aspire to have a deep, positive and lasting impact on people, firms and society.

IESE’s humanistic approach puts the participant at the centre of the learning experience with a focus on their personal and professional development.

At IESE participants hone their strategic leadership competencies within a global framework. With a thriving alumni community of more than 50,000 executives and entrepreneurs who work in more than 100 countries, IESE delivers cutting edge business programs designed around today’s critical and emerging business needs and challenges.

IESE has been ranked No. 1 in the world in Executive Education and Custom Programs for the last four years.

**SWIRE**

John Swire of Liverpool established an import-export business in 1816 and his son John Samuel Swire opened the doors of his first China office in 1866. Swire is now a highly diversified global group. Many of its core businesses can be found within the Asia Pacific region, where traditionally Swire’s operations have centred on Hong Kong and Mainland China.

Within Asia, Swire’s activities come under the group’s publicly quoted arm, Swire Pacific Limited. Elsewhere in the world, many businesses are held directly by parent company, John Swire & Sons Limited, in Australia, Papua New Guinea, East Africa, Sri Lanka, the USA and UK.

John Swire & Sons is headquartered in the UK. It is responsible for formulating and directing overall group strategy and provides a range of services including recruitment, employment and training of staff for the group and its subsidiaries. The group employs over 130,000 people worldwide.

**EXECUTIVE LEADERS PROGRAM**

“The Executive Leaders program is a truly thought-provoking program that successfully marries the latest academic thinking with practical case studies, study tours and hands-on experience. The tailored nature of the course combined with the focus on strategy and implementation was perfect for giving us a leg up as we take board positions and make strategic decisions.”

Rupert Bray, Marine Services Director, Swire Pacific Offshore







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A Way to Learn  
A Mark to Make  
A World to Change

