

Professor Brian Armstrong heads up WBS/Telkom Chair in Digital Business

The Wits Business School (WBS) has appointed Professor Brian Armstrong to head up the WBS/Telkom Chair in Digital Business. WBS established the Chair in Digital Business in 2016 through a five-year funding commitment from Telkom.



The Chair will ensure that WBS is at the forefront of developing important research, as well as teaching programmes that are essential for doing business in today's digital world. The 'flagship' programme will be a Master's degree in Digital Business, but there will be other offerings, including a postgraduate diploma, and online and executive education courses.

Armstrong has had a long career in the telecoms industry in South Africa and Africa. After 15 years at the CSIR, where he was involved in ICT research and development, he joined British Telecoms Global Services as VP: Middle East and Africa. He then joined Telkom in 2010 and was there until March 2017, when he resigned as chief commercial officer.

"It is an honour to have someone of Armstrong's standing in the telecoms industry to lead this important portfolio. With his knowledge of the industry, his passion for the subject of digitalisation and its transformative capacity in all aspects of business and society, I cannot think of a better person for the job," says Kalu Ojah, Professor of finance and deputy head of WBS.

Armstrong, who describes himself, interchangeably, as a 'business scientist' and a 'scientific businessman', has a passion for the science behind digitalisation and how it applies to the business context from a business model/strategy point of view. He completed his BSc (Eng) and MSc (Eng) at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1982 and 1984 respectively, and obtained his PhD from University College London in 1992.

"In the past five years or so, there has been much hype around 'digitalisation'. However, while it is a real part of our world and applies to every aspect of business, it is a concept that is over-traded but under-researched. Most of the information we have about digitalisation is anecdotal – there is no body of knowledge available which is underpinned by rigorous academic research," says Armstrong. "New and rigorously conducted research will underpin curriculum development, and there will be exciting opportunities for people to participate and share in this research."

Vision for Africa

His vision for the Chair is threefold: to be a centre of excellence in digital business in South Africa and Africa, to become fully sustainable, and to have an impact on society. "Our outputs must be seen and felt in our society; the Chair must have an impact on the South African and African business communities."

"There have been significant changes in digital business and this role affords me the opportunity to explore the industry through research, while bringing to the table my practical, business experience. Wits was my first choice because it is a top research institution and likewise WBS, which is at the forefront of emerging market research and shares my vision for the Chair," Armstrong concludes.

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