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Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy

EMEA WEBINAR

HOPE TO ACTION: DESIGNING AND CATALYSING BRAIN ECONOMY LIVING LABS

Co-organised by the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA), the Brain Capital Alliance, the Brain Economy Hub, and the Neuro-Policy Program at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy

Date: Monday 24th February 2025, 13:00-15:00 CET

Moderated by: Harris Eyre, Lead and Senior Fellow, Neuro-Policy, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, Executive Director of the Brain Capital Alliance and the Brain Economy Hub, Advisor to the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association

Rapporteur: Daisy Vaughan Liñero, Researcher, EMEA

BACKGROUND

The future of economic growth depends on optimising brain capital, a form of human capital that encompasses brain health with cognitive, emotional, and social skills that drive innovation, productivity, and resilience. Today, underinvestment in brain health is leaving trillions in economic potential untapped.

All global economies are at a critical inflection point:

- The global economy is losing \$2.5 - \$8.5 trillion annually due to lost productivity from brain disorders.
- The knowledge economy requires peak cognitive performance to sustain workforce adaptability in the face of technological innovation and AI.
- Aging populations and rising neurodegenerative diseases risk hurting productivity and increasing healthcare and social costs.
- Geopolitical uncertainty and digital misinformation highlight the need for cognitive resilience as a national security asset.
- Business leaders are calling for policies that strengthen workforce resilience, innovation, and sustainable growth, all of which depend on brain capital.

According to the [McKinsey Health Institute and the World Economic Forum](#), the brain economy is a new economic paradigm that prioritises brain capital, encompassing brain health and brain skills, as its core asset. Driven by a neuroscience renaissance, it responds to the growing demand for brain skills – cognitive, emotional, and social – in the modern workforce.

At the 2025 World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, brain health was identified as a priority issue as [noted](#) by Forbes Magazine for global policymakers, business leaders, and wider civil society. As technology and AI reshape the workplace, brain skills like creativity, resilience, and curiosity are becoming increasingly vital. The World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs Report [highlights](#) that half of the top skills on the rise are brain-related. According to the McKinsey Health Institute, employers who invest in [employee brain health and well-being can enhance performance and potentially boost global GDP by up to 12%](#). Brain health has been noted as foundational to smooth brain skill-based economic transitions such as the energy transition and digital transition.



We must move from hope in the brain economy to action. We need regional economic living labs to prove that the brain economy model can boost productivity, well-being, and human flourishing. Living labs span and integrate sectors and utilise advanced economics, finance, and research methodologies.

This webinar assembled the world's leading thinkers in the brain economy from public, private, and philanthropic perspectives. The Brain Economy is emerging as a transformative economic paradigm that places brain health, brain skills, and neurodiversity at the centre of economic development. As global challenges such as demographic shifts, climate change, and digital transformations reshape economies, there is a growing need to integrate brain capital into economic and policy frameworks.

In February 2025, the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) hosted a webinar on the Brain Economy, bringing together a distinguished panel of experts, policymakers, and practitioners. The event aimed to move beyond conceptual discussions to explore practical approaches for embedding brain capital into economic models, with a particular focus on regional economic development and Living Labs as catalysts for innovation.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The session was moderated by Dr Harris Eyre, Lead and Senior Fellow, Neuro-Policy, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, Executive Director of the Brain Capital Alliance and the Brain Economy Hub, and Advisor to the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association. He opened the event by underscoring the importance of rethinking economic development through the lens of brain capital. He highlighted how Living Labs and experimental approaches provide real-world platforms for testing and scaling brain-focused economic strategies.

Dr Harris Eyre introduced the Brain Economy framework, which positions brain health and brain skills as fundamental drivers of productivity, resilience, and economic flourishing. He emphasised the need for systemic change to embed brain capital into economic policies, education, workforce strategies, and urban development. He explained that the Brain Economy should complement existing economic models, such as the Green Economy and the Blue Economy, to ensure a holistic and sustainable approach to development. He also highlighted the importance of Living Labs as experimental ecosystems where new economic strategies can be tested and adapted for broader implementation.

The concept of Living Labs was discussed extensively as a practical methodology for embedding brain capital into local economies. Speakers explained how Living Labs integrate public, private, and philanthropic sectors, providing a collaborative space for testing innovative economic models. The European Network of Living Labs was presented as an example of how such initiatives can drive brain-centred policy innovation. The discussion also explored the potential to develop regional Brain Capital Dashboards, which would enable policymakers to monitor progress and refine strategies based on real-world data.

The role of brain capital in economic growth was a key theme, with speakers addressing the profound implications for workforce productivity, business competitiveness, and social resilience. Kana Enomoto, Director of Brain Health at the McKinsey Health Institute, presented data illustrating how brain health affects economic performance. She highlighted that poor brain health currently costs businesses over one trillion dollars annually in lost productivity, absenteeism, and healthcare expenses, while proactive investment in employee cognitive well-being could increase global GDP by up to 12 per cent. She also discussed the rising prevalence of mental and neurological disorders, stressing that businesses must integrate neurodiversity and cognitive skill development into their workforce strategies to remain competitive.



Stephen Reynolds, Director of Public Policy at the Greater Houston Partnership, discussed the private sector's role in brain capital development. He explained how the Greater Houston Partnership is working to integrate brain health into economic and workforce strategies, particularly in light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The region has recognised the mental health crisis in the healthcare sector and beyond, highlighting the urgent need for businesses to take a more active role in promoting brain health.

Paola Zarin, Director of Scientific Research at the Italian Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, focused on the role of patient organisations in advancing brain health as a business priority. She stressed the need for a global mission on brain health and the importance of integrating patients' perspectives in the governance of research and policy development. She also introduced the concept of barcoding brain health, which involves identifying brain health drivers and investing in early detection, preventive strategies, and personalised interventions.

Cara Altimus, Managing Director at the Milken Institute's Center for Strategic Philanthropy, discussed the importance of aligning philanthropic investments with brain capital strategies. She emphasised the role of cross-sector partnerships in advancing neuroscience research, particularly in areas such as mental health, neurodegenerative diseases, and cognitive resilience. She highlighted that philanthropic investment can indeed serve as a catalyst for de-risking early-stage innovations, thereby attracting greater institutional investment in brain-related economic initiatives.

Steve Carnevale, Founder of the California Mental Health Commission and Co-Chair of the Global Brain Capital Initiative, explored how innovative finance mechanisms can drive brain economy initiatives. He argued that traditional funding models are inadequate for addressing the complexities of brain health and called for the introduction of Brain Bonds and public-private investment models. He also discussed the role of workforce brain capital, emphasising that businesses must integrate brain skills development into corporate strategies to remain competitive in the evolving economic landscape.

Shiva Dustdar, Dean of the European Investment Bank Institute, provided an investor's perspective on mobilising funding for brain capital initiatives. She outlined the necessity of innovative financing models such as Brain Bonds, which could be structured similarly to Green Bonds to attract institutional investment. She also stressed the need for public-private partnerships to de-risk investment in brain health innovation. Greater alignment between scientific research, policy frameworks, and financial markets was identified as crucial in accelerating investment into brain capital projects.

The webinar featured extensive discussions on regional and national policy initiatives aimed at embedding brain capital into economic planning. Dr Rajinder Dhamija, Chair of India's Brain Health Task Force, detailed efforts by the Indian government to integrate brain health into public healthcare infrastructure, with a plan to establish district-level brain health clinics across the country. He highlighted that neurological disorders affect over 40 per cent of India's population, making brain health a critical public policy issue. The initiative seeks to ensure that brain health services are accessible, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Congressman Dr Facundo Manes of Argentina discussed legislative initiatives in Latin America aimed at embedding brain capital in public policy. He outlined plans for a national brain health bill and cognitive skill development initiatives, which would focus on integrating neuroscience insights into education, workforce training, and mental health services. He also addressed inequalities in brain health access, highlighting how socio-economic disparities impact cognitive development and productivity, particularly in emerging economies.

George Vradenburg, Chair of the Davos Alzheimer's Collaborative, provided insights on how brain capital frameworks are being integrated into global health and economic policy discussions. He highlighted upcoming policy engagements at G7, G20, and UN General Assembly meetings where brain capital is gaining recognition as a key driver of economic resilience. He also noted that Africa presents a unique opportunity for brain capital research, as the continent's multigenerational family structures provide valuable longitudinal data on cognitive resilience and brain health across the lifespan.

The intersection between neuroscience, investment, and economic development was further explored by Professor Giulio Tagliolatela of the UTMB Moody Brain Health Institute. He presented research on cognitive resilience, showing that 20 to 30 per cent of ageing individuals with Alzheimer's pathology do not develop dementia due to inherent neuroprotective factors. This insight has profound implications for economic policy, as it suggests that enhancing cognitive resilience could reduce healthcare costs and improve workforce longevity. The discussion emphasised the potential for brain-boosting urban environments, workplace interventions, and early childhood education programmes to foster cognitive resilience on a societal scale.



Penny Dakin of the Minderoo Foundation in Australia discussed the importance of early childhood development, neurodiversity, and arts and culture in shaping brain capital. She explained that early interventions in cognitive and emotional development have a long-term economic impact, as they enhance learning capacity, workforce readiness, and social adaptability. She also highlighted philanthropic investment in brain capital, noting that innovative funding mechanisms are needed to support long-term neurodevelopmental initiatives.

The webinar concluded with a call to action, outlining key steps for advancing the Brain Economy. Speakers emphasised the need to embed brain capital into regional economic development strategies, leveraging Living Labs and place-based initiatives as testing grounds for new models. Investment mechanisms must be enhanced and expanded, ensuring that brain health initiatives receive sustainable long-term funding. Strengthening cross-sector collaboration between governments, businesses, investors, and research institutions was identified as crucial to translating brain economy concepts into tangible policy actions. There was also a strong emphasis on developing standardised metrics and Brain Capital Dashboards to ensure that brain economy policies are data-driven and results-oriented.

Speaker Biographies



Moderator

Dr. Harris Eyre

PhD, Fellow in Brain Health at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy and Senior Fellow for Brain Capital with the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Originally from rural Australia, Harris Eyre MD PhD is a global physician-executive and neuroscientist focused on advancing the field of brain capital. He is lead of the Brain Capital Alliance and co-lead of the OECD Neuroscience-inspired Policy Initiative. He is Fellow with the Baker Institute for Public Policy and Senior Fellow with the Meadows Mental Health Policy Initiative. He has provided senior executive services to dozens of brain technology start-ups. He has published papers journals such as Neuron and Chief Finance International. He is an advisor the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association and the Texas Medical Center Innovation Institute. Harris maintains adjunct roles with the Global Brain Health Institute, Baylor College of Medicine, Deakin University, the Latin American Brain Health Institute and the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston.



Prof. Rym Ayadi

President and Founder of the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association

She is Founder and Director of the Euro-Mediterranean and African Network for Economic Studies (EMANES). She is Senior Advisor at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS); Professor at the Bayes Business School, City University of London; and Member of the Centre for Banking Research (CBR); Academic member and Chair (2018-present) of the European Banking Authority - Banking Stakeholders Group (EBA- BSG). She is also Associated Scholar at the Centre for Relationship Banking and Economics (CERBE) at LUMSA University in Rome.



Kana Enomoto

Director of Brain Health for the McKinsey Health Institute

Kana is the director of brain health for the [McKinsey Health Institute](#), where she specialises in behavioral health, public health, and delivery-system reform. Kana has more than 20 years of experience as a federal executive in mental-health and substance-use policy, data, programs, and practice improvement. Kana is a global thought leader and accomplished executive with a strong record of achieving public-policy goals, delivering programmatic impact, and inspiring organisational and social change.

Since joining McKinsey in 2019, Kana cofounded the Center for Societal Benefit through Healthcare to address underinvested areas of health with a focus on behavioral health. In addition, Kana has supported a wide range of clients, including government entities, payers, providers, investors, employers, and not-for-profit organisations to better serve people with, or at risk for, mental and substance-use disorders.



Stephen Reynolds

Director of Public Policy at Greater Houston Partnership

Stephen Reynolds is a native Houstonian and graduate of Auburn University. In January 2022, Stephen joined the Greater Houston Partnership after working nearly 8 years for the United States Congress.

Stephen is currently a Director of Public Policy at the Greater Houston Partnership and leads the Partnership's health care, transportation and infrastructure, aerospace and aviation, and immigration policy efforts and committees. Stephen's work is focused on aligning and coordinating initiatives and priorities with the development and growth of Houston's economy and community.



Giulio Tagliatela

Director of Public Policy at Greater Houston Partnership

Giulio Tagliatela, PhD, is a tenured professor at UTMB's Department of Neuroscience & Cell Biology and director of the UTMB Mitchell Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases.

He has over 27 years of continuous research funding, focusing on Alzheimer's and related disorders, with support from the NIH, the State of Texas, and multiple foundations. With 100+ peer-reviewed publications and national/international speaking engagements, he is a leader in his field. Dr. Tagliatela is also deeply involved in medical and graduate education, directing UTMB's Neuroscience Summer Undergraduate Research Program and a joint PhD program with the University of Palermo. He has led UTMB's Society for Neuroscience chapter for over 20 years, earning national recognition for excellence.



Dr. Rajinder Dhamija

Chair of the Indian Government Brain Health Task Force

Prof. Rajinder K Dhamija is a Neurologist and Clinical Scientist trained in India as well as in Australia. He is currently Professor of Neurology and Director, Institute of Human Behavior and Allied Sciences New Delhi India. He is MD from Medical College Rohtak (Haryana). Thereafter He did his DNB(Neurology) From National Board of Medical Examinations New Delhi and FRACP from Melbourne Australia.

He has received CCST(Eqv.) from Specialist Training Authority of Medical Royal Colleges (UK) and FRCP(London). Dr Dhamija was awarded Commonwealth academic fellowship in 2000 and 2003 and WHO fellowship in National Stroke Research Institute Melbourne Australia in 2004. He was also WHO fellow at National institute of Epidemiology in 2011.

He has published more than 120 peer review research papers and book chapters. He is also Chair of Movement Disorders at World Federation of Neurorehabilitation (WFNR). He is WHO expert in Parkinson Disease Rehabilitation.



Shiva Dustdar

Dean of the European Investment Bank Institute

Shiva Dustdar currently serves as the Head and Director of the EIB Institute, which brings the values and mission of the EIB Group closer to society through non-commercial activities supporting its climate, innovation and development priorities. Shiva has over 28 years of experience in the financial industry working for large private and public institutions in New York, London and Luxembourg. Since joining the EIB in 2003, she has worked in risk management, lending, investing and advising in innovative companies. She holds a BA (magna cum laude) in Economics from Columbia University in New York and an Executive MBA from London Business School (LBS). Shiva is an innovation finance expert and regular speaker on innovation and impact financing, gender-smart investing, and digital and green financing. She is actively engaged in networks that promote sustainable and mission-oriented financing.



Penny Dakin

Executive Director, Communities, Minderoo Foundation

Penny is a change maker and systems thinker. She is a dedicated and passionate advocate for children, young people, their families and the communities in which they live. Her career spans government, for-purpose and community-led organisations where she was instrumental in addressing health, community development, wellbeing and equity challenges. She has extensive national and international experience steering pivotal collaborations, advocacy consortia and research projects with Commonwealth and State Governments, industry and philanthropy to achieve substantial outcomes. Penny played a key role in the development of the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children which seeks to align efforts by the Commonwealth Government and Australia's leading philanthropic foundations (including Minderoo Foundation) to tackle entrenched disadvantage and improve the lives of children.



Facundo Manes

Argentine Congressperson

Facundo Manes is an Argentine neurologist, neuroscientist and politician, creator of the Institute of Cognitive Neurology (INECO), honorary president of the INECO Foundation, former rector of Favaloro University, director of the Institute of Neurosciences of the Favaloro Foundation and Principal Investigator of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) of Argentina. Since 2021 he has been a national deputy for the Province of Buenos Aires. In 2018 he became the first Spanish-speaking president of the International Frontotemporal Dementia Society.



Cara Altimus

Managing Director, SPARC (Science Philanthropy Accelerator for Research and Collaboration), Milken Institute

Cara Altimus, PhD is a managing director on the Science Philanthropy Accelerator for Research and Collaboration (SPARC) team at the Milken Institute, leading the science and health innovation portfolio.

A PhD neuroscientist, Altimus advises individual philanthropists and foundations on the state of research for various areas including neurodegenerative disease and mental health, identifying opportunities where their capital can make the biggest impact. In addition to her research experience, she serves as the chair for the Trainee Advisory Committee for the Society for Neuroscience, is an advisor to the Ontario Brain Institute, and spent a year as an AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow developing a neuroscience research portfolio at the Department of Justice. Altimus holds a bachelor's degree in genetics from the University of Georgia and a doctorate in biology from Johns Hopkins University. She works at the Institute's Washington office.



George Vradenburg

Chair, Davos Alzheimer's Collaborative and USAgainstAlzheimer's

George is Chairman of UsAgainstAlzheimer's, which he co-founded in October 2010. He was named by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to serve as a founding member of the Advisory Council on Research, Care, and Services established by the National Alzheimer's Project Act (NAPA Council) and has testified before Congress about the global Alzheimer's pandemic.

Under his leadership, UsAgainstAlzheimer's co-convenes both the Leaders Engaged on Alzheimer's Disease (LEAD) Coalition and the Global CEO Initiative on Alzheimer's Disease. George also is a founding member of the World Dementia Council. With his late wife Trish (1946-2017), George has long been a dedicated member of Washington's civic and philanthropic community, serving as Chairman of The Phillips Collection for 13 years.



Paola Zarin

Director of Scientific Research, Italian MS Society (AISM) and Foundation (FISM)

Paola Zarin is the Director of Scientific Research for the Italian MS Society and its Foundation. She has been a coordinator of several international research projects.

In her quality as Coordinator (2018- 2021) of the EU Responsible Research Innovation H2020 MULTI-ACT project (<https://www.multiact.eu/>), Paola led the development of a new research governance model to engage key stakeholders in health research and care initiatives.

Paola is chair of the Scientific Steering Committee of the global Patient Reported Outcomes Initiative for Multiple Sclerosis (PROMS; <https://proms-initiative.org/>, 2019-present); member of the European Charcot Foundation Multistakeholder Initiative (<https://www.charcot-ms.org/ms-initiatives>, 2019-present); member of ECTRIMS and National MS Society International Advisory Committee on Clinical Trials in MS (2022-present, <https://www.ectrims.eu/ms-clinical-trials-committee/>); co-chair of the Global MS Societies Research Strategy Initiative (2023-present).

Paola is author of more than 90 publications (1987-2025).



Steve Carnevale

Founding Advisory Board Chair of the UCSF Dyslexia Center

Mr. Carnevale is a Founder and co-Chairman of the UCSF Dyslexia Center which is translating neuroscience to enable precision education. The Center has a partnership with the Armstrong School, for which he is former President and current Emeritus Trustee.

In addition to Learning Ally, he is a trustee of other educational nonprofits including the SERP Institute, Boon Philanthropy and a member of the Eye to Eye Leadership Council. He is currently Chairman of Sawgrass, a developer of digital industrial inkjet technologies.

He is a 1978 graduate of the University of Michigan College of Engineering. As a Founder of the Center for Entrepreneurship he is the recipient of the 2015 Distinguished Alumni Service Award. He also supports several Michigan student leadership programs. For local community work, he is the former President and current Emeritus Board Chairman of The Olympic Club Foundation, whose mission is to support disadvantaged youth sports programs that develop future community leaders.