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NURTURING THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

The CEOs role in talent management



By: CAROLE KIMUTAI
Photo: SHUTTERSTOCK

often ask CEOs what keeps them awake at night and their answers range from competition, high production costs, poor infrastructure, high interest rates, unstable economic environment, shrinking markets...

An addition to this growing list is talent management.

The issue of talent management not only keeps CEOs awake but keeps them on their toes – literally. These concerns have been highlighted in a 2006 Economist Intelligence Unit study that was done in cooperation with Development Dimensions International. In the study, 20 corporate leaders (18 CEOs and two COOs), running

multi-billion dollar companies in the US, Australia, Asia, and Europe were interviewed about the role they play in talent management in their organisations. Almost all organisations generate at least US\$1bn (approximately KSh 86.1 bn) in annual revenue and possess strong brand recognition. The findings showed how core talent management was to a CEO's duties and responsibilities, and how they proactively participated in the process. Below are the summarised highlights.

Time spent on talent management
Fourteen of the 20 CEOs spend between 20 to 50 per cent of their time working on talent management. Considering the

length of a CEO's to-do list, this is a considerable amount of time allocated to one issue. The remaining executives said talent management is a priority and they either spend 5-15 per cent of their time on talent management or could not provide a time estimate.

The CEO of a transport and logistics company in the US allocates as much as 40 per cent of board meetings to talent management. Other executives regularly discuss talent management both in formal meetings and in casual settings.

The executives regularly evaluate their direct reports as a basis for top-level talent decisions, often with written performance evaluations. Their

companies conduct at least one lengthy formal assessment of top executives each year. The reviews combine written feedback and a scored section covering several leadership categories. Others make it a habit of addressing small groups of incoming executives, facilitating group leadership exercises and giving presentations on strategy during offsite retreats.

A CEO-led talent management
All the interviewees shared a similar understanding of the importance of talent management in identifying and grooming employees at all levels of the company so they can rise faster up the corporate ladder. The CEOs hold follow-up meetings to discuss results and determine what programmes and job experience their subordinates need to improve their weaknesses.

Good talent management promotes people based not only on their performance, but also on the manner in which they have made their mark. A CEO of an insurance company in the US said that could best apply when you have a leader who is getting results, but is damaging the organisation because of the way they've achieved those results.

It is strategic for executives not only to keep abreast of the latest developments in the company's talent programme but also to plot strategy, own associated initiatives and regularly participate in talent management related events. The CEO of a bank in Japan said his responsibility is working with the senior team in developing their capabilities and assisting them in coming up with ideas, concepts, procedures, and policies to develop their workforce all the way through the organisation. "It is one of the most important things that I can do," he said.

Most executives interviewed oversee their company's talent management activities. They carve out specific times to discuss talent management with senior staff and their boards, but also refer to the topic at regular meetings.

Communication is very important especially when it comes to succession planning. One CEO says it is important to communicate and justify to your managers why they are on / not on a list. The benefit is the organisation's

employee turnover reduces.

Elements of talent management
Talent management consists of many elements including performance evaluations to identify potential; psychological testing and assessment centres to determine capability gaps; training and development programmes, relocations, project work and job experience to accelerate development.

HR advises on the most appropriate programme from a range of options, including off-site retreats, classroom and online learning, executive coaching and formal mentoring. Most of the executives mentor their direct reports and others on a more informal basis.

HR departments are responsible for executing talent management strategy, being custodians of the talent management process and often provide guidance and fresh thinking about talent management programmes. They coordinate recruiting, help set job goals and compensation, introduce new development programmes, and monitor and report on individuals' progress.

Tied to performance
Talent management is so important, that some organisations are tying compensation to it. At least one-half of the firms interviewed cover employee development in annual performance reviews that determine pay increases. A financial services company in the US calculates part of its senior leaders' bonuses on their ability to meet certain development goals. They must provide training and assignments to their most promising managers and report to the board on their progress.

Growing managers
The CEOs saw on-the-job experience as critical when choosing and promoting managers because they prefer the person to have a broad background rather than expertise in one or two areas. Managers in some of these organisations are encouraged to pursue opportunities in unfamiliar settings, including international assignments and project work designed to hone new skills. "The best kind of development is putting someone in a job that tests them where

they have not been tested before," said a CEO of a US machinery company.

Benefits of good talent management
If a company's leaders have the right skills and experience, their direct reports and middle managers below them will thrive. Companies that have strong management development and succession processes in place tend to have smoother transitions. When executives move to other roles or leave the business, that ultimately has a cost but companies with sound talent management don't have to pay head hunters because they have a pipeline of leaders who have to move into positions rapidly and can assume those vacant positions.

Challenges and risks
Succession planning is a delicate process requiring foresight and considerable diplomatic skill. Another challenge is the difficulty in timing promotions. If the process is slow, there is a risk of losing a talented executive to a rival company – occasionally after a candidate has been developed for years.

Promoting someone too quickly represents a risk to the business and can create resentment and job vacancies that cannot be filled lower down. Some executives said they had challenges promoting executives over the heads of less-talented superiors. According to the CEOs, figuring out how to manage where you put an individual and where you make room for the people under them that truly do have potential to get to the next level is by far the biggest talent management challenge. ■

This article was extracted from a 2006 report by the Economist Intelligence Unit titled: The CEO's role in talent management: how top executives in ten countries are nurturing the leaders of tomorrow. The research drew on desk research and in-depth interviews with CEOs and COOs across a range of industries.

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Seni Adetu, Group Managing Director & CEO, East African Breweries Ltd.

Talent is the **PINNACLE** **OF ALL ASSETS**

By: CAROLE KIMUTAI
Photo By: EMMANUEL JAMBO

Talent management features prominently on the agenda of most CEOs around the world. Once only of concern to HR, it is now among CEOs' most pressing responsibilities. Strong talent management leads to greater workforce

productivity and other benefits and companies are increasingly realising that they cannot be successful unless they have a good strategy for developing talent. CAROLE KIMUTAI spoke to Seni Adetu, Group Managing Director & CEO, East African Breweries Ltd; on the role he plays in identifying and growing talent in his team.

In today's corporate world, the competitive battlefield is for the best people because they are the true creators of value. For organisations like EABL, talent management is among the top priority that is passionately driven by the CEO. This is consistent with EABL's majority stakeholder Diageo's global focus on talent.

A strategic activity

At EABL, talent management is a strategic activity. "From the employee proposition we aspire to deliver when hiring to the critical matter of retention and the ultimate outcome of long-term capability building, we ensure that the business is awash with quality talent to match our audacious ambition. Identifying, developing, and growing talent is a major focus area and in service of that, there are times we consciously recruit ahead of our needs, so that we can train or assign outside home markets strategically, without compromising the 'business as usual' deliverables," Adetu says.

But who or what are these talents that organisations and CEOs world over are so keen on developing and keeping? According to McKinsey, a US-based management consulting company, talent are employees whose contributions are vital to a company's ability to produce its products or deliver its service. Excellent talent refers to employees who produce an above-average amount of product and poor talent means those who do much less than average.

For Adetu, the talent management agenda should be led by the CEO. "I spend a lot of time with my executive management team talking about Talent. We do so in the context of succession planning and capability building. We do what we call "spotlighting" where we look at which talent within the organisation has the potential to grow and to what levels. We ensure they have mentors and we invest in their development. We also second staff to sister companies within Diageo. We invest time in really knowing our people, understanding their strengths and development needs, and work with them to craft very specific

highly customised career development programmes to suit those needs. The opportunity is really about spreading this activity more widely across the organisation," explains Adetu.

Mentoring is important because it overarches immediate job challenges and helps mentees navigate the organisation. EABL has systems and processes that enable them manage how talent grow within the organisation in order to fulfill their careers. "We want when you sign up to work for EABL, you sign up to live your entire career life as a "citizen" of EABL. Our intent is always to ensure that people first know what career opportunities exist for them within the organisation so that we can then actively support them to fulfil their career ambitions."

The leadership at EABL continues to encourage employees to own their careers. "In the past, employees would think their careers would be solely managed by their line managers. A line manager obviously has a massive role to play in career management, but how one grows in their career involves consciously working at it and causing the organisation to support them to achieve those career ambitions. We support line managers to have one-on-one conversations with their people regularly."

The organisation has a management process that enable the classification of all employees in the buckets of their levels of readiness for their next jobs. "So if they are ready today or in five years based on their skills, qualifications, and leadership capabilities, we classify them as such. Once that is in place, for those that we identify to be ready for new moves in a short period of time, we consciously lead the conversations to help them achieve that. This has worked very well as, increasingly, we see our leaders moving out to take up senior positions across Diageo and in different parts of the world, a recent example being our former Group Finance Director, Peter Ndegwa, who is now leading Guinness Ghana Breweries Ltd (a Diageo business in Ghana) as Managing Director."

There is a management cliché that business executives are fond of using: "Employees are our greatest assets." Seni Adetu cannot agree more. In fact to him, talent is easily the most supreme of all assets. "I have heard some multinational companies declare that their best assets are their brands. I have heard others say it is their reputation. There is nothing wrong at all with either of these except to emphasise that both (brands and reputation) are inevitably managed by people. For me, therefore, talent is the pinnacle of all assets that a company can ever hold on to." Explains Adetu, who has been at the helm of the multinational beverage company for over two years now.



Seni Adetu.

Retention strategy

Adetu is clearly aware that what most employees look for is the value they get from an organisation. "Employees will often look at value in terms of rewards and how they feel about the organisation." He says retention is as a result of a combination of things. First is to make sure that EABL has the right reward proposition in place, the second is having a leadership team that continually shows that it values its employees. "We put in conscious efforts to engage our employees through engagement initiatives. For example, we have an annual all staff conference whereby we sit together, review business performance and celebrate successes with all our employees. In other words, reward and engagement go hand-in-hand as it relates to retention."

EABL engages employees through connecting activities like annual staff conferences. During these forums they review the business and spend quality time on ways that make people feel engaged and connected. "It is always a unique opportunity to align all our people to the Company's vision and future. Above all we celebrate our successes. This holistic approach strategy, Adetu says, has greatly helped EABL retain its staff.

Another EABL strategy is conducting an anonymous value survey annually. This is conducted online by an independent consultant to measure how employees are feeling. It acts as a barometer for the management to pick areas of challenges. "We get people to express their feelings about EABL and look for things such as; why they love working for EABL, if they would recommend the company as an employer to their friends and family, if they would sign up to work for EABL "forever" and also

measure the percentage of people who say EABL is the company they will work for 'all their life.'"

For Adetu, the most important thing for him is when employees say that some of the issues that came out of a previous survey have been addressed by management. "The more we can do this, the more we see our engagement growing because an employee will for instance say, 'Last year, I said I didn't like something about the company and I am happy that that has been resolved. I love this company, I love the leadership.'"

The EABL executive team is measured on how they improve the survey scores annually. "Our year-end performance appraisal takes into consideration the performance from the value survey. So if a line manager who has delivered on the numbers but had an awful value survey report, could have his ratings compromised as a result."

Complementing the role of HR Even while taking the lead in talent management, how does Adetu complement the role of HR? "In the past we thought that HR was completely responsible for talent management. The new thinking is that the accountability for hiring quality talent is as much the responsibility of HR as it is that of the

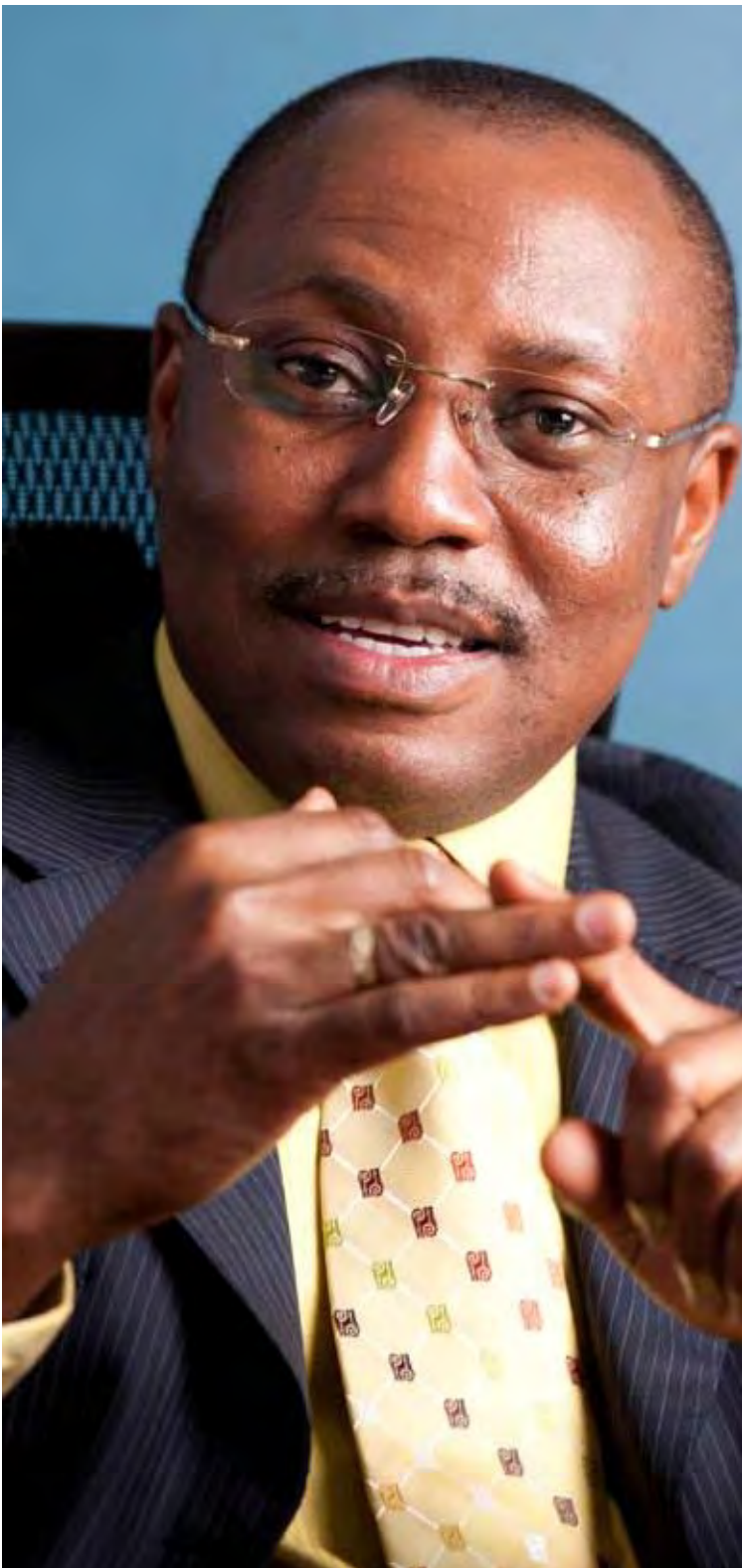
the line manager. Building long-term team capability for the future of EABL is, for each function, dependent very much on their line manager. HR is there to facilitate but they are by no means solely accountable for performance in this area."

Adetu has realised that since the CEO is accountable for the delivery of numbers, the tendency is that the persons closest to the CEO are usually the commercial people, which he says is not always right. "What I do is to raise the profile of HR and HR leadership where I can and ensure i give them adequate voice during executive management meetings. I also tend to have more meetings with HR than I do with most functions these days. It is people who deliver numbers so if you are a CEO who does not recognise how numbers are delivered, you miss the boat."

He says as a CEO, he supports HR to have them engage more with the line managers to provide systems and processes and capability to enable people manage their teams effectively. "Every line manager is the MD of the people that work for him/her because that is who they see every time and not necessarily the CEO or the HR. Engagement cannot be done by HR only. It is these types of conversations that the line manager should have with his team to help in talent management." According to Adetu, each function head should have the responsibility for managing their teams. "HR is a resource point. They facilitate, share best practice and cascade learning from other markets."

At EABL, each business unit has an assigned HR business partner. "The thinking behind this is that for every team of say 10 people, there should be a person assisting from a HR standpoint. But that does not take away the responsibility of the line manager managing talent in his or her organisation. The line manager would typically be clearer on what skills he/she needs more than what HR would ever know. That is a paradigm shift!" ■

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SENI ADETU'S Leadership Thoughts

You previously worked in West Africa (Ghana). What is the difference between the West and East (Africa) in terms of business environment, work ethic, consumer behaviour?

Other than the cultural differences, the consumer trends, behaviour and lifestyles are largely the same. The East African market is very dynamic and highly competitive. On the other hand, when I think about East Africa these days, challenges such as increased regulatory frameworks and economic volatility are of concern to me, even if those headwinds are more than balanced by the headroom opportunities from increased GDP growth, an emerging middle class, regional integration, and geographical expansion possibilities. The West has its opportunities too. The large populations like Nigeria would continue to attract business investment. At the end of the day, East or West, as businessmen, we are paid to craft strategies that enable us to win, and to execute them flawlessly.

Productivity in an organisation is dependent on a highly-motivated team. What role do you play as the MD in motivating your teams?

We have learnt to celebrate over time. We celebrate our achievements, successes and provide recognition to people. All that tends to motivate staff. However, most important to me as a leader is to provide inspirational and authentic leadership as it elicits trust, generates transparency, and respect for equity – “what people sow is what they reap.” If people trust the leader and know that in the company practically everything is given and done on merit, that is by far the best motivation a leader can give his team.

How do you inspire Generation Y?

I see myself as a member of the Gen Y group. The most important thing in managing this new generation of workers is to understand them – they are very mobile – they potentially want to change jobs every few years, they don't want to sign up for the conventions in the organisation - like hierarchy, wearing suits to work, they just want to be who they are. They are socially connected, every time they are out of the office they are actually in the office in terms of communicating with each other and there is therefore little wonder they are growing advocates of virtual offices. Once you know all of that, the ideal thing would be for you to leverage that to get the best out of them. This means ensuring the organisation has a well-defined work-life balance strategy. For this generation it is not about quantity but about quality, not about time spent in the office but about how they spend their time. At EABL we employ on average 25 graduates every year on our management trainee scheme. We create the mobility that they seek in their careers. We rotate them in roles every few months giving them the excitement they want, developing their minds to become more generalists and ensuring they are engaged.

Do you have a mentor? What role does he/she play in your professional life? How often do you consult him/her?

I have two mentors (and I hope they know). They are – Nick Blazquez, Diageo President for Africa, and Alex Cummings, Executive Vice President, The Coca-Cola Company; and my former boss – great friend and confidant. I speak to both whenever I need to - my relationships with them enable that. I have learnt immensely from these two gentlemen, both professionally and in the way they balance their work and family lives. I'm immensely lucky in that sense. ■



The CEO factor in talent management

In an increasingly competitive business environment, company executives now find themselves being proactive in developing and growing their outstanding employees. LEX LINDEMAN and HAN VAN DER POOL discuss the concept of future-proof talent development (TD) by explaining the role of the CEO and how the HR function can position itself as a strategic supporter, innovator and challenger of the CEO.

Photo: SHUTTERSTOCK

“At the end of the day you bet on people not on strategies,” is a famous phrase by Larry Bossidy, CEO, AlliedSignal. Research by Jim Collins in *“Build to Last and Good to great,”* highlights the essential role of talent management. Based on rigorous analysis, here is a clear link between company strategy and the talent management strategy.

The CEO factor

The responsibility of TD lies with the top executive. The CEO and the organisation’s top tier must be actively involved in developing future management. The top managers should be active as coaches, mentors or trainers to their teams. The CEO has a prominent and active role in education or action learning, which means talent linked to experienced leaders are utilised for critical issues of the organisation.

This can be made possible by connecting future talents with several top managers and assuming several career paths (think of career choice menus and career co-creation, instead of fixed career paths). The performance appraisal process and succession planning can be more flexible to allow rapid necessary adaptations in allocation of jobs. The approach should not only be top-down. Start by having a dialogue with talented employees to discuss the organisation’s future and their personal ambitions.

For clear, future-proof positioning of TD, it is important to make good and calculated choices. Involve the right persons at the correct moment. For example, role models and change agents in the field of organisation and personal development.

Working with talent

Talent development starts by selecting the talent. Learning agility is a critical factor here. The future talents need to be open to change, courageous, can handle ambiguity, be strategic thinkers, creative, and innovative. Selecting the right talent is an important issue during recruitment, assignment and promotions; if they don’t possess the behaviours above, they are not fit for the jobs ahead. The CEO plays a part by reviewing the selection process and by meeting the talented candidates.

Organisations must provide innovative answers to increasingly complex strategic issues. It is therefore, crucial, that talented professionals gain insight into the most important business issues. In many organisations, strategic management is strongly aware that something fundamental needs to take place to prepare the organisation for far-reaching external development in the years to come. These developments are existential by nature, such as surviving in an environment with increasing strong competition, the yet unknown but undoubtedly drastic consequences of reshaping of the markets, and the necessity for a sustainable economy. Subsequently, the awareness grows that a one-time action programme for TD is not sufficient because the organisation is expected to adjust constantly. This constant adjustment means continual learning which has to be organised. An important aspect of future-proof TD is to involve talented professionals and expect them to contribute to organisations’ long and short-term objectives.

This is only possible by combining TD with the strategy of the organisation and issues like business development, innovation, and sustainability. Not only are development investments made

when linking these business issues with individual and group development, but immediately value is created in several areas in the short and long term. Just by choosing this approach and marketing it actively within and outside the organisation, TD becomes an active accelerator for individual and business success.

Apart from linking topics, there are still more adaptations necessary for TD. It is not about using totally different instruments, but different allocation and the use of TD instruments like succession planning and development programmes. Also in the future, succession planning remains an important topic; more so if talent is more difficult to find. It is thereby important to arrange succession planning more flexibly and transparently.

Innovative programmes

It is logical that development programmes develop, challenge and support this behaviour. For the design and execution of programmes, this has a number of consequences. First, strategic organisation topics must be found back in the programme design. If customer orientation is important, ideally, customers should play an important role in the programme. If the organisation is aimed towards operational excellence it’s important that the programmes are also ‘lean and mean.’

Second, programmes should unite several perspectives. Ideally, it is about: developing substantive (knowledge and insight) and mental (behaviour/ attitude) competencies, developing skills to familiarise and reinforce themselves with the company values and standards which strengthen the strategically desired culture (company DNA). Third, make concrete contributions to the

development of the organisation and company results. Innovative development programmes will play an important role in future-proof TD and it is, thereby, essential that these programmes develop employees within the organisation context instead of next to it.

As earlier stated, these programmes have to link to the organisation's strategy and business issues. Apart from that, the approach and the interventions used should be more aligned to the (future) requirements of the organisation, and better aligned to the wishes of the future talented employees and/or independent professionals. Organisations must change more rapidly, become more flexible and operate more innovatively. This is also asked of the talented employees.

Nobody questions the importance of learning and developing talent. However, in these uncertain times, training and development activities are often put on hold or investments in training and development (T&D) are drastically reduced. One of the reasons T&D activities are cut or reduced is the difficulty of proving that development is a valuable and effective component of successful talent management. The challenge now is to attract, retain and develop talent in a more proven, effective way. This is becoming the guiding principle across companies, whether entrepreneurial, public, private or family owned.

Wider perspective

You can also look at a wider perspective than your employees. It is becoming necessary to bring talented, independent professionals who fit well in (the future) organisation. However, it is a waste of money and time if a position has to be filled urgently, to engage professionals on the basis of availability instead of whether they fit. Another important group is the company's alumni (former employees). In a network economy it is important to treat them as ambassadors because they influence many other talented employees within the organisation.

| Level of sophistication | Evolution to future-proof talent development to support the CEO (Model Bersin & Associates, 2009) |
|-------------------------|--|
| 4 | Future-proof TD approach Flexible and transparent process, clear link with strategy. Focus on all key positions. Innovative instruments. Strategic dialogue between top and HR/TD (business partner and challenger). |
| 3 | Renewed TD approach There is a link between strategy and TD. Besides focus on management, there is also attention to professionals, experiments with more innovative instruments. HR/TD are business partners. |
| 2 | Traditional MD/TD approach Including performance management, succession planning, development plans and programmes. HR facilitates the process, but is no real business partner. |
| 1 | Limited MD approach List of successors and sometimes, high potentials. No planning of personal development. HR plays a supportive role. |
| 0 | No MD/TD approach Possibly, there is only a list of candidates for the top of the organisation. |

To combine these perspectives, the use of an effectively calculated mix of instruments becomes important. The importance of blended learning and action learning will increase further. With the use of these tools' effectiveness, cost conscience, and connection are combined to the participant's wishes. Creative and impact-full approaches such as DILO (Day in life of), temporary changing roles, (social) training periods and pressure cooker meetings will replace traditional ways of working as training modules.

Level 4 talent development

An important aspect is to measure and evaluate the TD approach at several levels and from several (stakeholders') perspectives. It will thereby by means of plural look at assessing if ambition is effectively gained. This means a regular, strategic dialogue about the business objectives and the link with TD.

With the current economic times, it is important to mobilise all talent within and outside the organisation for business objectives. Combining organisation perspectives with individual perspectives guarantees sustainable results and prepares the organisation for the future. The CEO cannot rely completely on his/

her intuition alone; he/she needs the support of a professional HR as a real, challenging business partner.

Innovative answers must be given to strategic questions. It is, therefore, imperative that the CEO and HR know how to translate business questions into development solutions which produce results for the organisation.

When talent development is really embedded in the organisation and seen as an ongoing rhythm the total processes in an organisation will not only run more smoothly, but also more effectively, generating shareholder and stakeholder value. ■

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5 management practices