



**LEADERSHIP DRIVEN BROAD-BASED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
WITHIN THE ORGANISATION**

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There is an obvious disconnect between the global shortage of many of the specialist skills needed in organisations and the large numbers of graduates who struggle to find meaningful jobs (not to mention very high unemployment and under-employment rates in most developing and underdeveloped countries).

The talent development and recruitment arms of most organisations struggle with a never-ending challenge of developing and retaining skilled staff. It is a process that often seems overly expensive and even futile, when experienced staff up and leave too soon, before these organisations have benefitted from their investments in attracting and developing those staff.

There are a number of contributing causes to the high churn rate of skilled people in and out of many organisations, and the consequent difficulty of attracting, developing and retaining people with potential. They all point to the need for the CEO and the leadership team to take personal responsibility for driving skills development and career path shaping if there is to be any hope of a sustainable solution to this ubiquitous problem. This article identifies five key contributing causes to the problem, all associated with organisation leadership. It then considers how organisation leaders, with guidance and assistance from human resource specialists, can address them.

Five leadership contributions that are all too often lacking in organisations:

1. Personal involvement in skill development.
2. Promotion and Integration of coaching as a primary development process throughout the organisation.
3. Being coached and exposed to the coaching process and acquiring coaching skills.
4. Active involvement in developing career paths and options for all key staff.
5. Personal communication of the Vision to inspire passion and loyalty.

Reflecting on each of these essential leadership contributions, the following may be worthy of consideration:

1. There is generally an insufficient appreciation at CEO and Board level that the root-cause of the problem is most often too little personal involvement, commitment to staff development, and sharing of the organisation vision from the leaders themselves. Skills development and retention are not responsibilities that can be confined to human resources, and fixed by expenditure and effort through the HR function with talent development initiatives and recruitment alone. For example, business schools will typically attest to the fact that training and education programmes for executives are always more effective with the active and personally demonstrated commitment of organisation leaders. And in terms of demonstrated commitment, it is often true that the more senior the leader, the greater the positive impact on learning, attitude and even loyalty.
2. Staff at all levels in the organisation stand to benefit from regular coaching, both to enhance performance and results, and to realise human potential. The best coaches realise potential by building trust, valuing differences in personality and preference, and listening actively to frame development options and challenges. While coaching for performance and coaching for potential have many elements in common both are inadequately developed and practiced. Coaching is a meta-skill that needs to be developed much further in most organisations. To develop and retain skilled staff, a larger component of the performance assessment of leaders at all levels must be allocated to demonstration of effective coaching of staff for both performance and potential.

3. In order for senior managers and organisation leaders to coach effectively, they too need to benefit from being coached, and to learn the skills and techniques of coaching. Coaching for potential, as described above, goes further than a focus on performance alone, and requires an additional set of leadership skills that are associated with people development.

4. An extension of the coaching process is necessarily the dynamic development of clearly defined career paths and options within the organisation for each employee. There is a noticeable trend of de-linking line-management from the responsibility of career development. Organisations wishing to retain their best people need to provide career-path development options. They also need to inculcate a culture of encouraging and rewarding staff for engaging in ongoing development through taking on a variety of roles that broaden experience and facilitate competency development. Employees who have derived experience and capability from multiple roles in the organisation are often best positioned to contribute strategically to its development and growth. This is true for staff with both specialist and generalist role orientations. 'Career pathing' needs to be leadership-driven. It is part of the succession planning process, and essential for organisational sustainability.

5. The role of the CEO and senior executives to inspire passion and loyalty is often underestimated in organisations. Leaders are best positioned to influence the organisation culture and the attitudes of staff. The HR function can help implement the culture, but cannot change the culture of the organisation without the active involvement and commitment from organisation leaders. Line-management leaders need to regularly and personally explain and communicate the organisation Vision, and also periodically translate the Vision into a shorter-term set of stretch goals and objectives (these can be defined

as the organisation's 'strategic intent' at any point in time) that can be responded to easily and effectively by staff. Inspiring passion and loyalty necessarily also requires leaders to demonstrate the values embodied in the Vision through their actions and their interactions with staff.

The five key leadership contributions to talent development and retention all point to the same pressing need. Leaders of organisations need to own and drive talent development and recruitment initiatives, particularly for key staff. It is a truism to say that competent people are the primary key to organisational sustainability and competitive advantage. HR specialists can perform with great passion and expertise in skill development and recruitment, but without visible leadership, involvement and support from the CEO, the Board, and line-management, there is no guarantee or even much likelihood of significant success in winning the war for talent and building a people-centred brand that attracts and retains the best people.

About the author

Dr Grant Sieff is CEO of the IC Growth Group, a research, strategy and leadership development consultancy. He teaches at leading business schools as a visiting professor and senior lecturer. Grant has worked as a vice-president for Citibank in Australia and a partner for Accenture. He consults to leaders at the top levels of organisations across African continent and abroad.

IC Growth Group (icgrowth.co.za) has initiated an Africa-based research, market insight and strategy development online portal, dedicated to development and growth in Africa (africamarketinsight.co.za). Grant can be contacted at grant@icgrowth.co.za or on +2721 462 7902.