

Climb higher or jump off: why senior managers can't stagnate

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Research shows that although executives and senior managers may have had the right skills to climb the ladder, unless they are constantly developing new skills they'll soon fall down.

As organisations' business priorities change in response to market pressures, technological advances, and a shift towards sustainable business, it has become clear that the skills that help senior managers climb the corporate ladder won't keep them balanced at the top.

According to research by the US-based Centre for Creative Leadership, many managers and executives are voicing fears that the talent they have is not the talent they need to face the changing business world. The survey of 2,200 leaders from 15 organisations in three countries, found that the leadership skills in today's organisations are insufficient for meeting current and future requirements.

Dr Makgathi Mokwena, Programmes Director of the [Mothertongue Project](#) and convener of the [Executive Development Programme](#) (EDP) at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of business (GSB), said that nowhere is this more evident than in Africa, a changing landscape defined by uncertainty and complexity.

"Most people in senior management reach their positions based on some outstanding qualities that elevated them among their peers. It is expected that those qualities will be the foundation of how that person will perform in the future, but with the marketplace persistently shifting, what do leaders do when they find that the landscape they're operating in has changed around them?"

According to Mokwena, the answer lies in unlocking the skills to deal with change: "Just as medical doctors constantly need to keep up to date with advancements in procedures, technology and the like or face being made irrelevant - so too does senior management."

In response to the issues, the GSB is offering the EDP, an advanced programme for executives and senior managers that focuses on strategy, results-based leadership, change and reputation management.

"The EDP explores the best management practices and latest strategies for sustaining competitive advantage over the longer term. It provides an important opportunity to learn from other organisations and both broaden and deepen understanding of an ever changing SA - characterised by increasing complexity, cultural and diversity at board and operational level," said Mokwena.

Reviewed annually to ensure that the programme remains relevant in emerging markets and is cognisant of the increasing complexity in both the local and global market place, the programme covers a broad range of key management, strategic, leadership, change, and reputation processes.

"No-one can argue that the world of work has not changed dramatically over the past decade. Companies are more global and employee groups more diverse than ever before. Organisational structures are less hierarchical and more collaborative. And today's networked offices are full of technological distractions that would have been unimaginable to the 20th-century manager.

"These changes make it essential that senior managers stay current. They are the custodians of their organisation's future; if they don't keep growing and developing then neither will their organisation," said Mokwena.

The Executive Development Programme at the UCT GSB runs from 13 to 16 August. For further information visit: gsb.uct.ac.za/EDP.

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