

People savvy managers can make or break your organisation

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Managers who are able to manage relationships and conflicts in the workplace, who understand employees and are able to connect and communicate, addressing problems effectively, are in high demand in the global workplace - research finds.

The best managers and leaders are not necessarily the people with the top technical skills or the ability to speed read a financial report and interpret data, or even the best strategists or visionaries – instead it is emerging that the most effective managers are people who are great at connecting well with others, who are perceived as real listeners and communicators, and are able to support colleagues when necessary.

“Financial acumen and technical expertise are still rated highly, but managers with self-awareness and self-knowledge are increasingly being sought out as research shows that such managers are more effective in the workplace,” says Jenny Boxall, management development expert at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (GSB).

Boxall is the convenor of the Programme for Management Development (PMD) programme at the GSB, one of the school's flagship leadership development programmes that in 2018 will see its 100th intake of participants. The programme will also be offered for the first time this year at the GSB's Johannesburg office in Sandton.

GSB Director of Executive Education, Kumeshnee West, says that one of the reasons for the PMD's enduring success over the years – it is thought to be the oldest continuously running business short course in the country – is that it has been able to adapt to industry needs and the changing roles of managers in the workplace.

Today's working environment is changing at an exponential rate thanks in a large part to the rise of AI and digital technology, she says – and business schools have to keep up with this.

“These changes and pressures can cause high levels of stress and anxiety affecting productivity,” says Boxall. “Studies show that self-aware individuals are better at managing themselves as well as others. This is why we focus a big part of the programme now on self-knowledge, exploring how people communicate, how messages are interpreted and how this process can be improved upon.”

A [definitive study](#) by Korn Ferry analysts David Zes and Dana Landis shows that self-awareness is the most crucial development breakthrough for accelerating personal leadership growth and authenticity.

The study found that self-awareness was critical to leader success in the workplace as it helps to leverage potentialities. It also found that leaders who were not self-aware were not respected as much and suffered from a lack of credibility. Self-aware managers, on the other hand, enjoy more trust and respect from co-workers.

This has led many companies to actively seek out managers who are more emotionally intelligent and self aware. Former senior vice-president of people operations at [Google](#), Laszlo Bock, for example, said the company used to hire people based on their technical expertise but; “It turns out that that's absolutely the least important thing. It's important, but pales in comparison.” More significant, he said, was being able to connect, being accessible to staff members, listening, helping and supporting.

“While some people are natural communicators, many more benefit from guidance in developing these skills,” says Boxall. “By gaining insight into your own strengths and weaknesses and becoming attuned to your own blind spots, solid people

skills are developed that make us better at relating to others as well.”

It is especially important, she adds, that these skills are developed in managers at middle and senior level in organisations.

“These people occupy positions of tremendous importance in companies. They are the primary influencers of behaviour within organisations, they are jugglers of multiple functions in many directions and influence staff and frequently perform a make-or-break role in several areas. People savvy managers can improve productivity, profitability and sustainability – and that’s the bottom line.”

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