

Insights

MBA's



The South African Legal Profession An Insight for November 13 2014

SA has a well developed and sophisticated legal profession and its lawyers have won respect for their skills and professionalism. This feature will focus on the further development of the profession and challenges and opportunities it faces.

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SA in perfect position to lead economic engine of Africa

Programmes aim to equip future leaders with tools, skills and emotional intelligence to succeed in 2020 and beyond, writes **NEELS BLOM**

NO COUNTRY is better positioned to lead the economic engine of Africa than SA, says Steven Bluen, director and head of school at Wits Business School (WBS).

WBS is the Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Asked whether SA's business schools are up the task of producing adequately skilled and educated managers to meet the organisational challenges in the country and the rest of the continent, he gives an unqualified reply. "Absolutely. Our universities understand that responsibility and that opportunity," he says.

"The challenge for everyone is to grow from the 'me society' of the past 20 years to the 'we society' that will deliver inclusive and sustainable growth. The challenge of tomorrow's business school is not to teach yesterday's lessons, but rather grow the kind of leader who leads with a brain, heart and courage," says Bluen. An appropriate business education would balance the hurly-burly of the real world with educating professionals in the traditional academic purpose of "knowledge certain", he says.

"Our curriculum (in the Master of Business Administration) is designed to do both. We place great importance on being relevant. For example, we draw extensively on our case-study centre, the biggest in Africa, to provide teaching that is based in actual, real-life situations." WBS is the only business school in SA with a dedicated case centre. Its purpose is to bring real-world business challenges into the classroom to allow students analyse business processes "that is seldom



Picture: THINKSTOCK

generated using traditional teaching methods". The case-study centre has developed more than 140 cases on companies as diverse as AngloGold, SABMiller, Nando's, Discovery, Harley-Davidson, Avis, Massmart and Capitec Bank. The cases cover all areas of business and management including strategy, organisational design and development, entrepreneurship, internationalisation, operations management and human resources. WBS makes its cases available to academics and course facilitators and they are now at other South African and

At the heart of critical thinking is the ability to be innovative. Our courses ensure those who study with us develop the ability to see around the corner

international business schools. "Pragmatic research helps solve important societal challenges. It also opens the door to finding unconventional pathways to answers that have been hiding from organisations and leaders. Our customers are students but their customers are the leaders who are hiring and looking for the technical skills and emotional intelligence to succeed in 2020 and beyond." Bluen says WBS teaches people to be critical thinkers and how to anticipate events. "At the heart of critical thinking is the ability to be innovative. Our courses ensure that those who study with us develop the ability to see around the corner.

"This is just one example of how WBS helps individuals develop a 360° perspective. Another is in developing the skill of curiosity, wanting to understand not just the what, but also the how and the why." In addition to learning key technical skills, WBS graduates learn how to make values-based decisions, how to give feedback, how to coach, how to lead, how to network and how to be an

authentic leader. "We are committed to developing tomorrow's leaders," says Bluen. "To remain relevant we are offering programmes focused on the future. The business community wants us to arm future leaders with the tools, skills and emotional intelligence to succeed in 2020 and beyond, and that is exactly what our programmes deliver." "WBS is unlike any other school in Africa because it is not focused on yesterday or today, but on the future," says Bluen. "We have been reimagining our curriculum and our executive education offerings to meet the

We shape our world by leading ethically and responsibly. We take the longer view in our decisions and actions, putting larger interests before our own

leadership needs of 2020 and beyond. We have undergone a radical curriculum review to ensure that we are lifting the bar academically as well as meeting the needs of companies as articulated by their CEOs, many of whom are our alumni and form the largest network of business leaders of any business school in Africa."

Bluen says great leaders are great for many reasons, none more important than that they possess balance. "At WBS we build confidence without the attitude. We make decisions based on evidence and analysis, giving us the confidence to act without arrogance. We lead through trust and collaboration," he says. "The idea is for WBS graduates to grow beyond themselves. We believe we shape our world by leading ethically and responsibly. As stewards of our enterprises, we take the longer view in our decisions and actions. This often means putting larger interests before our own.

"At WBS you will learn how to speak to power and be able to constructively question the status quo. Our students learn when you feel something is wrong, how to question it. We lead by championing bold ideas, taking intelligent risks and accepting sensible failures. This means speaking our minds even when it challenges convention."

WBS has more alumni in leadership positions in Africa than any other university. "We are meeting tomorrow's challenges because our students know that coming to WBS means they are coming to a university that opens eyes, hearts, minds, doors in Africa. No one is doing a better job of preparing Africa's future leaders to lead," says Bluen.

"Ultimately, the mission is to develop leaders. This is true for most other top business schools, and it is undifferentiating. It is therefore critical we fulfil this mission in a way that is distinctively Wits. We have a set of deep assets that not only provide all the requisites of a top business school, but also distinguish us. This is why we articulate our purpose as developing leaders who redefine how we do business in Africa and throughout the world."



In Africa, the gap between the skills of the current workforce and the skills businesses need to achieve their growth plans is widening. Picture: THINKSTOCK

Struggle to find right people to do the job

ORGANISATIONS worldwide are expecting a hiring spree in the immediate future, but most fear they will not be able to find the skilled people to fill the vacancies to expand in Africa, a study released by consultancy PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) shows.

The study released in June this year shows that 96% of 1,300 CEOs at leading corporations across 68 countries are doubtful of the availability of skilled people on the continent. About 87% of the respondents hold this view about SA.

Commenting on the statistics Prof Walter Baets, director at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business, says the findings raise questions for business education. "Who is being trained, where and how? And why are not enough people gaining the necessary skills to be effective in Africa?"

The answers, from a business school perspective, are far from straightforward, he says.

"That Africa has an acute skills shortage does not come as a surprise to anyone. The World Bank estimates that 2.5-million more engineers and technicians are required to achieve Africa's key development targets.

"The skills shortage is linked to socioeconomic problems such as poverty, unemployment, lack of access to running water and basic services, poor infrastructure and poor primary and secondary-level education. In SA the Institute of Municipal

Finance Officers estimates that 73% of positions including municipal managers, chief financial officers and supply chain managers are not filled at local government level. And the Institute of Security Studies estimates that there are at least five protests in the country a day reflecting public frustration around poor service delivery and other poverty-related issues."

Gerald Seegers, human resources director at PwC Southern Africa, says the gap between the skills of the current workforce and the skills businesses need to achieve their growth plans is widening. Despite rising business confidence equating to more jobs, organisations are struggling to find the right people to fill these positions.

"Half of CEOs plan to hire more people in the next 12 months, meaning competition for talent will be intense at the same time as the battleground has been redrawn. Business leaders are looking for people with a wider range of skills than ever before. Gone are the days of lifetime careers. Chameleon-like employees who apply their skills whenever and wherever they're needed are now in high demand," says Seegers.

"Businesses need to get out of the mind-set that new skills equals new people. The most successful organisations will combine recruitment with developing their own people to be more adaptable to its

changing plans," he says. African economies have grown 5% a year over the past few years and the World Bank expects average growth to reach 7% growth by 2016.

"So how to get more people upskilled to the point where they can take advantage of this momentum?" says Baets. "One of the problems is that not many individuals in emerging market economies have access to the kind of finances required to study the necessary business courses at top business schools — this is increasingly being addressed by the rise in online learning options and other innovative ways of delivering education to more people.

"The other problem is that, no matter through what medium, business schools are potentially teaching students the wrong things," says Baets. At the recent European Foundation for Management Development held in Dakar, delegates seemed to agree that entrepreneurship was not something that could be taught and that introducing entrepreneurship at university or business school level might be entirely too late, he says.

"Rather than trying to teach entrepreneurship, we could do our economies good by training our students in entrepreneurship. (That means) fostering an attitude orientated towards taking action, responsibility and developing projects with a focus on business model innovation."



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Tough course is a 'life-changing experience'

LOCAL business schools hold their own in terms of standards and course content, says Gysbert Kappers, CEO of social business platform Wyztalk.

"There are the elite schools that are aspirational and costly and would be a great option if you have the funding and opportunity to attend. Overseas, the Master of Business Administration (MBA) comes with logistical complexities and a high price tag. "My decision to do my MBA at UCT's Graduate School of Business was for its focus on systems thinking. Not having studied for a while and also running a business meant that local suited me better, though it was not the predetermining factor; I wanted the opportunity to engage as part of a group on a continuing basis."

Kappers acknowledges the growth of online business education, but he says group and class environment is irreplaceable. "I certainly feel that you would not experience the same through an online degree. To the best of my knowledge, even online courses require blocks of learning and engagement. "It is a very difficult course to navigate on your own. The benefit of being supported by other professional students, shared learning, understanding different perspectives, and learning to work with diverse cultures, opinions and personalities in person is invaluable."

Kappers warns prospective students of the mass of material that they will need to master. "The key to completing an MBA is undoubtedly discipline. You have to quickly learn how to succinctly understand what you're being taught on the day and not get behind. This discipline extends to when you're off-module. I had to schedule at least three hours a day, seven days a week for my two years, outside of when we were together on campus which was often an 18-hour day," he says. "Studying for an MBA while working full time is an extremely tough decision: you have to be 100% focused and committed. If you make it through, it is one of the most rewarding and life-changing experiences you will have."

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