

Transformation isn't a programme - it's a way of life

 By [Werner Lindemann](#)

4 Jun 2018

Many people experience the mid-afternoon slump - the time when your blood sugar drops after a hard day at the office and fatigue sets in. All too many office workers will grab a sugary treat and a shot of caffeine to get a temporary boost of energy, only to collapse when their blood sugar drops again.



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A lot of corporate business transformation programmes are the equivalent of a doughnut and cup of coffee that give the organisation a spike of oomph and motivation that only lasts a few days. The challenge for corporate leaders is to make transformation stick – to turn it into a way of life, in the same way as regular exercise and a healthy diet can help you to keep your blood sugar and energy levels constant.

I have been looking at ways that I can drive transformation across my organisation in a way that is sustainable. My goal is to drive higher performance by ensuring that there is a continuous buzz, that people feel constantly engaged, enthusiastic and passionate about the workplace.

This is all about building an organisation with a culture that values innovation, diversity and growth – starting with deliberate design of the sort of business we wish to be and a roadmap that will help us reach our goal. I have identified three pillars in managing the transition to a business that is fit to compete in the dynamic South African business landscape.

Pillar 1: Climate

One of the major challenges corporate leaders face in transforming their businesses lies in managing the sheer diversity of the workforce. Not only do we live in a country with people from so many cultures and lived experiences, we also have a multigenerational workforce, with stark differences in working styles between young digital natives and their older peers.

I see diversity as a strength and value the different perspectives people from different backgrounds bring to a business and welcome people who can challenge the status quo. As I started the transformation, I hosted a workshop where colleagues spoke to each other about how they experienced history and the new South Africa.

I have sustained this with quarterly programmes, where people can learn about different cultures. I also ask people to build relationships with colleagues outside their immediate part of the business, so that they can get a broader view of the world. To drive a culture of innovation, we allow people to spend some of their workdays developing new ideas.

Pillar 2: Careers and succession planning

I am focussing heavily on designing our next-generation workforce and leadership. Retaining key skills, while bringing in new blood, is one aspect of this. You don't want to have too much attrition since that means losing valuable skills and institutional knowledge. But the business could also ossify without new people bringing new ideas to the organisation. An attrition rate of 8-15% a year is optimal.

Another element of this pillar's succession planning is that I have identified two potential people one job away and two jobs away from each senior and critical role in the business. The company support them with a leadership programme that includes training, skills development and mentoring.

Pillar 3: Continuous learning and development

The people are your company's only assets, and the company must invest in growing their value. I am constantly identifying gaps in the business, assessing where I need to build skills as well as achieve the right mix to exceed our broad-based black economic empowerment targets. I see my business partners as part of our extended workforce, which is why I invest in enterprise development.

What's more, I see a shortage of skills as an industry issue, so I am investing in programmes like In The Know Now, with the aim of keeping marketers and media planning professionals at the forefront of the latest industry trends while upskilling young media practitioners.

Closing words

Over the past decade and more, South Africa's media industry has experienced profound change as a result of new technology, a shifting political and social landscape, and changing consumer expectations. Mastering change and constant reinvention must become a way of life for media organisations that wish to endure and thrive – there is a lot more change in our industry's future.

ABOUT WERNER LINDEMANN

Werner leads Mediamark, South Africa's leading integrated, multichannel media sales house, as it continues its journey to create a converged sales capability that can help customers leverage mobile, video and content marketing, in combination with its exceptional traditional platforms...
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