

Growing pressure on managers calls for increased skills development

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As a consequence of the global economic crisis, more companies are getting fewer people to do the same amount of work. Often, despite their responsibilities being increased, managers are simply not equipped skills-wise to deal with the new level and areas of responsibility that are being placed upon them.

It is a trend throughout the world. According to the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), the ranks of middle managers have significantly declined over the past two years while their responsibilities have continued to grow. A recent survey by ASTD of 2,000 mid-level managers found that "only 11% felt well-prepared to handle their increased responsibilities and challenges over the next two years. That means that almost nine out of every ten mid-level managers lack confidence in their own ability to fulfil their job responsibilities".

Research conducted by the US-based Institute for Corporate Productivity further attests to the fact that managers are being stretched thin, as companies restructure in an effort to increase efficiency while expanding the number of direct reports a manager has. The research, released in September 2010, shows that the number of employees that managers are responsible for will continue to grow in the future; a situation for which many managers are ill-prepared.

"Companies looking to further flatten their organisational structures need to weigh efficiency and agility gains against disengagement and burnout among middle managers - or all managers, for that matter," said David Wentworth, Senior Analyst at the Institute for Corporate Productivity.

Bruce MacDonald, programme director of the Programme for Management Development (PMD) at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB), agrees, commenting that this is leading to employee dissatisfaction and decreased levels of productivity.

MacDonald says that it is vital that organisations recognise the importance of developing their managers and foster the ability to think strategically, lead change, create vision, and rally others around it.

In order to equip managers with the skills to increase their ability to deal with the additional responsibility and skills that are required, the PMD at the GSB aims to provide managers with heightened self-confidence in their existing competencies, and enhance their abilities in new areas in order to offer substantial return on investment.

MacDonald comments that research has shown that companies that develop their managers have a higher employee retention rate. "Replacing managers who have moved on is an expensive business, and investment in management development can easily pay for itself in reduced employee turnover".

The GSB's Programme for Management Development is not lecture-driven. "We believe that 80% of the learning should come from the individuals themselves; we encourage open debate, discussion and discourse, as well as the challenging of perceptions. This approach is particularly effective, considering the substantial experience that participants bring to the programme", he says.

"They are generally experienced functional managers; they come to us as specialists, and we equip them with the 'jack of all trades' perspective that is crucial at higher levels of management. General Managers are, by definition, generalists."

PMD is targeted at mid- to senior-level managers and is the GSB's longest-established management development programmes. PMD enjoys a repeat business rate of between 80% and 90%, a fact that suggests that regular supporters

perceive a great deal of value from their investment. Delegates are drawn from major corporations, both in South Africa and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa: a very rich and diverse mix, providing a deeply rewarding learning experience.

MacDonald's survey of 110 past PMD participants provided rich feedback, suggesting that the programme had achieved its objectives. 97% of respondents reported that the programme had been either 'completely successful' or 'largely successful' in providing them with an improved understanding of the nature, requirements and responsibilities of a manager's job. 96% believed that the course had given them substantially improved effectiveness as leaders through a better understanding of human behaviour and individual differences.

The next PMD runs from 28 August to 10 September. Contact Junita Abrahams on 021 406 1323 or SMS "PMD" to 31497 for more information.

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