

New research shows that few leaders practice what they preach

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The research, carried out by the American Management Association, surveyed nearly 2000 global executives for insights on leadership competencies and found that while most rated strategic thinking as the most important quality needed in a leader - this is not translating into good strategy on the ground.

Dr Grant Sieff, programme director of the new programme Strategic Thinking and Execution for Growth at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (GSB) says that the most remarkable thing about strategic thinking today is that it doesn't happen often enough, and that this does not bode well.

"We've come from a world where we used to plan for a stable future, but today everything is more volatile. And in this context strategic thinking and implementation are vital. Good strategic thinking uncovers opportunities for creating value and challenges assumptions about a company's value proposition, so that it can capitalise on these."

Dr Sieff says in South Africa, as in most developing economies, the volatility is more extreme but so are the opportunities. "South African businesses have the opportunity and tyranny of having to grapple with both the developed world and the emerging market. The problem with the developed world is that growth is slow, it's beset with recession, but on the other hand, the developing world, with faster growth rates, is beset with infrastructure challenges. We have the opportunity to strategically leap frog - to overcome the problems that may exist because of a lack of infrastructure - through the use of technology, or new products, or services. Our strategic playing field is bountiful. We just need to skill up the people in our organisations."

In response to this, Strategic Thinking and Execution for Growth at the GSB, assists business leaders reposition ideas and strategy as an integral part of their business models. "We have to strategise while we execute - deliver to customer needs in changing circumstances and engage with strategic option - it is a process orientation to strategy, which is what strategic thinking is all about in a changing world," says Sieff.

The programme focuses how organisation leaders and change agents can strategically direct, build ownership and alignment amongst their staff to implement change - using case studies, reflective questions, small group work and current strategic dilemmas. It will provide executives with the frameworks and tools needed to think and engage effectively on strategic challenges, as well as to implement strategy that builds organisational resilience and delivers results.

A core focus is on value transformation, from concept to communication and delivery.

"Business needs to wake up and grow the 4% of strategic thinkers to 100% - and not just at leadership level - everyone in the organisation should be a strategic thinker in order to deliver the best possible service and to lift the level of contribution," says Sieff.

Strategic Thinking and Execution for Growth runs at the UCT GSB from the 20-23 August. To apply, or for further information please contact Iona Gutuza at +27 (0) 21 406 1368 or e-mail iona.gutuza@gsb.uct.ac.za. Visit the website at www.gsb.uct.ac.za/strat.

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