

Homegrown managers are the way forward for SA

Simon Davies

IN TODAY'S fast-paced world the development timeline for new managers is shrinking. The old paradigm of managers learning how to manage just by watching their bosses, doesn't necessarily apply anymore.

The fact is that most workers get their managerial skills from watching their managers for a number of years. And in the past, when the pace of managerial turnover was slower, this method worked fine.

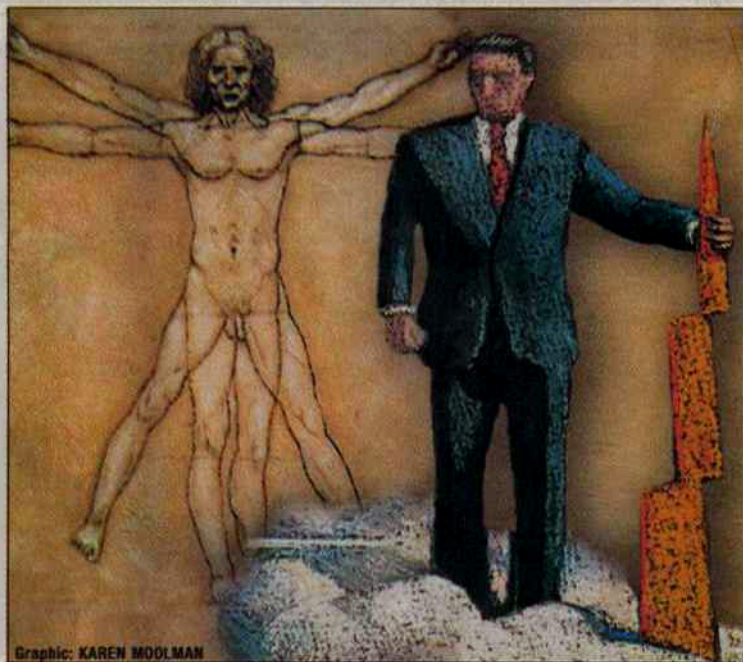
As the pace of transformation in SA accelerates, many companies are rethinking the way their front-line managers are developed. Indeed, while many companies are reporting chronic management skills shortages, smart players are looking within and proactively up-skilling their front-line managers.

The above, however, begs the question: why are people selected from the ranks of workers to become front-line managers (supervisors, foremen, etc) in the first place? The simple answer is they are usually good workers. But being a good worker doesn't necessarily mean an individual will be equipped to succeed in a managerial role.

Never before in SA have so many companies complained of a shortage of front-line skills. Quite often though, these organisations are ignoring the underlying problem, and in the process setting themselves — and their new generation of managers — up for failure.

Often newly appointed managers receive development training, which is undoubtedly helpful. However, there is a world of difference between training and coaching. Imagine being expected to learn how to drive a car simply from classroom training.

Front-line coaching is about



Graphic: KAREN MOOLMAN

teaching managers to observe the dynamics of their workplace while also providing them with the tools and confidence to review and influence team performance as the work day progresses. Indeed, it is about empowering the individual to make those knowledge-based, minute-by-minute decisions that make the difference between average and outstanding team performance.

Often, this involves not just the "know-how" but also the "know-why". Once front-line managers understand this they are less likely to revert to old ways of doing things; less likely to act like a worker and more likely to act like a manager.

Direct coaching for managers is undoubtedly not cheap, which explains why it is crucial to link front-line coaching to tangible business

outcomes and rewards.

For example, what would a 15% productivity boost add to your bottom line? When you use front-line coaching to achieve a specific financial or operational outcomes, the results pay for themselves while you are up-skilling your team.

In our experience results of a 10%-20% improvement in productivity are not uncommon.

Undeniably, the up-skilling of workers is a priority for most organisations today. So, the next time you hear someone complaining about a lack of managerial skills; remember the saying — it is a poor artisan who blames his tools.

■ Simon Davies is a principal at Partners in Performance International SA.