



The High Performance Movement



Elevating performance standards and service delivery in Namibian business. Brought to you by the Harold Pupkewitz Graduate School of Business (HP-GSB)

Africa's Brains trust: winning the battle on home ground

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The thorny issue of the dairy import legal battle stings the same way it does when a favourite soccer team loses on home ground. It is a complex issue that calls for the team, or country, to bring together its strongest players and apply itself to solving the matter at hand.

The bullying tactics many African countries are subjected to, especially in matters of trade, are not just because our industries are underdeveloped. One of the main issues is the much talked about brain drain, the depletion of Africa's brains trust that sees our best and brightest minds solving foreign problems and neglecting our own.

The essence of the soccer team losing on home ground analogy is simple: we need all of Namibia's most talented individuals to be right here in the country, collectively dedicating themselves to developing Namibian solutions to Namibian problems. There are many instances where African countries are not playing at their optimum strength; we are doing our best, but we could do much better if the African brains trust in the diaspora were applying their minds to solving African problems. If we are to succeed as a continent and indeed as



a country, we need to have all of our best players on the field.

In Africa, we struggle to retain our most talented professionals. The question is, why? When it comes to making decisions about the education of their children, every family makes the best possible choices under the given circumstances. Unfortunately, that decision sometimes means that the top 20 percent of our matriculants - the highest scorers - will be sent abroad for tertiary education and as a consequence each year we lose our best and brightest minds. However, we cannot blame parents for a decision made in their children's best interests. How do we address this problem? The intuitive response is either to penalise or incentivise

those families; in my opinion neither of these approaches is likely to be successful. Rather, I suggest, we need to change the nature of the game. When we change the game, old assumptions become redundant and new decision choices become viable. European football of 30 years ago was a monolithic affair, very physical, relatively slow with attack strategies based on the long-ball up the middle; players like Messi and Ronaldo would have probably spent most of the season on the bench. Now football is creative, played at a blistering pace and attack strategies start anywhere on the field. The game is still football, but not as we know it!

One of the many consequences of losing our best and brightest at tertiary level is that most of the young people who go abroad will stay there. The truth of the matter is that they will spend their most productive years (early 20s and 30s) solving another country's problems. If we can at least get them back into Namibia to study at tertiary level and spend their most productive working lives at home, we will have more players on the field. A combination of internationally educated foreigners (attracted to Namibia) and locally educated talented Namibians working round the clock to solve Namibia's own problems will inevitably increase the competitiveness of the country.

So how do we change the game? In two ways: Firstly, by changing the perceived quality of tertiary education within Namibia we need to be seen as competing with the best on the continent and even globally. This is one of the reasons why the HP-GSB is competing with the best across Africa and creating an international standard of education that will be enviable; that way we can make it attractive for high profile students seeking further education to pursue their studies within the country. One of our MBA students told me she was 'comparing notes' with a student colleague who was attending one of the top three schools in South Africa. The SA student was feeling quite good about her choice until she heard our fees were a third of the fees she is paying (never mind airfares and accommodation); and regarding course quality, we have internationally-rated academics with visiting lecturers from all over the world including SA. Secondly, we must create the environment in which these young vibrant professionals want to work; this is not simply about pay and conditions of employment but making space for these young minds to really thrive. This will be really changing the game!

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