Competency Based Leadership Recruitment: An Analysis and Comparison of Advertisements

Recruiting leaders with the necessary depth of experience and breadth of vision together with suitable competencies is a daunting challenge for organizations. The quality of leadership recruited is determined from the onset by the way organizations position themselves and the lingua used to attract the right caliber candidates.

In this week's column I look at the recruitment of leaders through advertisements in Botswana and elsewhere. The article will examine the extent to which advertisements are derived from or reflect approaches that are widely known and which are likely to reflect current, more generally accepted conceptualizations of leadership qualities.

Comparisons will be made between the practice in a European country and Botswana. The local practice was established through research conducted by the writer utilizing content analysis on advertisements placed with one of the popular weekly newspapers between January and August 2008. The research covered such positions as Managing Director, Chief Executive Officer, General Manager, Director, and senior management posts in medium to large organizations.

Studies by Hogan et al (1994) and Howard (2001) prove that 30 to 60 percent of Chief Executive Officers (CEO) are prematurely ousted from their jobs thus costing organizations billions of American dollars each year. Given this high failure rate it is critical that the recruitment of leaders becomes more effective.

Leadership Competencies sought in United Kingdom

In a study conducted by Hartog, Caley and Dewe in the UK in 2007 the researchers found that in general "people oriented" and "transformational" terms are used far more than terms describing "task oriented" or "transactional" qualities. They also found differences between advertisements for CEOs and the lower level leaders and attributed these to the difference in hierarchical levels and the magnitude of the leadership responsibilities of these roles.

The use of this vocabulary is in line with the most influential streams of leadership theories which revolve around transformational versus transactional leadership, task versus relationship oriented leadership behavior and leadership traits. The research by Hartog, Caley and Dewe gives 10 most popular words in order of importance from the sample of 180 leadership word/phrases. These are leader/leadership skills, communicator/communication skills, interpersonal skills, influencing skills, proven track record, inspirational/inspire motivator/motivational skills, strategic/strategic thinker, vision/visionary, and management skills in this order.

These findings generally reflect the emphasis on transformational leadership in contemporary literature. The study also identified the use of leadership traits such as truthfulness, ethical behavior, integrity, honesty, fairness, teambuilding, development skills, empathy, and respect.

Botswana Leadership Lingua

An analysis of the contents of advertisements placed with one of the more popular weeklies in Botswana for leaders such as CEOs/Managing Directors, Directors, General Managers, and other senior managers shows that most advertisers in Botswana seek the same leadership qualities as sought in the United Kingdom in their advertisements. The advertisements reflect an awareness of the trend towards competency based recruitment. Some advertisers however do not articulate behavioral competences as they are content with spelling out the technical competencies only.

The competencies cited in advertisements for leaders in Botswana include; communication, analytical thinking, team building, business orientation, decisiveness, assertiveness, results focused, interpersonal skills, attention to detail, influence and impact, leadership, customer service, integrity, relationship building, problem solving and innovation. The traits of honesty, fairness, empathy, and respect are not included in the list of requirements. This is surprising considering that these traits encapsulate the Botswana national ethos of *Botho.* The writer also considered the vocabulary used in recruiting Human Resources leaders and found gaps between local and developed world practice.

Human Resources (HR) Leadership Competencies

An analysis of the advertisements for HR leadership positions appearing in the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) People Management Magazine of July 2008 reveals interesting insights. Employers in the developed world are seeking senior HR practitioners with the following competencies; persuasion and influence, diversity management, team leadership, change management (positive and not downsizing), commercial acumen, communication, innovation and strategic orientation. The less common requirements include political acumen, *numeracy*, business mindedness, and business partnering. The last competency is derived from Dave Ulrich's "three legged stool" Human Resources model of corporate leadership which is backed by business partners, specialists, and service centers.

An analysis of the few advertisements for senior HR practitioners in Botswana reflects the following requirements: results focus, analytical, proactive team leadership, innovation, interpersonal skills, communication, influence and impact, decisive and assertive.

Gap Analysis and Recommendations

Advertisers ought to consider placing emphasis on such leadership skills as influencing, inspiring, motivating, strategic thinking, and visionary skills. In addition, traits like integrity, honesty, fairness, empathy, respect, and spirituality should also be considered. For the Human Resources leader business orientation and acumen as well as business partnering skills ought to be elevated to be part of the subset of key competency requirements.

Aligning the leadership competencies we seek with "best practice" as articulated in the literature does not provide an adequate substitute for the development of an African leadership competency framework that is rooted in the culture and psyche of its people. Until we develop a truly *Afrocentric* leadership model that embraces concepts like *Botho* and *Ubuntu* the potential of Africa's leaders and followers will remain dormant waiting for the right key to unlock it.