

The future of the COMPANY



What will keep the corporate organisation ticking in future? FLORENCE DE VRIES finds out which issues the leaders of tomorrow are tackling today.

No organisation is an island. With the impact of globalisation and a defined focus on social responsibility across the world, the companies of today, and indeed their leaders, have had to rethink and broaden their *raison d'être* in order to embrace more than just the bottom line in aiming to become the companies of tomorrow.

In 2005, an international call for a specific focus on responsible leadership was made when the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) extended invitations to various business schools and institutions to participate in an initiative which asked one basic question: What constitutes a responsible leader? At that time, some 21 companies and business schools took hands in what has become known as the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI). Three years on, more than 34 such institutions, including the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB), have joined, and membership continues to grow.

According to Professor Anders Aspling, chairperson of the GRLI, the corporate model of the 21st century must constitute a diverse structure. And one important aspect for such organisations is to have global representation.

To this end, organisations from all continents are now enjoying representation in the GRLI initiative. "We're looked upon as a laboratory...an avant-garde group of sorts," says Aspling.

The GRLI, which does not intend to grow its membership to over 100 members, sees itself as a small group intent on making a large difference, by tackling pertinent issues which underscore the role of companies – and their leaders – in a global economy.

Companies and business schools belonging

to the initiative play the key role in developing the leaders of tomorrow.

According to Aspling, the over-arching emphasis of the GRLI is to consider how the laws of interdependence and interconnectivity are creating the climate in which companies operate today.

"Where, traditionally, businesses have focused primarily on aspects such as profits, we want to address other, more meaningful aspects," says Aspling. "Such facets include addressing the issue of diversity, as well as developing a culture of societal awareness within companies. Companies should have these issues high during their conceptualisation processes, and they can only start being integrated into the DNA of a company if managers are aware of them," he says.

With these key aspects in mind, the USB is collaborating with other international business schools in establishing a new business development programme – "Developing the Company of Tomorrow – Today" – under the auspices of the GRLI.

"Business schools should be leaders in the fields of sustainable leadership and development, corporate governance, business ethics and corporate responsibility," says Daniel Malan, senior lecturer in Business Ethics and Corporate Governance at the USB.

Malan makes the point: "Part of the process to remain at the forefront is to network with leading global initiatives, of which the GRLI is one. Through its participation in this initiative, the USB is making a contribution to international dialogue, and is also able to bring back the learning from these discussions into the classroom".

Professor Laetitia van Dyk, head of the USB's Centre for Leadership Studies, agrees, saying of the Sustainable Leadership component of the USB MBA programme: "This component is of value to high potential individuals on

a personal level and to their organisations. Individuals who fit this networking profile are the newly emerging, influential leaders in companies."

The overall approach of the GRLI initiative, according to Van Dyk and Aspling, is both more holistic and entrepreneurial than traditionally understood business methods.

Specific issues that are addressed by the initiative include transforming strategic thinking and developing partnerships across boundaries. □



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Contact the Company of Tomorrow Programme

If you are interested in applying to attend the Company of Tomorrow Programme you are invited to have an initial discussion with one of the programme directors, Bjorn Larsson or Nick Ellerby. Their details may be found at: www.companyoftomorrow.org. For more information about the GRLI, visit www.grii.org.