

African leadership feels wind of change

Eskom forum presents opportunity to examine management styles and forge one appropriate to the continent

Penny Haw

THE second annual Eskom African Business Leadership Forum will take place at the Sandton Sun International Hotel on October 13-15, bringing together leaders from the public and private sectors of 19 African countries.

The theme of the forum is leadership for prosperity and the objective is to discuss leadership issues and policies, and share experiences about challenges confronting the continent.

Leadership and management styles will inevitably once more come under scrutiny and delegates — including prominent business managers, academics and politicians — will have the opportunity to consider current developments and trends in African leadership.

Have the continent's leaders, for example, moved away from an "X style" of management (an autocratic approach) to a "Y style" of leadership (a participatory method), in terms of management theorist Douglas McGregor's theory X and Y hypothesis on management?

McGregor's philosophy says that X managers believe that people are inherently lazy, need to be told what to do and will work only when pushed. Y managers, on the other hand, believe that people are self-motivated to perform work that is satisfying to them.

These leaders feel that if they provide a good environment, the employee can be successful, learn new things, use their creativity and accept responsibility for helping the organisation succeed.

Stanley Subramoney, the deputy CEO of PricewaterhouseCoopers southern Africa and one of SA's foremost advisers on empowerment initiatives and intra-Africa trade, is among the speakers who will address the 2004 forum. He believes that the event is an ideal opportunity to discuss the need for Africa's leaders to become more agile, proactive and less reactive in their style of leadership.

"While the winds of change have definitely begun blowing across the continent and there are impressive examples of proactive and visionary leaders in some African countries, there are

LEADERSHIP STYLES THAT GET RESULTS

According to Daniel Goleman, Harvard Business Review:

- **Coercive**
Demands immediate compliance, and drives staff to achieve.
- **Authoritative**
Mobilises people towards a vision and works best when changes require a clear direction.
- **Affiliative**
Creates harmony, builds emotional bonds and is effective in healing rifts.
- **Democratic**
Forges consensus through participation.
- **Pacesetter**
Sets high standards of performance and gets results from highly competent, motivated teams.
- **Coaching**
Develops people for the future to improve long-term strengths.

others who remain trapped in archaic and traditional management styles," says Subramoney.

He believes we need to transform the African landscape from

one that is dependent on others and accepts handouts, to a self-sufficient and thriving region.

This approach requires a "new breed of leaders... and a modern,

democratic Africa that moves beyond narrow nationalism to embrace a vision in which Africans support each other and achieve change together".

Leadership is individualistic and circumstantial and, as such, African leaders should develop their own distinctive management style that is Afro-based, modern, responsive and in tune with the challenges and dynamics of the continent.

Subramoney suggests that our past gives South African leaders a base on which to build more a energetic leadership style for the future. "We are in a unique position and have a diverse nature in terms of the population.

"The challenges of where we have come from have made South African leaders very sensitive to the whole issue of diversity. It has forced leaders to think beyond the traditional ways and embrace the best that different cultures have to offer," he says.

On the other hand, he believes that while South Africans are very critical of productivity levels in the workplace, we invest too little in developing skills and human

capital. "I would like to see more value-added programmes addressing worker competency," Subramoney says. "Government's macro policy is laudable but industry needs to take greater advantage of initiatives such as the Setas (sector education and training authorities)."

Improved competency through training, and the advent of a proudly African style of leadership, will see "leaders emerge from a crowd".

"Once we have identified these leaders, we need to put a development programme around them. It is important to nurture, groom and invest in leadership. This is all we have for the future. The programme should be locally designed and yet mindful of the fact that we exist in a global village. We need an Afro-based leadership style and not a copy of an European programme," he says.

The main sessions of the forum will tackle leadership for transformation, leadership case studies, leadership in business, leadership by example, leadership tools, and a business opportunities workshop.