

celebrating excellence in organisations

2006/7

CEO

special edition

BWA Businesswoman of the Year 2006
Corporate Category:
Gloria Serobe, Chairperson: WIPHOLD

BWA Businesswoman of the Year 2006
Entrepreneur Category:
Angela Dick, CEO: Transman

benchmarking

innovative leadership

SA's Top Businesswomen

5th edition





Suzanne Ravenall, Group CEO

Her statement is more than borne out by the fact that the company she founded in 1997 now offers performance improvement and business transformation solutions that are considered three years ahead of the market.

If one is going to create the future, execution becomes a critical issue as it converts the vision into reality.

"With increasing competition innovation becomes critical," she says. "But innovation is something that you must make a way of life within the organisation. It's not just about keeping ahead of the game but about how we continue to apply efficiency to our organisation to make it run better at a lesser cost, how we reduce re-work and how a process or department can run better for the client. We need to ask the right questions every day."

At Beyond Outsourcing innovation is made live at every level through the strategy and procedures of the organisation.

The strategy, incorporated in the vision, mission and values, is further extrapolated into a balanced scorecard for the whole company. From there it is taken into people's job profiles where competencies, accountabilities and responsibilities are outlined.

"For each role there is a checklist that has been compiled by people who have done the job before," notes Ravenall. "This adds

creating the Future

by Cheryl Bannatyne

"You can't predict the future but you can create it!" states Suzanne Ravenall, Group Chief Executive Officer of Beyond Outsourcing, with absolute conviction.



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Performance Improvement
Predictable Outcomes

to our knowledge-based management system as it is updated every quarter and a new person coming into a role can hit the ground running – knowing exactly what is expected of them."

Innovation is emphasised throughout this system and is part of the strategy as well as the accountabilities and responsibilities of every person. "It must be there from top to bottom," reiterates Ravenall. "People need to understand their role to innovate and it must be measured or it becomes theory without execution. Innovation can also get lost when people come up with great ideas but they are never pushed through the ranks to be implemented."

Beyond Outsourcing has a system that allows ideas to be logged, to be put through a process of approval and then to be implemented. However, Ravenall emphasises another ingredient for a successful innovation culture and that is brutal honesty. "You

can't have one without the other," she says. "People often come up with great ideas but they are squashed because the crucial questions are not asked – like why have we always done it this way before and why can't it change?"

Workplace forums have proven a very successful means of generating new thinking at Beyond Outsourcing. Representatives from various key departments meet regularly in these forums to talk about a wide range of issues. The forums have a clear statement of purpose and they are not just for discussing issues but have a remit to act on behalf of all stakeholders. This has fostered open and honest communication that has led to many changes.

The Right Leadership

Leadership plays a vital role in facilitating innovation as most good ideas come from the ground level where people are working daily with the practical issues. "Leadership needs to foster an environment of openness and of allowing people to have access to tools, information and people in the organisation," shares Ravenall. "They need to be able to talk about things that are not working well and further to push innovation from the bottom up. This means that every manager needs to also have or develop strong leadership skills - management is about operational control on a day-to-day basis while leadership is about looking to the future, guiding people in a direction and fostering an environment that people can succeed in."

Having the right leadership starts with employing the right people and Ravenall notes that the processes used at Beyond Outsourcing are extremely stringent, involving technical assessments, behavioural assessments and management testing. Having recruited a person all the information from this testing is pulled into a personal development plan as well as being populated into a talent management framework, together with quarterly performance reviews.

"This allows us to see where every single person fits into the organisation based on their potential and their performance," says Ravenall. "It allows us to see the bright shining stars that we want to push through the organisation as fast as we can, and we make sure there are fast track development plans in place for them."

Much training in leadership today focuses on behavioural change and Beyond Outsourcing believes in testing the way people think, as thinking drives behaviour and behaviour drives output. But as with innovation training must also be measured.

"The training we do is very outcomes based and that is key," emphasises Ravenall. "Training is fantastic but if you don't have a pre-assessment and post-assessment and can't tell what your return on investment is going to be, then why do it. Everything we

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do is competency based and linked back to a return on investment in some shape or form. We want to see change for the better."

In addition there is a lot of on-the-job training. Everybody in the company has access to a huge knowledge-based management system that outlines all the processes of how every aspect of the company runs. With the recent introduction of the Harvard e-learning suite, each person can therefore take responsibility for their own development and learning.

Ravenall is encouraged by the fact that a lot more investment is being made in training in South Africa but expresses concern about whether it is being correctly targeted or measured. "We also try to teach what it will be like to be in leadership through talking about it and modelling it in our own leadership," she says.

Ravenall doesn't limit this to her own organisation but shares her experiences and advice freely, especially assisting women through various speeches and programmes. In this way she also contributes significantly to the creation of a greater future for the country.