

Interface

Setting Black advancement strategy

J.U. Badenhorst

Chief training officer, Agricultural Development Corporation of Bophuthatswana (Agricor), P.O. Box 1, Mafikeng 8670

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When setting a Black advancement strategy three factors must at all times be kept in mind. Firstly, one must bear in mind the attitude and perspectives of the people one is dealing with. Secondly, the human resources needs must be clearly defined and, thirdly, one cannot ignore the political factors involved.

In the Southern African context race relations have a long and, in many ways, a complicated history. A certain perception of the white man towards the black man has arisen and vice versa. This has led to a generalized image existing in both the minds of Whites and Blacks about the other's personality, habits, ability, intelligence, work rate, etc. In most cases these images are misconceptions, and in almost all cases they are stereotyped and lack any real scientific proof.

The second factor is human resources needs. One cannot ignore the fact that to continue along the ways of the past will lead to eventual economic disaster because of the need for skilled manpower. Whites can no longer supply the amount of manpower necessary to maintain a sound economic growth rate and black people must, therefore, be educated and trained to move into areas previously reserved for 'Whites only'.

Political factors always seem to crop up when speaking on Black advancement. The point is that labour relations, manpower-development and legislation are to a large extent controlled in the political arena and one must, therefore, work within a certain framework.

A detailed discussion on Black advancement strategy is too wide a topic to discuss in a single paper. I would, therefore, like to concentrate on an aspect of this topic, namely, the promoting of black workers into posts previously occupied by Whites only. To table this topic, I shall explain the situation at Agricor, and hope that our experience can be of value to others. This paper must, therefore, not be seen as a scientific document but rather as a working paper related to practical experience.

Agricor is a Development Corporation founded and functioning in Bophuthatswana. All discriminatory laws have been abolished in Bophuthatswana. In most cases training schemes are designed to help promote Tswana citizens into all forms of jobs available. The President of Bophuthatswana, Chief L.M. Mangope, has on many occasions stated that Bophuthatswana is a multiracial country with room for any person. No restrictions

against Tswana citizens are, however, tolerated. These mentioned factors play an important role in the training situation at Agricor. To illustrate this, a few general figures are given in regard to the Corporation's manpower needs.

In the area of dryland maize production Agricor intends expanding by 400 000 ha at the rate of between 10 000 and 20 000 ha per annum. For this purpose approximately 10 managers are needed annually and 200 in total. For irrigation schemes we need 30 managers and for extensive cattle projects 330 managers. For intensive animal husbandry projects the Corporation needs another 60 managers. These figures indicate that we need between 15 and 20 managers annually until at least the end of the century. These managers we need must, however, be a special breed of man. To give you an idea of the responsibilities of such a man, let me explain in brief the functions of a manager on a dryland maize production scheme.

A manager will have approximately 2 000 ha under his supervision. This implies that he will work with production aids to the value of R2 million annually. This manager is not in charge of the farmers in his division. He must, through good communication and leadership, become the natural supervisor and be accepted by these farmers in order to achieve production. His only weapon should be his knowledge and natural leadership abilities. He can, however, control the production aids to ensure maximum production without the wastage of capital.

To get enough good managers was a big problem which had to be solved. Two basic options were open to the Corporation: import the necessary skilled labour; or train the local people.

In both the mentioned solutions costs would be high, but in terms of manpower utilization and the mentioned political factors a much stronger argument could be made for training the material available. If the necessary skilled labour had to be imported this would not solve the problem in the long term simply because the stage is now being reached in Southern Africa where skilled labour, especially in the form of white people, will become very difficult to obtain because of shortages.

The solution to the problem was therefore obvious. Local people had to be trained. This represented a big challenge to training in general because of the following reasons:

- Acceptable and well-screened black people had to be found despite a somewhat negative attitude among skilled Blacks in general towards agriculture.
- The question of how present white employees would accept Blacks moving into similar positions to those they had solely occupied up to the present time.
- The problem of how black people would react and cope in these new positions.

These problems are generally faced by all companies embarking on a Black advancement programme.

A solution to this problem lay basically in the following programme, as illustrated in Figure 1. It must, however, be kept in mind that there is no final remedy, and adjustments can and probably will be made to this model.

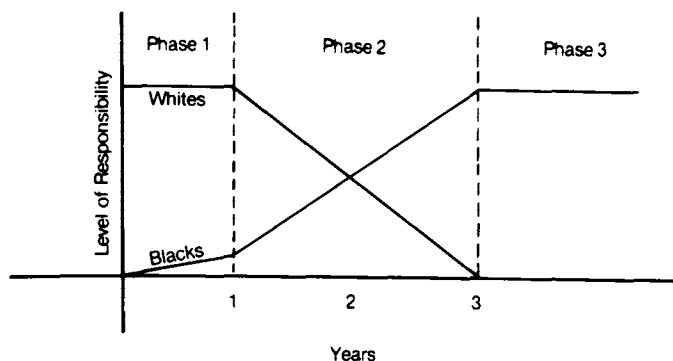


Figure 1 The Black advancement programme.

- Phase One:** Recruitment, selection and training of suitably qualified black staff. At the same time Agricor negotiates and trains white management to accept these new black managers.
- Phase Two:** Placement of black managers and allowing white management to give them in-service training to enable the new managers to move into a more senior management level.
- Phase Three:** Gradual withdrawal of white managers and promotion or transfer of these managers to new or larger projects. The black managers now have to accept in full their new responsibilities.

This form of training can be criticized but the following may explain why this method was used: A general approach among trainers is to put Whites and Blacks together in the training and working situation. This is, however, more suited for basic in-service training courses where Whites and Blacks are doing the same job and are brought in for advanced or job improvement training. When starting to train a person from scratch I believe this form of training can lead to problems because a gap in education and background exists between Whites and Blacks. This gap can be wiped out through training, but when Whites and Blacks are simply thrown together, this can lead to serious problems.

I believe that it is risky at this stage to put Whites and Blacks together at the same level of management in jobs where this has not been done previously. Select and train your Blacks well and first let them prove themselves before expecting them to compete with Whites. One can never ignore the Whites' feeling of insecurity and one must compensate for this when starting on a Black ad-

vancement programme. After a number of years these stages can be abolished. The white and black people should then have grown accustomed to this situation. I want to stress that competition, at an early stage, will do more harm than good. During the three stages you also make the white manager aware of his importance by actively involving him in the training scheme.

In general our training programme is, therefore, aimed at moving black employees into more senior managerial positions. When undertaking such a training scheme one must give the black trainee a solid base on which he can build his future career. We often see the situation created where a black (and in many cases a white) employee is told that he has now become a manager. He is given a posh office and told to start managing. When he fails it is always his fault. We must accept that the black man comes from a different environment and world, and is expected to function in the 'white man's world' which he does not understand. He can be taught general work but once in a managerial position other factors start to take over. We, in other words, force our world down his throat and if he does not want to swallow it he is considered useless and unsuitable. If we want him to accept our system we must 'sell' it to him. This is where achievement motivation training plays such an important role. In these achievement motivation programmes the trainee undergoes experiential learning about the values, economic and human interactions, responsibilities and time perspectives of the world he must enter or has entered, but does not understand.

The course we give our trainees has a duration of nine months and includes the following subjects:

- Accountancy and Financial Management
- Personnel Management
- Human Communications
- Management
- Co-operatives
- Agricultural Economics
- Development Studies and Community Development
- Practical Agricultural Fieldwork
- Achievement Motivation Programme.

We pay our trainees an average salary during training but on successful completion of their courses their salaries are immediately doubled. We provide them with good houses, according to their needs, on the projects.

The duration of the course may seem long to some people, but I think this is well justified if proper management training is required.