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2025



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role in a  
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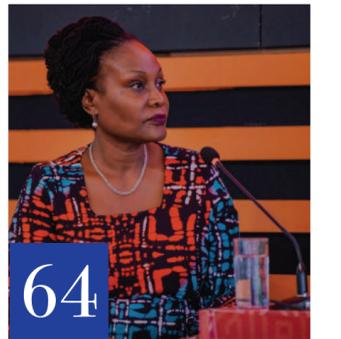
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# Letter from the publisher.

## Welcome to the RIKA Summit 2025

This year's gathering finds us at an inflection point for leadership and human capital in Africa. As global systems bend and recalibrate—from geopolitical tensions and rising protectionism to AI's meteoric rise—we are called to not just respond, but to lead with clarity, conviction, and compassion. And as the world shifts and morphs, Africa must be more than a witness; it must be an active, intentional architect of its own growth story. And that journey begins not just with systems and structures, but with people—our most enduring asset.

At RIKA, we continue to believe that the future of work will not be determined solely by algorithms or automation, but by how well we develop, deploy, and retain African talent.

This year, we are particularly attuned to how paradoxes define modern leadership. Africa's leaders must learn to balance tradition with innovation, local needs with global aspirations, and continuity with agility. The African continent continues to birth new ecosystems—startups, policy labs, capital networks—but without the right leadership scaffolding, these gains may remain ephemeral. It's not just about talent pipelines; it's about building institutions of excellence, systems that support human flourishing, and cultures that endure.

The summit brings together a mosaic of voices—seasoned CEOs, emerging Gen Z leaders, global faculty, and human capital practitioners and policy influencers. Their presence affirms our shared belief that leadership is no longer a static role, but a dynamic and deeply human process. RIKA is proud to facilitate these critical conversations and to present our sixth cohort of Fellows—resilient, sharp, and purpose-driven professionals ready to lead transformation across the continent.

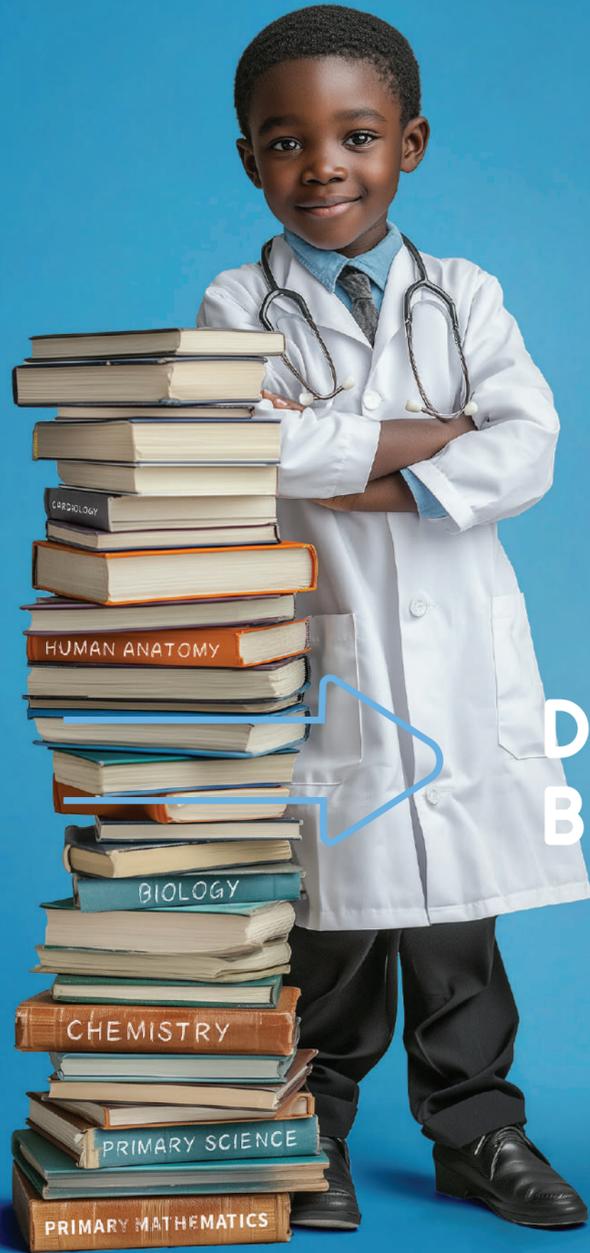
We thank our speakers, partners, sponsors, and all those who have helped shape this year's programme. May your day be one of deep engagement, practical insights, and renewed inspiration.



**Susan Githuku**  
Publisher & Executive Director, RIKA

“  
You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness ... the courage to invent the future.

Thomas Sankara



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# Letter from the editor.

Dear speakers, guests, fellows, faculty, and friends

It is with tremendous excitement that I welcome you to this edition of the RIKA Summit and to the pages of our 2025 Summit Magazine.

RIKA was founded with a simple yet ambitious aim: to develop a cadre of African leaders in human capital who are future-ready, ethically grounded, and globally relevant. This year's theme, exploring the nexus of Artificial Intelligence (AI), talent, productivity, leadership, and evolving markets, could not be more timely. Across the continent, we are witnessing simultaneous disruptions: a youthful population with unprecedented experiences; the widespread digitisation of services; and growing tensions between individual agency and institutional legacy.

The articles featured in this magazine reflect these layered realities. You will find insights on navigating paradoxes, understanding the neuroscience of change, and unlocking potential in a BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible) world. Each piece has been selected not just for its rigour but for its practical resonance. We encourage you to read, reflect, and above all; engage with the content. There is wisdom in this room, and we hope the written word will serve as a catalyst for dialogue.

We have also made space in this edition to spotlight the voices of emerging leaders and new thinkers. In a world where millennial and Gen Z talent are challenging legacy assumptions and calling for more progressive workplaces, we believe that listening; really listening, is a leadership act. Our aim is to produce a magazine that is both thoughtful and provocative, grounded and global.

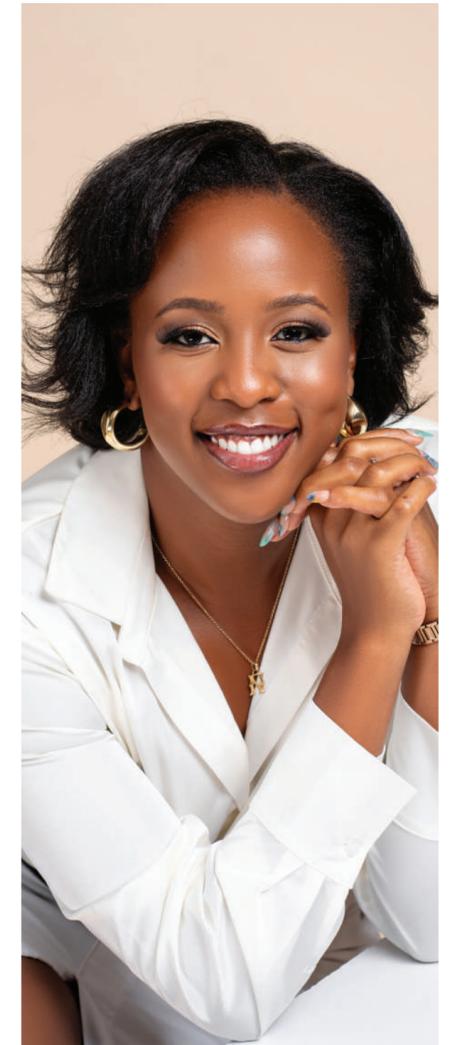
Congratulations to Cohort 6 - our largest cohort yet.

To the devoted RIKA faculty, the tireless RIKA Programme Office, our trusted sponsors, and esteemed delegates, I express my gratitude. Your commitment and belief in the power of credible, competent and inspiring leadership is clear.

As we gather today, and go forth thereafter, I invite each of us to lean in, to introspect and to take up greater space in shaping our continent's future. The work of building enduring institutions and people-Centred systems belongs to all of us.

“  
The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.

Alvin Toffler, Future Shock



**Natalie Manga**  
Editor & Programme Director, RIKA

# Africa's next chapter in leadership starts here.

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Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025

9am - 5pm

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**SUSAN MUIGAI**  
Chief People Officer  
Mastercard



**PHILIP ODERA**  
Former CEO, Stanbic Bank  
Chairman, Liberty Group Holdings



**PROF. PLO LUMUMBA**  
Founder,  
The PLO Lumumba Foundation



**DR. LAILA MACHARIA**  
Co-founder and Chair, Africa  
Digital Media Institute



**ALLAN KILAVUKA**  
Group MD & CEO,  
Kenya Airways



**RITA KAVASHE**  
Managing Director, Isuzu  
East Africa



**BIRJU SANGHRAJKA**  
Managing Director Corporate &  
Investment Banking  
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# Can we reimagine Africa, not as a bystander, but as a shaper of what comes next?

In a world grappling with fractured systems, fraying alliances, and fading certainties, Africa's youthful dynamism, cultural rootedness, and untapped ingenuity may hold the blueprint for renewal. Not because it has been spared the storm, but has endured and adapted through centuries of imposed disruption.



The question is not whether Africa is ready for the world, but whether the world is finally ready to learn from Africa.

If we dare to reframe the lens, what emerges is not a continent waiting to be saved, but one quietly poised to lead.

A close-up portrait of a young woman with dark skin. Her face is adorned with vibrant yellow and blue body paint. She has a thoughtful expression, with her hand resting near her forehead. The background is a bright yellow.

# From bystander to architect.

---

For decades, Africa was cast as a passive recipient in global affairs—buffeted by external shocks, sidelined in decision-making, and expected to adjust to frameworks it did not design.

## A NEW CENTRE OF GRAVITY

Demographically, Africa is becoming the planet's centre of gravity. With over 70% of its population under 35, it is not only the youngest continent, but also the most vibrant crucible of innovation, energy, and entrepreneurial dynamism.

While the Global North ages and turns inward, Africa's youth bulge is a strategic asset in a world starved of fresh ideas, digital agility, and future-oriented leadership.

This generation is fluent in both tradition and technology, blending ancestral wisdom with AI fluency.

But this dividend will only yield results if we invest intentionally in education, ethics, and ecosystems that allow talent to thrive at home. In a fragmented world, Africa's youth are not just its future—they could become the world's renewal.

## RECLAIMING ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY

Global fragmentation has exposed the costs of overdependence—on imported goods, commodity exports, and externally dictated development models.

Africa now has the opportunity to reclaim economic sovereignty by focusing on regional self-sufficiency, diversified production, and intra-continental trade.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers more than economic integration; it provides a pathway to continental coherence, creating the largest single market in the world by number of countries.

Building regional value chains in food, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and green energy could buffer the continent against global volatility. But sovereignty will not be achieved through policy alone—it will require infrastructure, intra-African investment, and a shared political imagination that sees fragmentation not as a threat, but as a strategic opening.

Africa is the holder of **60%** of the world's uncultivated arable land

Africa can lead the climate restoration

But in today's fractured world, where the old consensus is dissolving and power is being redistributed, this script no longer holds.

The weakening of global institutions, the erosion of trust between nations, and the recalibration of alliances all point to an open moment—one that demands new authorship. Africa's role now is not to plead for inclusion but to set its own terms, shaping a future that reflects its realities, aspirations, and contributions.

The continent must move from being managed by global structures to remaking them. It is no longer a question of whether the world will allow Africa in—but whether Africa will define its own centre of gravity.

## A MORAL AND ECOLOGICAL COMPASS

Amid global ethical confusion and ecological breakdown, Africa can become the world's moral and environmental compass. Its deep traditions of community, restraint, and respect for nature offer a counterweight to the excesses of late-stage capitalism and individualism.

African philosophies like Ubuntu, which emphasise shared humanity, and indigenous land practices rooted in stewardship rather than exploitation, could inspire new models for regenerative economies.

As the last frontier of biodiversity and the holder of 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land, Africa can lead the climate restoration agenda, not just plead for adaptation funds. But this will require resisting the temptation to repeat extractive patterns under new names. The role Africa can play here is profound: not just as victim or beneficiary of climate policy—but as the conscience of a world on edge.

## THE PLATFORM FOR MULTIPOLAR PARTNERSHIPS

As old powers retrench and new powers rise, Africa is navigating a complex realignment with agility and increasing strategic confidence. The expansion of BRICS, growing AU-EU negotiations, and the deepening of South-South trade indicate that Africa is no longer looking for permission—it is building new coalitions.

In a fragmented world, Africa is uniquely positioned to act as a bridge-builder, translating across blocs and balancing relations without being locked into binary choices. Its non-aligned history and diplomatic diversity give it the credibility to host global convenings, mediate digital governance frameworks, and shape the ethics of emergent technologies.

This is not a call for neutrality, but for constructive engagement—anchored in Africa's interests, values, and long-term vision. The continent's growing geopolitical maturity could make it the convening ground of a divided world.

## THE WORLD'S NEXT TALENT ENGINE

As global labour shortages deepen and knowledge economies scramble to reinvent themselves, Africa stands ready to become the world's next great source of talent. Its universities, informal learning hubs, and digital ecosystems are producing a generation of coders, creatives, analysts, engineers, health workers, and cultural innovators ready to shape the 21st century.

Africa's role is not just to supply talent, but to set new standards for how talent is grown, dignified, and deployed. In a world desperately seeking smart, ethical, and agile problem-solvers, Africa's youth are its gift to the global commons.

**70%** of Africa's population is under the age of **35**

## THE STORYTELLER OF A DIFFERENT FUTURE

Africa's deepest power may lie not in what it exports, but in the stories it tells—and the paradigms those stories shape.

The dominant narratives of scarcity, fragility, and corruption have long clouded the continent's image—but a new generation of African thinkers, artists, entrepreneurs, and public intellectuals is rewriting the script.

These are stories of renewal, of resilience, of complexity held with grace. In a fragmented world fatigued by cynicism and exhausted by broken promises, Africa can offer a narrative of coherence—where tradition and modernity, spirit and strategy, identity and ambition coexist.

This is more than cultural diplomacy—it is a declaration that how we frame the future matters. Africa's voice is not just rising—it is reframing what progress looks like.

## THE SOFT POWER OF CULTURAL WHOLENESS

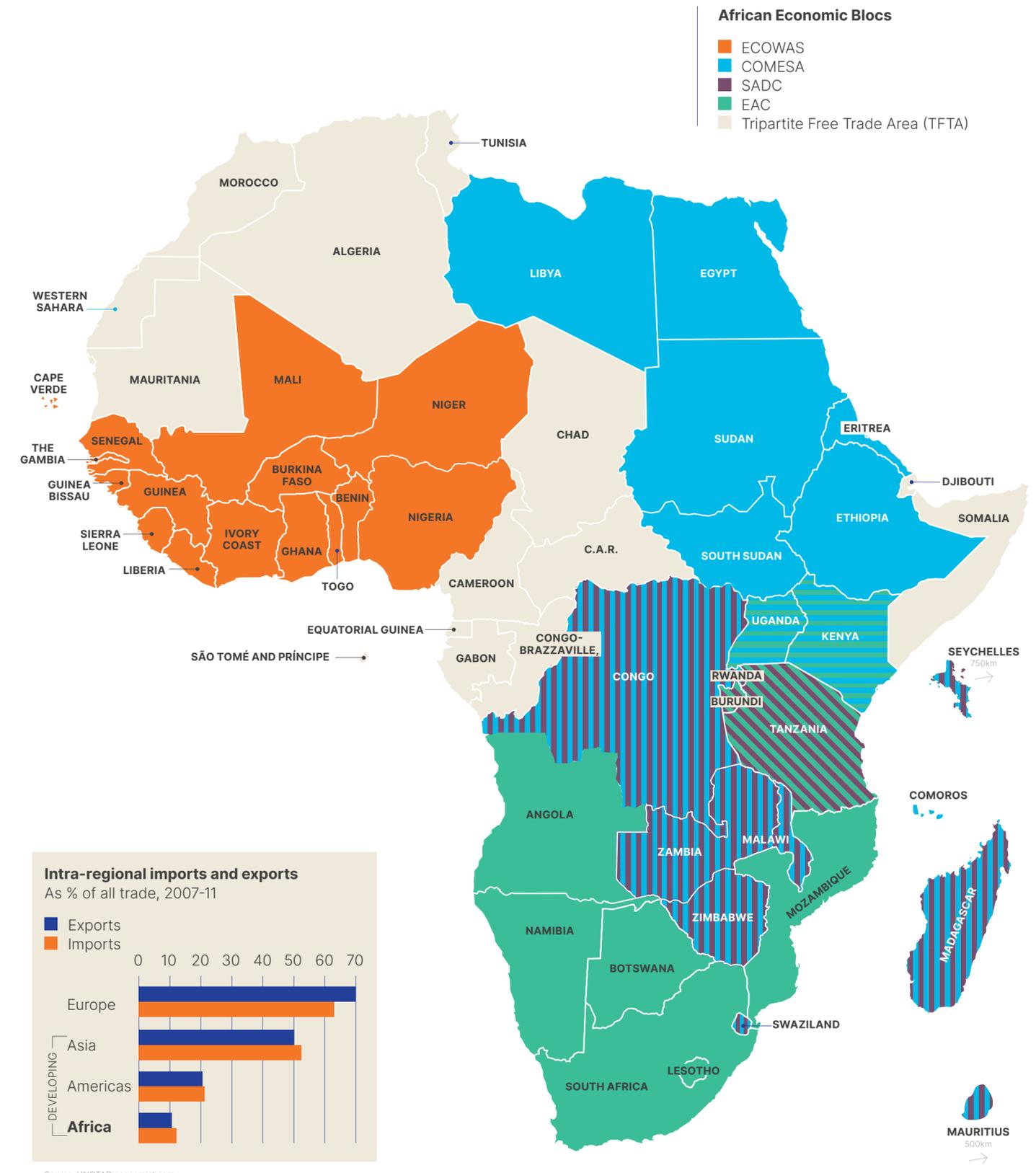
In the fractured, anxious, always-on cultures of the modern world, Africa may be one of the last places where a more intact humanity still breathes. Rooted in rhythm, ritual, community, and spiritual anchoring, African cultures offer a counterbalance to the fragmentation not just of systems—but of selves.

Africa could play the quiet but transformative role of restorer of centredness—not by exporting commodified culture, but by demonstrating how to live in alignment with time, land, and one another.

In a world overwhelmed by noise, Africa's music, proverbs, ceremonies, and ways of being may be among the most valuable exports of all. This is the continent's soft power: the capacity to remind a disoriented world how to feel whole again.

But this talent must be supported, not just harvested. Governments, companies, and universities must build pipelines, mentorship structures, and incentives that allow Africa's human capital to thrive on the continent, not flee from it.

# Reimagining globalization: Africa's opportunity in a fragmenting world.



# Africa's opportunity to redefine globalization.

The global trading system is convulsing. From Washington to Beijing, Brussels to Delhi, tariff walls are rising where bridges once stood.

And as the major economic powers retreat into protectionist postures, recalibrate alliances, and weaponise supply chains, a quiet opportunity is unfolding—far from the boardrooms of Davos or the corridors of the WTO.

It is unfolding in Africa.

The current tariff wars, while deeply disruptive, may prove to be the catalytic moment for the continent to reimagine its place in the global order—not as a passive recipient of extractive trade flows, but as a proactive architect of a new kind of globalization: one that is regional, regenerative, and rooted in African value.



## The premise: fragmentation as fertile ground

It would be easy, and not inaccurate, to view the current global environment with concern.

Trade disputes between the United States and China have not only decelerated global commerce, but also triggered secondary effects across Africa: volatile commodity prices, reduced investor confidence, and diminished access to capital equipment and inputs.

Europe's new "carbon border taxes" and America's Inflation Reduction Act have added new layers of complexity.

Yet, within this fragmentation lies a chance for African agency.

As global supply chains bend under the weight of nationalism and tariffs, Africa is no longer bound to the old terms of integration—where it exported raw materials and imported finished goods. Instead, it can ask: What would it mean to build inward before reaching outward?

## A different globalization, from below

This is not a new question. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)—the largest free trade area in the world by number of countries—was designed precisely to correct the colonial economic architecture that tethered African nations more tightly to Europe and Asia than to one another. But what the AfCFTA lacked in urgency in 2019, the tariff wars have now supplied in abundance.

The African Development Bank has called this a "once-in-a-generation moment" to unlock the full potential of intra-African trade, which remains dismally low at around 15%, compared to 67% in Europe. Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, the Bank's outgoing president, has warned that unless Africa builds its own value chains and processes its own raw materials, it will remain "at the mercy of the global price winds."

This is not just rhetoric—it's a rallying cry.

If Africa can take seriously the task of localizing production, retooling trade logistics, and investing in continental integration, it could become a zone of self-sustaining growth. The current global disarray is not just a crisis to manage—but a window to reset.

## Strategic realignment: a new axis emerging

There is also a strategic shift quietly taking place. As Western powers turn inward and protectionist, African countries are rebalancing their geopolitical relationships.

The expansion of BRICS—now including Egypt and Ethiopia alongside South Africa—signals a desire to belong to multipolar trade platforms that may be more aligned with Africa's development agenda. This alignment is not ideological—it is pragmatic. As Western export markets tighten, emerging economies may offer more flexible and less prescriptive pathways to growth.

McKinsey's latest research on Africa's economic outlook notes that "fragmentation in the global economy could give rise to a more diversified set of trade partners and a greater focus on regional and South-South trade." In other words, this is not the end of globalization—it is the decentralization of it. And Africa, for once, is not merely being invited to the table. It is being asked to co-host.

## Building from within: what this moment requires

Of course, opportunities are not automatic. They must be claimed. And that will require more than rhetoric or policy papers. Three shifts are vital:

### 1. Manufacturing with purpose

Africa must invest in industries that serve regional needs first. Agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and clean energy are obvious targets—but so too are intermediate goods for infrastructure, construction, and housing.

### 2. Infrastructure for integration

Roads, ports, and digital rails must connect countries not just to global ports, but to each other. The AfDB's Africa50 initiative and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) must be scaled and fast-tracked.

### 3. Mindset over mimicry

African economies should stop mimicking globalization models designed for different contexts. They must instead champion scale-appropriate, labour-rich, and environmentally grounded approaches—drawing inspiration from thinkers like Schumacher, who warned against economies that grow big before they grow wise.

## The power of narrative

If Africa's response to tariff wars is merely reactionary—scrambling to replace lost inputs, seeking exemptions, or negotiating bilateral deals—it will have missed the moment. But if Africa treats this as a philosophical and structural opening, it can forge a new narrative about what globalization from the South looks like.

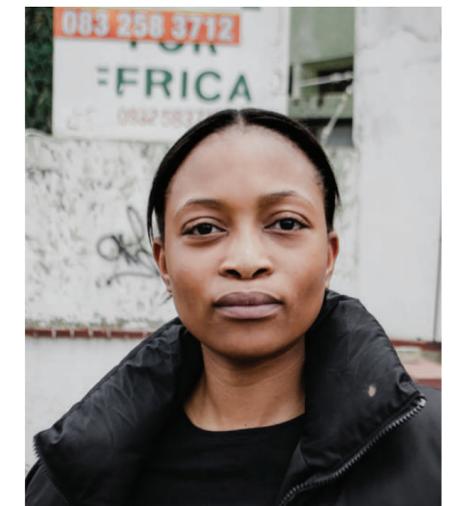
A narrative where:

- Value is retained closer to source
- Production and consumption are more balanced
- Trade is embedded in culture, community, and ecology
- The rules of engagement are co-authored, not imposed

This is the kind of globalization that feels not only necessary, but inevitable—as the current system falters under its own contradictions.

Africa is no stranger to being caught in the wake of global disruptions. What is different now is the convergence of infrastructure readiness, youthful demographics, digital connectivity, and policy ambition. If leaders, firms, and institutions across the continent can act with urgency and cohesion, Africa could turn this fragmentation into a foundation.

Tariff wars may have triggered this reflection, but the real battle is for economic imagination. And perhaps, in this strange moment of deglobalisation, Africa is best placed not to rebuild what's crumbling—but to build what's next.



# If globalization is to continue, let it be beautiful, let it be human.

**Susan Githuku**

Publisher & Executive Director, RIKA

I first read *Small Is Beautiful* as an undergraduate student of economics in Upstate New York. I remember loving its size, tiny; being moved by its prose—unusual for an economics text—and intrigued by Schumacher’s invocation of “economics as if people mattered.” It felt humane, thoughtful, and quietly radical. I appreciated it, perhaps even admired it. But I must confess: it did not hit home as hard then as it has now.

Back then, the world seemed to be galloping forward. Globalization was the reigning orthodoxy. Supply chains stretched effortlessly across borders. The liberal economic order felt permanent. More integration, more trade, more innovation—it all felt inevitable and mostly good.

But now, in the throes of escalating tariff wars, reshoring debates, global mistrust, and a climate crisis that refuses to be background noise, Schumacher’s voice has returned—not as a gentle whisper, but as an urgent, almost chastising presence. This time, I feel its full weight.

## What have the tariff wars taught us?

The ongoing economic confrontation—especially between the United States and China, once framed as tactical brinkmanship, has deepened into a structural realignment. The ripple effects are everywhere: African and Asian nations being forced to pick sides; commodity-dependent economies caught in the crosshairs; global firms frantically recalibrating sourcing strategies to reduce overdependence.

Tariffs were supposed to be levers of strategy. Instead, they’ve revealed a deeper decay—of trust between nations, of the global rulebook itself, and of the long-held assumption that economic growth lifts everyone.

So I find myself asking:

- **WHAT IF the global economy we built was always more fragile than we admitted?**
- **WHAT IF our worship of scale blinded us to its brittleness?**
- **WHAT IF as Schumacher warned, we mistook complexity for progress—and forgot how to be small wisely?**

## What should we have done differently?

Perhaps we should have been more curious about the hidden costs of hyper-globalization. The fatigue of workers who became invisible cogs in vast, impersonal chains. The erosion of local industries that had been crowded out by cheaper imports.

The sense of helplessness in communities that had no ownership of the economy shaping their lives.

We might have asked different questions:

- **What is the right scale for this industry, this policy, this innovation?**
- **Who benefits, and who is left out?**
- **What is being extracted, not just from the earth, but from people?**

Instead, we assumed that global was always better, that bigger was always more efficient, and that human values would catch up later. They didn’t.

## What if we insisted on beauty and humanity?

When I worked at the Coca-Cola Company, my colleagues would accuse me of being over-Socratic. That I was always asking questions. That was me then for sure and it is still me now as the questions continue to bubble up.

Today, I find myself returning to a hypothesis – informed by Schumacher. I frame it as a question: What if we insisted that globalization—if it is to continue—must be beautiful and human? Not efficient at any cost. Not frictionless in the cold sense of the term. But grounded. Rooted. Designed for human flourishing.

That might mean:

- **Shorter supply chains**, not for nationalism’s sake, but for resilience and local value creation.
- **Appropriate technologies** over automated displacements—tools that dignify work rather than erase it. And as you know this is another big topic.
- **Inclusive ownership models**, like worker cooperatives and community trusts, not just shareholder primacy.
- **Slower growth**, but richer in meaning—more equitably distributed, more ecologically aware.

This is not romanticism. It’s structural realism, reframed. And Schumacher gave us the vocabulary and vision for it long before the world fell out of rhythm.

## What do we do now?

It’s tempting to treat the tariff wars and supply chain shocks as temporary detours. But what if they are signals that the system we built is fundamentally misaligned with the world we now inhabit?

What if “globalization 2.0” must no longer be about scale, but about balance?

What if the success of nations, companies, and communities will be measured not by how much they dominate, but by how well they coexist?

I’m beginning to believe that Schumacher was not only ahead of his time—but ahead of our imagination. His insistence on smallness was not about withdrawal, but about attention. His concern with “intermediate technology” was not technophobia, but a cry for dignity. His critique of “modern man” as prone to worshipping systems he no longer understands is more relevant in the age of AI than it was in the era of oil.

## Let This Be Our Reset

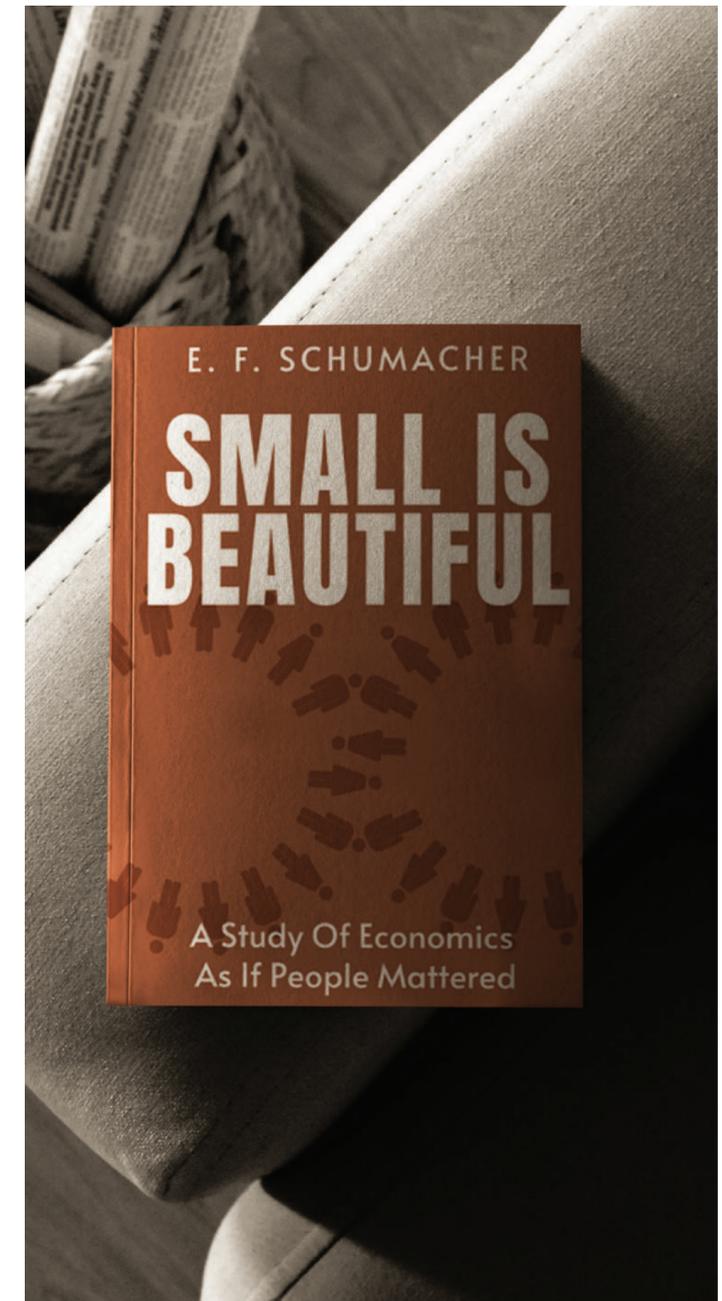
As someone who once read *Small Is Beautiful* with intellectual curiosity and now returns to it with almost reverent urgency, I offer no grand solutions. But I offer this belief:

The next version of globalization must be built on different assumptions.

It must ask:

- **How do we make the economy feel personal again?**
- **How do we design institutions that care, not just scale?**
- **How do we teach future economists not just to model systems—but to design them for life?**

If globalization is to continue, let it be measured by the well-being of communities, not just consumption. Let it be beautiful—in its proportions, in its values, in its outcomes. Let it be human—attentive to voice, scale, place, and purpose. Maybe it took a pandemic, a war, and multiple crises for Schumacher’s voice to finally pierce through. But now that it has, I hope we listen more closely. This time, it might save us.



# What if Nairobi became the business capital of Africa?

What if Kenya—poised at the crossroads of East and Central Africa—chose to envision Nairobi not merely as its capital city, but as the business capital of Africa?

Not as a slogan or a PR campaign.

Not as a boast, but as a blueprint.

What if this became a national mission, pursued with the clarity of Singapore, the ambition of Dubai, and the authenticity of Africa? What if we asked, seriously: What would it take to turn Nairobi into Africa's economic nerve centre—its commercial brain, its convening heart, its entrepreneurial soul?

It's a hypothesis worth holding. Because beneath the noise of political cycles and structural challenges lies a city with extraordinary latent potential.



## The case for Nairobi

The raw material is already here. The indicators—both tangible and intangible—are persuasive.

### Geostrategic Location

Nairobi sits at the midpoint between West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and between Southern and Northern Africa. Its time zone allows real-time communication with both Asia and Europe. It is a gateway—uniquely placed for capital, trade, diplomacy, and logistics.

### Human Capital

Kenya boasts one of the most educated, urbanised, and tech-savvy populations on the continent. Its youth bulge is less a burden than a potential engine—particularly in finance, digital services, healthcare, and the creative economy.

### Technology Savanna

M-Pesa wasn't a fluke. It was a signal. Nairobi's moniker as the "Silicon Savannah" is well earned: it is home to hundreds of tech startups, global innovation labs, and R&D outposts for multinationals like Google, Microsoft, and IBM.

### Diverse and Open Culture

Nairobi is a melting pot—ethnically, culturally, and ideologically. From Kibera to Karen, it blends resilience with aspiration. Its diversity isn't just cosmetic—it's an asset in a world where global business demands local nuance.

### Diplomatic Hub

Nairobi hosts the only UN headquarters in the Global South (UNON), dozens of embassies, and a growing list of international agencies. It is already a convening city. Why not a commanding one?

### Financial Ecosystem

Nairobi is home to the Nairobi Securities Exchange, a vibrant private equity sector, a sophisticated mobile banking ecosystem, and a growing fintech landscape. With the right reforms, it could become the financial services centre of East Africa—and beyond.

## What would it take?

If Kenya truly committed to making Nairobi the business capital of Africa, it would demand more than vision. It would demand a reorientation of state, society, and strategy.

Here are seven hypotheses to consider:

### 1. What if we governed for excellence, not survival?

The first lever is governance. Business capitals thrive on trust, clarity, and speed. Nairobi must become a jurisdiction where the rule of law, policy stability, and ethical public service are non-negotiables.

This means:

- Predictable tax regimes
- World-class contract enforcement
- Zero tolerance for corruption at all levels
- Digitised, transparent, and time-bound government services

### Singapore built its brand on ruthless efficiency. Rwanda is halfway there. What if Nairobi made this its uncompromising baseline?

### 2. What if Nairobi redefined African urbanism?

The city must function—physically. That means reimagining Nairobi's infrastructure not for cars and congestion, but for people and productivity.

- A commuter rail and electric BRT system that works
- A green and clean CBD that operates 24/7
- Co-working and co-living hubs across income brackets
- Smart zoning laws to accommodate vertical, mixed-use expansion

**In short: a Nairobi that works for its people will work for the continent.**

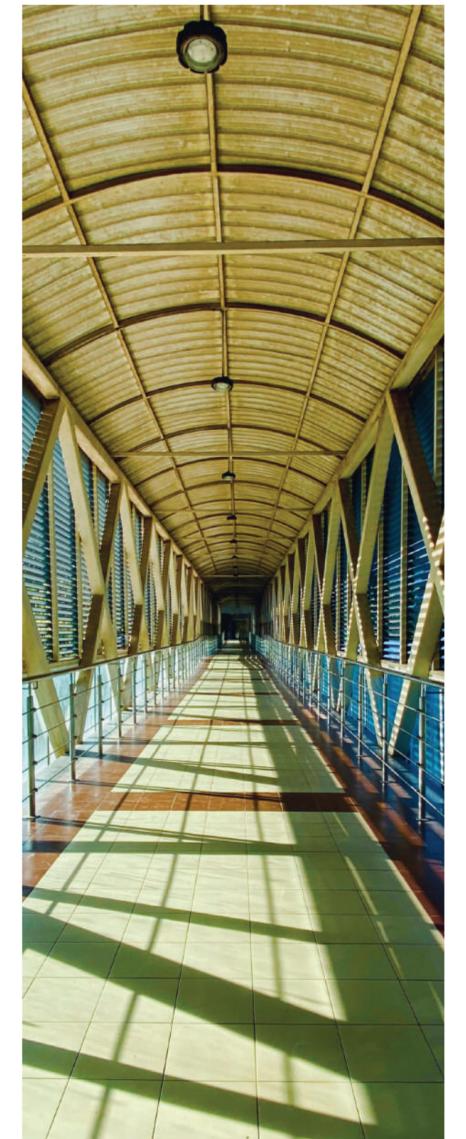
### 3. What if the private sector was treated as a co-architect, not a bystander?

To become a continental capital, Nairobi must actively attract and retain pan-African headquarters, multinationals, and venture capital firms.

This requires:

- Tax and regulatory incentives for companies that anchor here
- Fast-tracked work permits for high-value talent
- A concierge-style Investment Facilitation Office that matches global capital with local opportunity

**Think Kigali's business ease with Lagos' scale and Johannesburg's capital markets.**



#### 4. What if Nairobi became Africa's talent capital?

Kenya's universities already punch above their weight.

But what if we went further?

- Establish Nairobi as the training ground for Africa's future executives, coders, designers, and creatives
- Partner with global institutions to build satellite campuses here
- Create a "Green Card for Talent" that welcomes high-potential Africans to live, work, and grow in Nairobi

**Let Nairobi be to Africa what Boston is to America—a city that educates and exports leadership.**

#### 5. What if Nairobi owned the future of digital trade and fintech?

Kenya has already proven its prowess with mobile money. But there's more ground to claim:

- Champion the AfCFTA digital protocol and create a sandbox for cross-border fintech
- Build a pan-African payment gateway based in Nairobi
- Incentivise homegrown startups to scale across the continent from Nairobi outward

**What if every African entrepreneur saw Nairobi as their launchpad?**

#### 6. What if we measured success not by buildings, but by business births?

Dubai has the tallest towers. Johannesburg has the oldest banks. Nairobi should focus on entrepreneurial density:

- Make it the easiest city in Africa to start a business
- Reduce licensing and registration times to under 24 hours
- Provide scale-up capital through blended finance funds and sovereign-backed VC accelerators

**What if every third company you met in Nairobi was exporting to five African countries?**

#### 7. What if Nairobi became the Davos of the Global South?

Beyond commerce, Nairobi should also be a place where Africa's big questions are debated:

- Host an annual "Africa Business and Governance Forum" that rivals Davos in relevance
- Convene tech summits, policy dialogues, investment roundtables, and startup expos
- Make Nairobi the default host city for pan-African corporate AGMs

**Not just a city of meetings—but a city of meaning.**

### Final reflection: from hypothesis to blueprint

Nairobi already has the ingredients. What it needs now is a national pact—across government, business, academia, and civil society—to declare and deliver on a bold, unifying goal: to become Africa's business capital by 2040.

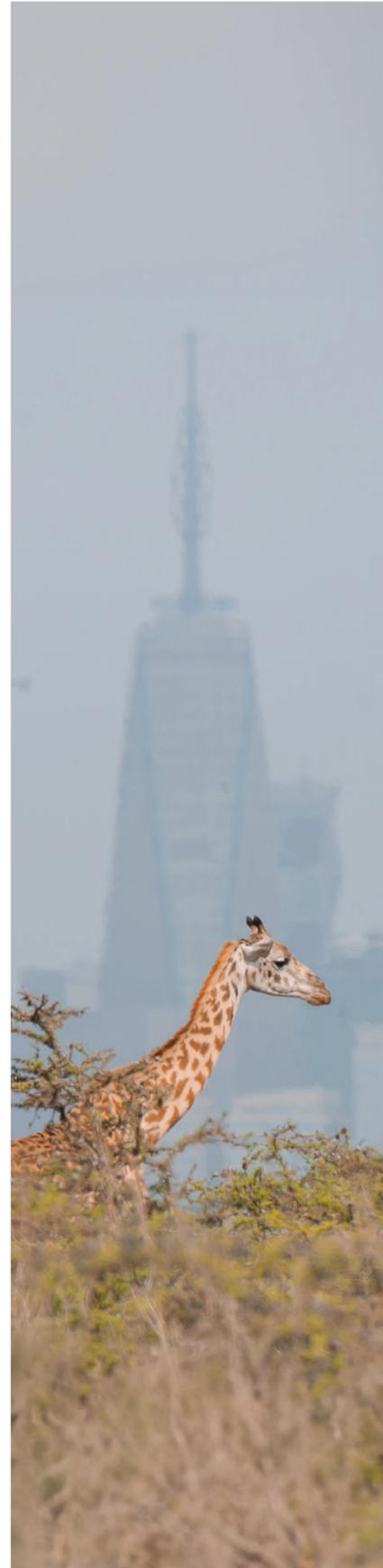
Yes, it will require money, policy reform, infrastructure, and political will. But more than anything, it will require imagination.

The kind of imagination that turns a city from a transit point into a destination. From a local capital into a continental symbol.

From a place we live, into a place we all believe in.

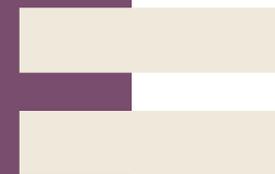
The moment is ripe. The continent is watching.

**What if we dared to begin?'**



# Strategic approaches to attracting high-calibre talent for organisational success.

Examining the necessity of aligning talent strategies with contemporary workforce dynamics, including, managing emerging workforce challenges and redefining traditional career lifecycle models. Insights for organisations seeking sustainable talent advantage in a competitive market.



# The game has changed—has your talent strategy?



The corporate world used to be unpredictable. Now, it's downright incomprehensible. In a world that is both BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) and VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous), old talent management strategies are not just outdated—they are dangerous.

Talent is no longer a linear pipeline. It's an ecosystem. And organisations that fail to shift from traditional talent management to Integrated Strategic Talent Management will not just struggle—they will disappear.

Let's break this down.

## 1. Stop managing talent—start architecting it

Forget about talent pipelines and succession plans that stretch five years into the future. The world is too fast-moving for that. Instead, think of talent architecture—a dynamic, adaptable, and continuously evolving approach to talent management.

What This Means:

- Stop obsessing over traditional org charts—create fluid talent networks that allow movement across roles, skills, and projects.
- Move beyond headcount planning—focus on capability planning instead.
- Think less about roles and more about problem-solving capacity within your organisation.

### KEY QUESTION

Is your talent strategy structured like a rigid machine or a responsive ecosystem?

## 2. The future of talent is “always-on” acquisition

The war for talent is no longer episodic. It's not about filling a vacancy when someone leaves. It's about continuously curating talent inside and outside your organisation so you're never caught off guard.

What This Means:

- Turn your HR function into a market intelligence hub—always scanning for top talent before you need it.
- Develop a boundary-less talent strategy, incorporating gig workers, freelancers, automation, and internal mobility.

- Invest in AI-driven recruitment and predictive analytics to anticipate talent needs rather than react to them.

### KEY QUESTION

Are you waiting for vacancies, or are you continuously building a future-ready workforce?

## 3. Talent retention is a myth—talent magnetism is the goal

Retention strategies are obsolete. The best talent isn't looking to be retained; they want meaning, mobility, and mastery. Organisations that act as talent magnets—offering purpose, autonomy, and continuous learning—will always win.

What This Means:

- Employees should opt in to stay with you every day, not just when contract renewals come up.
- Create an internal talent marketplace, allowing employees to move across projects, teams, and geographies.
- Don't hoard talent—adopt a boomerang strategy where former employees can easily return with new skills and perspectives.

### KEY QUESTION

Are you trying to “keep” talent, or are you giving them reasons to keep choosing you?

## 4. Agility is the new stability

Rigid hierarchies and fixed career paths are relics of the past. In a BANI-VUCA world, the only thing that matters is how quickly your workforce can adapt, learn, and pivot.

What This Means:

- Build a learning organisation—where reskilling and upskilling happen continuously, not just when disruption forces it.
- Enable adaptive leadership—leaders who are not just bosses but navigators of uncertainty.
- Embed agility metrics into your HR strategy: How fast can your teams shift, restructure, or innovate under pressure?

### KEY QUESTION

Is your organisation designed for stability or for perpetual reinvention?

## 5. Psychological safety is your talent superpower

Employees today are not just looking for financial security—they are looking for emotional security. The workplace is no longer just a place to work; it's a mental health ecosystem.

What This Means:

- HR must become a human experience architect, ensuring that employees feel safe, heard, and valued.
- Mental wellness must be treated as a core business metric, not a side initiative.
- Leaders must be trained to lead with empathy and psychological resilience, especially in times of crisis.

### KEY QUESTION

Is your culture designed to protect and empower your people, or is it silently draining them?

You see, talent is not an HR problem—it's a business imperative.

Integrated Strategic Talent Management is not just about HR. It's about survival. It's about building an organisation that is not just future-proof but future-focused. CEOs, CFOs, CHROs, and business leaders must stop thinking of talent strategy as a function within HR and start seeing it as their ultimate strategic advantage.

Because in a BANI-VUCA world, the only real competitive edge is the ability to attract, deploy, and develop talent faster and better than the competition.

And that starts right now.

# How organisations in Africa can attract top diaspora talent back to the continent.

## Africa is undergoing a moment of strategic recalibration.

As economies diversify, digital ecosystems scale, and governance frameworks mature, a critical piece of the puzzle remains elusive: talent. More specifically, how can African organisations attract the highly skilled, globally exposed African diaspora back to the continent—not just for symbolic returns, but for long-term leadership, innovation, and nation-building?

This article outlines a pragmatic and strategic approach for African governments, corporates, startups, and impact organisations to reposition themselves as destinations of choice for top diaspora professionals. Drawing on global best practices, behavioural science, and lived African realities, the goal is not repatriation for its own sake, but strategic reintegration: tapping into the diaspora's global experience to solve local and continental challenges.



## Why this matters

Bringing Africa's talent back from the diaspora is no longer just a cultural imperative or a sentimental gesture—it is a strategic necessity for the continent's long-term resilience, competitiveness, and growth.

### 1. The Global Talent Landscape Is Tightening

As Western economies face aging populations and labour market saturation, their immigration policies are becoming more restrictive and protectionist. Skilled Africans are increasingly met with visa constraints, wage stagnation, and underemployment in foreign markets—creating both a push and a pull for return.

### 2. Africa Is Competing for Capability, Not Just Capital

The next decade of growth in Africa will be defined by how effectively the continent can convert opportunity into scalable outcomes—in education, healthcare, financial services, and infrastructure. For that, it needs experienced architects, engineers, strategists, and system-builders—many of whom are currently abroad.

### 3. Diaspora Professionals Are Mission-Aligned

Unlike traditional expat professionals, African diaspora leaders often return not only for opportunity, but for impact, belonging, and legacy. They bring the hunger to give back—paired with deep expertise in global systems.

### 4. The Future of Work Is Distributed

Remote work, cross-border teams, and digital governance have created a window where diaspora professionals can transition more easily, gradually, and flexibly than ever before.

### 5. Their Return Can Be Contagious

When structured well, successful diaspora reintegration creates a ripple effect: it changes perceptions, attracts capital, inspires peers, and enriches institutions with new cultures of excellence.

### IN SHORT

Bringing back Africa's talent is not about reversing brain drain—it's about engineering brain circulation: enabling knowledge, capital, and leadership to flow into the places where they can make the most catalytic difference.

## The case for diaspora talent: more than just nostalgia

The African diaspora is among the continent's most underutilized assets. From Nairobi to New York, Accra to Atlanta, highly skilled Africans are building unicorns, leading Fortune 500 teams, and shaping policy at multilateral institutions.

These professionals possess:

- World-class technical and leadership skills
- Global exposure to markets, systems, and cultures
- Cultural fluency and relational ties to the continent

Their return is not simply a story of reverse migration. It is a strategic multiplier: a way to transfer knowledge, mobilize capital, and accelerate institutional maturity across African economies. But attracting this talent requires more than patriotic appeals.

## Why many diaspora Africans don't return

Despite emotional ties to the continent, many diaspora professionals cite the following barriers:

- **Professional Risk**  
Lack of institutional structure, unclear career growth, or fear of underemployment
- **Cultural Friction**  
Disconnect between progressive global experience and status-quo work cultures
- **Administrative Hassles**  
Visas, dual citizenship, banking, and local onboarding hurdles
- **Family Considerations**  
Spousal employment, school quality, healthcare, and lifestyle concerns

### IN SHORT

Organisations must confront these not as anecdotes but as structural issues to resolve through design, policy, and leadership.

## Strategic levers to attract and retain diaspora talent

Successfully attracting diaspora professionals back to Africa requires a deliberate and multi-dimensional approach. These individuals are not just job seekers—they are high-performing, globally attuned professionals evaluating risk, purpose, leadership quality, and ecosystem strength. Therefore, organisations must go beyond recruitment campaigns and design full-circle strategies that address both head and heart.

Below are five interlocking levers that, when pulled together, can help you not only attract, but retain and empower top diaspora talent.

### 1. Reframe the Value Proposition Offer Purpose + Pathways

Diaspora professionals are increasingly motivated by impact and legacy, not just compensation. Organisations should present roles in Africa as career accelerators, not detours.

- Create clear 10-year narratives: Where does this role lead? How does it position them globally?
- Emphasize nation-building, innovation, and transformation, not just tasks
- Offer roles with real authority and visibility, not symbolic titles

### 2. De-risk the Return

Returnees are often walking away from stable, high-earning roles. Mitigating the risk of return is key.

- Provide "soft landing" incentives: relocation packages, housing support, or school subsidies
- Offer two-year convertible contracts with optionality to renew or return abroad
- Enable location-flexibility: hybrid roles that allow phased transitions

### 3. Create culturally fluent work environments

Many returnees struggle with rigid hierarchies, micromanagement, or exclusion from decision-making.

- Train managers on leading diverse and globally trained teams
- Foster high-performance, low-ego cultures
- Institutionalize psychological safety and performance feedback mechanisms



#### 4. Establish Diaspora Talent Pipelines

Don't wait for returnees to knock on your door. Proactively build engagement pathways.

- Partner with diaspora associations, graduate networks, and African student groups abroad
- Run "Africa Talent Fellowship" programs with tailored onboarding and mentorship
- Create a diaspora-facing executive search function or alumni engagement team

#### 5. Leverage the Power of Networks

Diaspora return is often a social decision. People return where they feel a tribe, a mission, a network.

- Build peer cohorts of returnees to reduce isolation
- Involve them in ecosystem events, mentoring, and angel investing opportunities
- Tell success stories of returnees thriving—not just surviving

### The role of governments and ecosystem actors

While individual organisations must lead the charge in building attractive and enabling environments, their efforts must be supported by public policy, ecosystem coordination, and national vision.

Governments, development agencies, and innovation networks hold levers that can amplify or hinder diaspora reintegration at scale.

These actors play a pivotal role in creating a national and regional context that signals welcome, opportunity, and structure.

- Fast-track visas and citizenship policies for skilled diaspora
- Create relocation tax incentives or housing support programs
- Fund diaspora innovation hubs that support returnees in starting ventures
- Include diaspora leaders in national advisory councils and state boards

### Avoiding common pitfalls

While building a diaspora strategy, organisations must avoid well-intentioned but counterproductive practices that can alienate returnees or disrupt local teams. Missteps such as token appointments, unfulfilled promises, or cultural superiority narratives can erode trust and fuel frustration.

#### Tokenism

Offering returnees roles without decision-making power

#### Overpromising

Advertising visionary roles, then under-delivering on resources or autonomy

#### "Messiah complex" dynamics

Positioning diaspora professionals as superior to local talent, leading to resentment

#### IN SHORT

The solution is integration, not elevation. The goal is to merge the best of both worlds—global expertise with local insight.

### Designing for return, not just hoping for it

Africa cannot afford to leave its best minds parked in foreign boardrooms, labs, and think tanks. But hope is not a strategy.

To unlock the potential of diaspora professionals, African organisations must design intentional pathways that combine career growth, purpose, systems support, and cultural fluency.

This is not merely about recruitment. It is about recalibrating African institutions to compete for world-class talent on equal footing—not just with other African countries, but with London, Berlin, Dubai, and Toronto.

Return is possible.  
But return must also  
be desirable, structured,  
and strategic.

# What role have you given your HR leader?

## Imagine this

Your company is in crisis mode. Markets are shifting, technology is evolving at breakneck speed, talent is more restless than ever, and the rules of work are being rewritten in real time. You look to your CFO for financial stability. Your COO for operational efficiency. Your CTO for digital transformation.

But who is helping you future-proof your people strategy—the single most critical determinant of your company's success?

Your HR Leader. But only if you let them be more than "HR."



## HR is not an HR function anymore

Let's be clear—traditional HR is dead. The days of compliance checklists, performance review templates, and "talent retention" buzzwords are gone. If that's all your HR leader is doing, you've got the wrong person in the seat. Today's HR leader is not here to manage people. They are here to architect the future of work for your company. They should be sitting at your strategy table, challenging assumptions, redesigning work models, and creating a workforce that is adaptable, innovative, and relentless. So, what do you, as a CEO, really need from your HR Leader?

### 1. A workforce futurist, not an HR administrator

The best HR leaders aren't thinking about employees. They're thinking about talent ecosystems. They understand that your next best hire may not be an employee at all.

- The workforce of the future is hybrid, fluid, and borderless. Your HR leader should be helping you blend full-time employees, gig talent, AI, and automation seamlessly.
- They should be anticipating skills that don't yet exist and designing learning models that prepare your workforce for jobs that haven't been invented yet.
- They should be telling you where to find tomorrow's game changers, not just filling today's vacancies.

#### ASK YOURSELF

Is my HR leader shaping the workforce of the future, or are they still optimizing yesterday's structures?

### 2. A business disruptor, not a policy enforcer

If your HR leader is just making sure your organisation is compliant with labour laws and updating policies, you are leaving billions on the table.

- HR should be disrupting your business model. They should be bringing you data-backed insights on what your competitors are doing, what your people are really thinking, and where your leadership gaps are.

- They should be questioning whether your org chart even makes sense in 2025 or whether it's an outdated relic of the industrial era.
- They should be able to stand up to the CFO and justify people investments with hard financials, not fluffy engagement surveys.

#### ASK YOURSELF

Does my HR leader know how our business makes money? Can they tell me where my talent gaps are costing us millions?

### 3. A culture engineer, not a chief happiness officer

Let's kill this idea right now—HR is not here to make people happy.

- They are here to make people effective. And that sometimes means making bold, uncomfortable decisions about who belongs and who doesn't.
- Culture is not about bean bags and flex hours. It is about behaviour, discipline, and high-performance mindsets.
- The right HR leader should be brutally honest about whether your culture is fuelling innovation or silently killing it.

#### ASK YOURSELF

Is my HR leader bold enough to tell me if my leadership team is the reason our culture is broken?

### 4. A change provocateur, not a crisis responder

In a BANI world (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible), your HR leader must be the one who sees around corners.

- They should be preparing you for workforce shifts before they happen—not scrambling to react when the talent market tightens.
- They should be the first to detect burnout, disengagement, or looming talent flight risks, not just running exit interviews after the damage is done.
- They should be arming your leaders with the resilience to navigate uncertainty, not letting change paralyse your teams.

#### ASK YOURSELF

Is my HR leader a step ahead of disruption, or always playing catch-up?

## 5. A reputation architect, not just a recruiter

Here's the truth: The best people don't work for companies. They work for brands they believe in.

- Your HR leader is your Chief Brand Ambassador. If they can't sell your company as a destination for the best talent, neither can your hiring managers.
- They should be obsessed with your employer brand, ensuring that the world sees your company as a place where top performers thrive.
- They should be actively engaging on LinkedIn, speaking at industry events, and turning your workplace into a magnet for game-changers.

#### ASK YOURSELF

Is my HR leader shaping our company's talent brand, or are they just running job postings?

## So, CEO, here's your call to action!

If your HR leader is not challenging you, they are failing you.

If they are not pushing your leadership team to rethink work, they are failing you.

If they are not helping you build a workforce that can win in a VUCA/ BANI world, they are failing you.

And if you are not empowering them to do all of this, you are failing them.

This is not HR as we knew it.

This is HR as the driver of business survival, innovation, and competitive advantage.

So the question is, CEO, do you have the HR leader you need to win the future?

# Redefining retirement: moving beyond age to lifelong contribution.

A conversation between Elizabeth Nasaka and Maria Shipiri.



**Elizabeth Nasaka**  
Award-Winning Leader  
& Entrepreneur



**Maria Shipiri**  
Senior Partner  
Human Performance Dynamics Africa

**R**etirement has long been framed as the final chapter of a working life—an exit dictated by age and outdated assumptions about diminishing capacity. But in today's dynamic work environment, this framing feels not only rigid but also wasteful.

If a lack of skill renewal signals the end of relevance, then many should be “retiring” five years into the workforce. The truth is, skills—not age—determine value. While the responsibility to evolve lies with individuals, employers can and should play a catalytic role.

Yet, in Africa, where a young population grapples with limited access to formal employment, the implications of traditional retirement norms are even more complex.

Is retirement truly an “ending,” or could it be a transition into new ways of contributing meaningfully?

## The flaw in traditional retirement thinking

Retirement, as historically defined, often implies professional irrelevance after a certain age. But do skills really expire with age? This narrow perspective ignores those who never fit into traditional employment boxes; farmers, artisans, caregivers, entrepreneurs—who rarely “retire” but instead shift roles as life demands.

Take the example of a grandmother tending her homestead well into her 90s—delegating heavy tasks but remaining a contributor. Her story exposes the flaw in policies that suggest age equals obsolescence.

Compounding this are corporate structures that unintentionally delay entry and accelerate exit. Entry-level roles requiring years of experience block youth access, while rigid ladders and evaluation tools, like the 9-box matrix, create a silent push toward the exit for older employees, regardless of adaptability or potential.

By age 50, many are nudged toward retirement tracks. The result? A culture of competition and burnout in the years leading to exit, driven more by fear than fulfillment. But what if the retirement policy didn't exist? What if contribution not age was the only standard, making room for a 33-year-old CEO and a 55-year-old call centre agent, without stigma?

## Employment vs. entrepreneurship: two very different paths

The divergence in retirement experience between the employed and the self-employed reveals structural inequality. For salaried workers, retirement is often marked by institutional triggers, pensions, severance, and forced exits. But for business owners or freelancers, it's different. Retirement becomes a question of capacity, not age.

Consider Warren Buffett, who retired at 92, not because a policy required it, but by personal choice. He transitioned on his own terms. That distinction matters: policy-driven retirement limits agency, while purpose-driven transitions extend it.



## Policy shifts for a modern workforce

To meet the realities of today's diverse, multigenerational workforce, HR leaders must champion progressive change:

### 1. Eliminate Arbitrary Age Limits

Assess employees by contribution, not birth year. A Gen Z might be ready for the C-suite, while a Gen X might thrive in a newly reinvented frontline role. There's no fixed formula.

### 2. Prioritize Skills Regeneration

Encourage lifelong learning from high school to university to workplace upskilling. Enable role shifts rather than exits. For instance, I was inspired by the appointment of Dr. Bernard William Chitunga, 36, as Chancellor of the Co-operative University of Kenya—the youngest ever in the country. I knew him at the African Development Bank, his sharp thinking and boldness could inject fresh energy into shaping market-ready graduates, from certificates to PhDs.

HR colleagues, prioritize real conversations with your teams. Don't just talk performance—talk adaptability, growth, and reinvention.

### 3. Embrace Flexible Work Models

As employees evolve, so should employment models. Think hybrid roles, team-based contracts, and job-sharing. Let students handle project-based work. Remember when Starehe Boys used to usher at Nairobi Hospital? Or how NYS personnel support government institutions today? Why can't private companies replicate such models?

Flexible engagement isn't just a perk—it's a smart workforce strategy that considers context, capability, and contribution.

## What younger generations can do differently

Retirement's reinvention also depends on how Gen Z and Millennials define success.

### 1. Reject “One-Size-Fits-All” Paths

Success doesn't mean a suit, corner office, or city life. Flourishing careers can grow from farms, freelance hubs, or tech labs in remote towns.

### 2. Start Early, Adapt Often

Don't wait until your 40s to upskill or plan finances. Let lifelong learning and planning begin in your 20s. The earlier the better.

### 3. Choose Purpose Over Prescription

Work shouldn't just be a 40-year race to retirement. Build careers with meaning, not just milestones.

## A word to the Gen X (and beyond): you're not done yet

If you're in your 50s or 60s, and wondering about your place in this conversation—don't worry. You're in it.

My grandmother, when no longer able to carry a 10kg banana bunch to Shamakhokho market, still walked there with her daughter. She adjusted the weight, not the mission. She stayed relevant by shifting how she contributed—not whether she did.

We must all learn to evolve how we give, lead, support, and create. The future of work is not linear; it's layered, lifelong, and deeply personal.

## Closing thought

It's time to dismantle ageist norms that limit human potential. Let's build a culture—supported by HR policies—that encourages continuous contribution at every stage of life.

Whether you're 18, 38, or 68, the question should always be: “How can I meaningfully contribute now?”

Let retirement be a comma, not a full stop.

# Focused on the development of adaptive and resilient leadership.

How are emotional intelligence and human-Centred leadership crucial for organisational success?

We explore essential leadership skills needed to navigate complexity and change, drawing insights from interviews with industry leaders on transforming leadership in today's business landscape.

**Susan Muigai**  
Chief People Officer  
Mastercard  
New York, USA

# Leadership focus

**W**hen Mastercard announced the appointment of Susan Muigai as Chief People Officer on 7 April 2025, the news resonated far beyond the payments industry. Here was a Kenyan-born lawyer-turned-HR-strategist stepping onto the executive bridge of a Fortune 500 company that serves 210 markets and employs more than 35,000 people. She succeeded long-time CPO Michael Fraccaro, inheriting a culture repeatedly ranked a “Best Place to Work” and a business that closed 2024 with double-digit revenue growth.

Muigai arrives with uncommon range. Over 16 years at Walmart she ran various functions, across multiple markets including the United States, Canada and India—moving seamlessly from distribution centres to e-commerce war rooms, always with people and the customer at the core. At TransUnion she reshaped talent strategy to match the data-analytics firm’s digital pivot. Board seats at Coursera and Breakfast Club of Canada underscore her conviction that equitable access—to learning, to opportunity, even to breakfast—unlocks human potential.

Now, as a member of Mastercard’s Executive Leadership Team, she must keep the talent engine humming while the company pushes into new payment rails, AI-driven fraud defence and financial-inclusion programmes. Her story is a blueprint for CHROs, CPOs and other leaders in Africa who aspire to win on the world stage.

We sat down with Susan to explore how she links talent strategy to Mastercard’s rapid growth agenda, and how she might perhaps open global doors for the next generation of African leaders.

## On leadership lessons and influence

**From Walmart floors to fintech boardrooms: which leadership lesson has proven universal, regardless of industry or geography?**

A leadership lesson that has served me well across every industry and geography where I have worked, is placing the customer and people within the business that I serve at the centre of all the decisions I make.. This enables me to find common ground that others can rally around but equally provides me a framework against which to test the strength of my decisions.

**Does representing Africa in a Fortune 500 C-suite carry personal weight for you—and how do you translate that pride into action for other African talent?**

I’m incredibly proud of my background and upbringing, which have had such a tremendous influence on the values I hold dear. As I chart new territory in my career, I appreciate opportunities—like joining the RIKA Leadership Summit—to learn and connect with upcoming leaders from Africa. It’s so important to stay connected not only to your country of origin, but to your global community. That connection helps me pause before drawing conclusions based on where I currently sit and continues to enrich my perspective on the various issues that come across my desk.

**If you could give one piece of advice to an aspiring HR leader from Nairobi, Lagos, Lusaka or Addis Ababa who dreams of a global role, what would it be?**

Always keep learning. The world is changing fast; stay agile and curious, so that you can adapt and keep up. I’m a lifelong learner myself—whether that’s in formal degree programs or striking up a conversation with a new colleague. I’ve always been hungry to learn more, to push my boundaries, and that would be my piece of advice to aspiring HR leaders.

## Talent strategy & future of work

**Mastercard grew revenue 14 percent last year. Which people lever will matter most if that streak is to continue through 2030?**

We have a strong People Strategy in place that works in lock step with our business strategy. One critical element of it is building a skilled and agile workforce. That will be a key piece as we continue to deliver on our business priorities. We need a workforce that has the skills to keep pace with a changing and complex market—and we need an agile organisation to be able to deploy talent at the speed and scale that the market demands.

**Which future-of-work trend do senior leaders still underestimate, and what are you doing now to get ahead of it?**

Not underestimated, but certainly something our senior leaders are focused on—the proliferation of AI. We have a cross-functional and cross-business team in place to build a strong AI learning strategy to ensure our people are prepared to use it in their day-to-day. In HR, we also are continuously partnering with our business and technical teams on how best to incorporate AI into our employees’

experiences in a meaningful way—whether that’s to improve personalization, increase speed and productivity, or augment them in their work.

**Data-Driven People Decisions: What single HR metric (beyond headcount and turnover) most accurately signals future business growth?**

Employee engagement is an important metric that helps demonstrate the strength of your employee base. We recently re-organized to better align our teams to our business priorities; with any change can come uncertainty and the risk of employees becoming disengaged. Throughout these change efforts, we were very intentional to ensure our employees felt that they were part of the journey, that they had open spaces to ask questions and learn more, and that we clearly reinforced the value of these changes to support our customers and each other. On our most recent Employee Experience Survey, our engagement was the highest we’ve seen it—that’s a great reminder of the value we’ve placed on our people.

**Growth vs. Resilience: In volatile currencies, how do you balance aggressive talent investment with the need to keep fixed costs flexible?**

It’s a delicate balance—but one that our teams are well versed in. When you need to balance the short-term against the long-term, you need to know where and how to either build the skills or go to market for the skills you need. Our investment in putting a stronger focus on skills has helped us to remain agile by having better line of sight to where and when we can upskill or reskill, as well as where we must ensure we have strong recruitment efforts.

## On culture & organisational insight

**Numbers tell one story; culture tells another. What have you discovered about Mastercard that spreadsheets could never reveal?**

From my initial interviews through to my first months in the role—the passion and purpose that our people feel has rung loud and clear. People are incredibly excited and proud of their work. During my first week, I had the privilege to walk the floors of one of our Tech Hubs, and hearing first-hand about the work our teams are doing to serve customers just reinforced how special this place is. Our people drive innovation and meaningful change as one team—truly connecting everyone to priceless possibilities.

### **Boards often struggle to link culture to EBITDA. How do you ensure the “people lens” lands on the CEO agenda with the same urgency as revenue and risk?**

Culture is a business differentiator. We’ve measured culture for some time—focusing on key aspects like leadership, innovation, inclusion, among many others. We benchmark ourselves to ensure we’re remaining competitive, and we regularly bring these metrics to our highest levels of leadership—our CEO and our Board of Directors. It helps us keep a pulse on where we are doing well and where we have opportunities to adjust our approach and be better. Culture is absolutely central to business discussions.

### **Future of Workspaces: With hybrid models now standard, how do you maintain mentorship and culture glue for a geographically dispersed workforce?**

Hybrid doesn’t need to mean disconnected. In fact, for us, embracing a more flexible working model not just dependent on physical workspaces has opened many doors for our people. Through things like our internal talent marketplace, our people from across the globe are able to access opportunities—like short-term projects and mentorships—from wherever they sit. We’ve had team members in Sao Paulo support projects in San Francisco, and mentor pairs in London and Pune meet virtually. Hybrid should be seen as another avenue for flexibility, and that opens some of the physical boundaries of our spaces. In-person collaboration is still a critical element of our culture, but hybrid has been a strong supplement to it, unlocking collaboration and development for our global workforce.

## **Personal journey & self-reflection**

### **Failure Trophy: What professional setback do you proudly display on your metaphorical shelf because it reshaped your leadership for the better?**

The professional setback I proudly display on my metaphorical shelf relates to a lateral move that was offered to me into Audit. At the time, I took it personally that I wasn’t promoted into a senior role within compliance. As it turned out, the lateral role gave me a much broader view of our business, taught me to how to lead when working in a space that was new to me, and expanded my network in ways that I had not anticipated—and two years later, had me further along in my career than I expected.

### **Unexpected Mentor: Who outside business—perhaps an artist, athlete, or family member—has most influenced how you lead?**

My grandmother. She lived through decades of significant change and, despite not having access to many of the things we take for granted today, never lost her curiosity and desire for continuous learning.

### **Early Spark: What moment or influence in your childhood or early career first made you believe you could thrive on the world’s biggest corporate stages?**

Winning a national debating competition when I was about 10 or 11. It taught me the value of preparation and self-confidence.

### **Pivotal Fork in the Road: Which single career decision—taken against conventional advice—proved most decisive in propelling you toward the C-suite?**

Taking an international assignment to India instead of an opportunity in a more mature market—all with a 10-month-old in tow. That assignment stretched me in more ways than anything I had previously undertaken and taught me the value of leveraging every person in your sphere, from my team members who taught me how the market worked to my family who provided childcare when I needed to travel, to other expatriates who helped me cope with home sickness.

### **Mentor Mosaic: Share one lesson each from a supporter, a challenger, and a sceptic—and how they shaped your leadership style.**

- A supporter – Take risks as long as they are calculated and intentional. This advice has shaped the way I assess both new opportunities and the solutions that I put on the table, and to constantly question whether I am pushing as hard as I should or taking the easier way forward.
- A challenger – Making no decision is a decision – This statement came from

one of my mentors at a time when I had wavered for a really long time on a decision. It helped me realize that my avoidance of the situation spoke volumes about what I was willing to tolerate and that my teams would be more forgiving if I provided them clarity (even if the decision was not one they liked) than if I left them guessing on where things were headed.

- A sceptic – Don’t give too much of yourself or show your weaknesses. Over time, I have learned that the opposite is true. Sharing more of my authentic self and the areas where I need help has actually enabled me to connect more deeply with others and build trust much more rapidly.

### **Resilience Rituals: During stretches of self-doubt or fatigue, what daily habit or mindset reset keeps you anchored and moving forward?**

Pulling away to spend time with friends and family helps ground me and often helps me remember to prioritize the things that are most important—my relationships, good health and happiness.

### **Legacy Lens: When rising African professionals study your career twenty years from now, what core principle do you hope they see—and replicate—in their own journeys?**

I hope that when others look back at my career that they see a continuous strive for excellence (because I think we can always reach higher) wrapped in this idea of community or Ubuntu (I am because we are). Ultimately, that I sought excellence and made a difference along that journey that brought about a positive change for others.

### **Secret Superpower: What do your colleagues rely on you for that doesn’t appear in any job description or résumé?**

Levity—when things don’t go as planned, I am known for finding humour or the light side of the situation. Laughter is universal, and smiling is an easy way of uplifting others.



“  
It’s so important to stay connected not only to your country of origin, but to your global community.”

**Wandia Gichuru**  
CEO and co-founder  
Vivo Fashion Group

# From bold idea to global influence.

## Wandia Gichuru on purpose, pivoting, and building a people-first fashion brand.

Over the last decade, Wandia Gichuru has helped transform Vivo from a bold retail idea into one of East Africa's most recognized fashion brands. In this candid conversation, she shares what has fuelled the company's growth, the personal values behind her leadership, and why local fashion has global potential.

### Designing for East Africa

#### What do you attribute Vivo's success to?

A few things. First, we design specifically for the East African woman. Global fashion often assumes a Eurocentric body shape, and that just doesn't work for many of us. Even something as simple as hip-to-waist ratio — most of our customers struggle to find trousers that fit well in both places.

We also focus on wardrobe staples and versatile pieces that you can dress up or down. We're not trying to be the brand you wear on the red carpet. We're the brand you wear under the red-carpet outfit. And finally, we manufacture 100% locally. That's been a big part of our story and visibility.

### From fitness wear to full fashion

#### How did the decision to manufacture in-house come about?

In the early days, we imported from Asia, but we couldn't get the range of sizes and colours we wanted, and the minimum order quantities were just too high. So we decided to try producing here in Kenya. We started with three machines and two tailors, testing quietly to see how customers would react. Nobody noticed the difference, which gave us the confidence to scale.

Manufacturing locally gave us control. We could adjust designs for our market, like adding sleeves for modesty without compromising style. That flexibility has become part of our edge.

### Growth & funding

#### What kind of financial support have you had along the way?

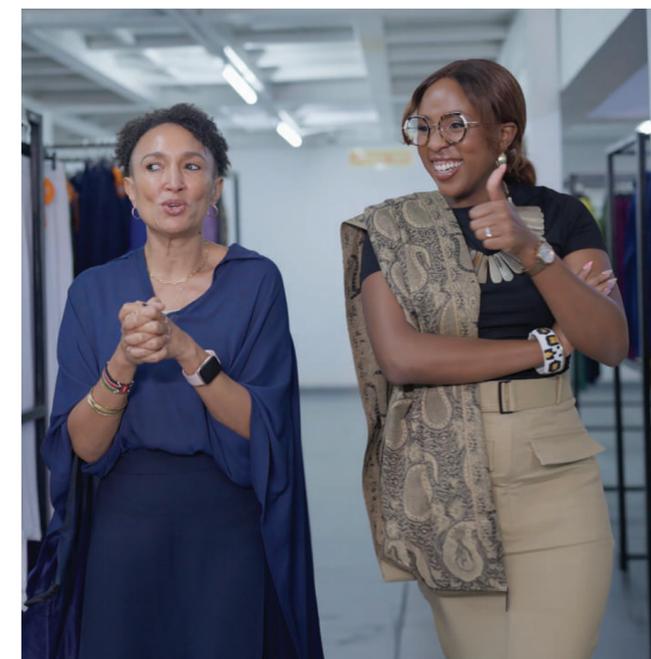
We started with personal savings, then grew by reinvesting profits. About five years in, we raised around a million dollars, all from friends and family. We've never taken institutional money, but those early reinvestments and later equity raises helped fuel our expansion.

### The power of a board

#### What role has governance played in Vivo's growth?

We had a basic board from day one which consisted of just myself, my co-founder, my brother, and a company secretary. But after I went through Stanford Seed, I expanded it to include independent directors. That changed everything. They pushed us to think bigger and scale faster — not just one or two stores a year, but five, six.

That external challenge and accountability really made a difference.



## People first, always

What are the top human capital practices you believe in as a leader?

# 1

### Hire well

Bring in people who can help shape the path, not just execute it. Don't just look at skills — attitude, chemistry, and diversity of thought are just as important.

# 2

### Set people up to succeed

Sometimes we misplace great talent by putting them in the wrong roles. Or we manage in ways that don't match who we are. I always say, be honest about the kind of leader you are. You can't micromanage one person and be hands-off with the next.

# 3

### Build leaders

As your company grows, you need leadership at every level, not just the top.

## Rethinking the HR Function

**You mentioned using a fractional Chief People Officer. How has that worked out?**

It has been a game changer. We couldn't afford a full-time strategic HR executive, but we didn't want to compromise on that role. So we brought in a senior HR leader who gives us 4 days a month focusing on strategy, policy, coaching, and long-term people initiatives. She holds us accountable, not just for launching projects but for sustaining and embedding them.

### Advice for career transitions

**You've moved from banking to development to fashion. What's your approach to change?**

Self-awareness. Ask yourself: Is what I'm doing still serving me? What's the risk of change, and how can I manage it? I didn't leap straight from a full-time job into Vivo. I had savings. I tried coaching for a bit. I tested the waters.

Change doesn't have to mean quitting your job. Maybe you start something on the side or shift roles internally. And if you do make a big move, break it down into steps. What's the next viable action?

### On burnout and energy management

**Have you ever experienced burnout?**

Not burnout, but I did experience anxiety last year, especially when there was a big gap between public perception and internal reality. We launched a store in Atlanta during a tough time financially,

and I started to panic. I'd find excuses to leave the room. Or go hide away in the bathroom. That was new for me.

I've also learned that my environment affects my energy. I moved to a quieter office and saw a huge difference. I wear an Oura ring to track my stress levels, and I literally saw my stress levels drop. For me, managing energy and environment is key.

### Leadership, decisions & values

**How do you make hard decisions when there's a lot of noise?**

I try not to rush. Sometimes just sleeping on it brings clarity. I also turn to people I trust, not because they'll tell me what to do, but because they ask the right questions. And I check back in with our core values. Are we staying true to them? Am I chasing shiny opportunities and losing focus?

### Legacy & local pride

**What do you want your legacy to be?**

I don't think about legacy in a grand way. I just hope I've added value to the lives of the people closest to me: my children, friends, team. But if there's one thing I want to help shift, it's how we see fashion. Not just as art or vanity, but as serious business.

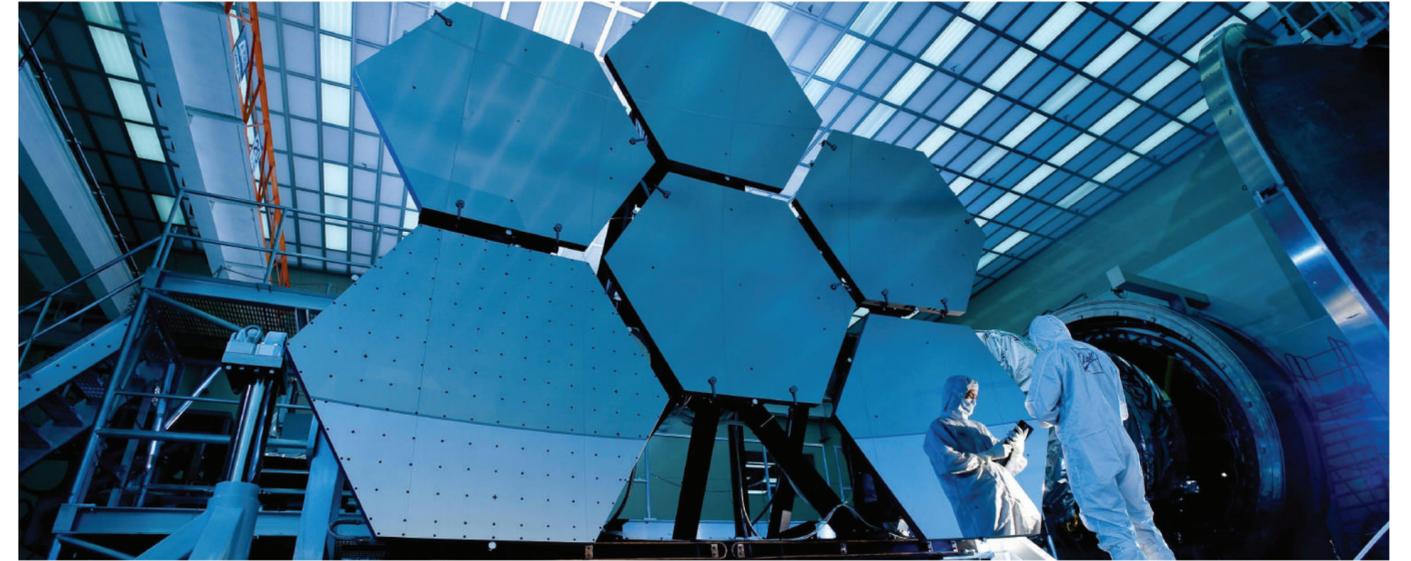
Fashion is still labour-intensive. It can create jobs, build wealth, stimulate supply chains. Yet 95% of what we wear is imported. We need to build proudly African brands, made for us, that stand tall on global shelves. We deserve that.



We need to build proudly African brands, made for us, that stand tall on global shelves. We deserve that.

**Liz Robertson**  
Head of People and  
Business Transformation  
KOFISI Africa

# Lead with humanity in a tech-driven world.



In the late 90s, my father gave me a book that changed everything. He'd given me many books before, but this one shifted the course of my education and career. It was Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman - a book that made a compelling case that emotional intelligence (EQ) could be just as, if not more, important than IQ.

I devoured everything I could find on emotional intelligence. I read and re-read Goleman's work, highlighter in hand, filling the margins with notes. At the time, emotional intelligence felt intuitive to me - so much so that I assumed it was obvious to everyone. But back then, it wasn't taken seriously. Emotional intelligence was dismissed as "soft" and seen as less valuable in the world of business and leadership.

Meanwhile, another major force was beginning to reshape the world: technology. While emotional intelligence was struggling to be recognized, tech was rapidly taking centre stage - automating tasks, scaling operations and driving data-based decision-making. But even as digital tools advanced, the people side of leadership was often overlooked.

Fast forward to today, and the narrative has shifted dramatically. The world has come to understand what many of us felt years ago: soft skills - now rightly rebranded as power skills - are essential to great leadership. Power skills<sup>1</sup> can be classified as being more intangible and human-Centred. From Harvard Business Review to Forbes to World Economic Forum, the consensus is clear: emotional intelligence is a top skill for the future of work. It's not just about being nice - it's about driving real business outcomes and creating cultures where people thrive.

Power skills like communication, adaptability, and critical thinking consistently set strong leaders apart.

They lead to higher engagement, deeper collaboration, and better integration of diverse perspectives. They outperform technical or hard skills when it comes to driving sustainable, people-Centred growth<sup>2</sup>.

Importantly, power skills aren't just useful in managing people, they are essential to how we apply and integrate technology in our teams and organisations. Tech alone can't solve human problems. It takes emotional intelligence to lead hybrid teams, resilience to manage constant change, and ethical judgment to navigate complex data.

As leaders, we are now expected to master both the human and the technological. Tech is everywhere - enabling remote work, automating tasks and processes, surfacing insights. But without the human element, that tech can feel sterile, disconnected and ineffective. It's the leaders who can bridge the gap between tools and teams that drive real progress.

In a previous era, "tech" and "soft skills" may never have been part of the same conversation. Today, they're inseparable. Whether leading hybrid teams or adopting new platforms, empathy and adaptability are critical. To lead well, we must be digitally fluent and people-centric - using data ethically, communicating transparently, and prioritizing trust and community.

As we navigate a world increasingly shaped by technology, it's the power skills - those deeply human qualities - that will continue to define the most impactful leaders. Emotional intelligence, adaptability and ethical judgment aren't just leadership add-ons - they're the foundation.

The future belongs to those who can balance innovation with intention, and lead not just with strategy, but with heart.

“  
Power skills aren't just useful in managing people, they are essential to how we apply and integrate technology in our teams and organisations.”

<sup>1</sup>"Let's Stop Talking About Soft Skills, They're Power Skills," Josh Bersin.  
<https://joshbersin.com/2019/10/lets-stop-talking-about-soft-skills-theyre-power-skills/>

<sup>2</sup>"The importance of soft skills in the workplace," University of Sunderland UK.  
[https://online.sunderland.ac.uk/the-importance-of-soft-skills-in-the-workplace/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://online.sunderland.ac.uk/the-importance-of-soft-skills-in-the-workplace/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

# Why emotional intelligence now reigns supreme.

IQ got you here, EQ will keep you here.

For decades, leaders were measured by their IQ (Intelligence Quotient)—their ability to analyse data, solve problems, and strategise with precision.

Then came the era of Technical Skills (TQ)—expertise in finance, operations, technology, or whatever industry they operated in.

Soon after, we saw the rise of Adaptability Quotient (AQ)—the ability to pivot in a rapidly evolving world.

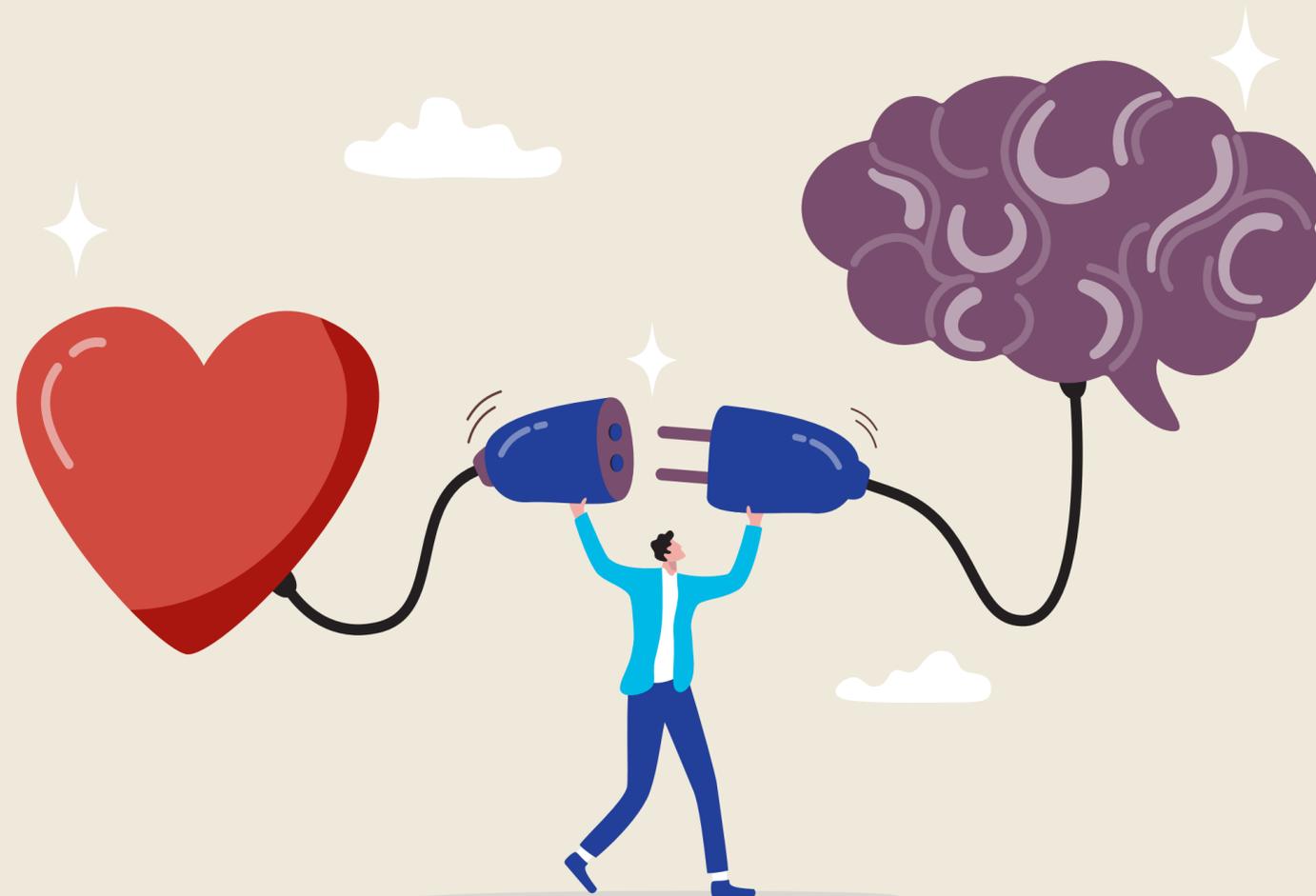
But none of these are enough anymore.

In a world that is more emotionally charged, fragile, and unpredictable than ever before, the real differentiator for leaders is Emotional Intelligence (EQ).

If IQ is what gets leaders into the room, EQ is what allows them to lead the room. And in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world—one that is also brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible (BANI)—leaders who lack EQ will either fail or be rejected by their teams.

So, the real question is:

**Do you have it? And if not, how fast can you develop it?**



## 1. Emotional intelligence: the leadership superpower you can't fake

Emotional Intelligence is not about being "nice." It is about being effective. It's the ability to read the room, anticipate reactions, and adjust accordingly. It's the skill that allows leaders to navigate difficult conversations, high-stakes decisions, and moments of crisis without losing control. It's what separates a leader who commands respect from one who demands it.

### What This Means for Leaders:

- If your team hides information from you, it's not a "communication issue"—it's an EQ issue.
- If you can't handle dissent or critical feedback, your leadership isn't strong—it's brittle.
- If you believe emotional intelligence is optional, your people will opt out of following you.

### KEY QUESTION

Are you leading people, or are you just occupying a leadership role?

## 2. Leadership without EQ is just authority—and authority is losing power

Gone are the days when leaders could operate in a command-and-control model. Employees don't tolerate fear-driven leadership anymore. Today's workforce values leaders who are emotionally in tune with their teams, not just intellectually sharp.

### What This Means for Leaders:

- People don't quit companies; they quit leaders who don't understand them.
- A brilliant strategy will fail if the leader can't inspire, engage, and emotionally connect with their team.
- The future of leadership is influence, not intimidation.

### KEY QUESTION

Are people following you because they want to—or because they have to?

## 3. The Four Pillars of high-EQ leadership

Leaders who master EQ operate at an entirely different level. Their decisions are sharper, their teams are more engaged, and their businesses outperform the competition.

### Here's how they do it:

#### 1 Self-Awareness

The ability to recognize your own emotions and how they impact your leadership. High-EQ leaders understand their blind spots and own their weaknesses.

#### 2 Self-Regulation

Staying calm under pressure, managing stress, and not letting emotions cloud decision-making. Leaders with EQ don't react—they respond with intention.

#### 3 Empathy

The ability to understand the perspectives and emotions of others. In today's world, if you can't walk in the shoes of your employees, customers, or stakeholders, you will lose them.

#### 4 Social Intelligence

Knowing how to influence, and build strong relationships. High-EQ leaders are master communicators who can handle difficult conversations without creating division.

### KEY QUESTION

Are you practicing these four pillars daily, or are you hoping EQ will develop naturally?

## 4. Emotional intelligence is no longer optional—it's the price of entry

The future belongs to leaders who understand that intelligence without emotional intelligence is a liability.

### What This Means for Leaders:

- You can develop EQ—it's not a fixed trait.
- Organisations will increasingly favour EQ leaders in promotions, hiring, and succession planning.
- Leaders who thrive in the next decade will not just be the smartest in the room, but the most emotionally intelligent.

### KEY QUESTION

Are you actively developing your EQ, or are you assuming that leadership is just about making decisions?

## The world is emotionally charged—leaders must be too

We are living in a world where emotions run high—fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and rapid change. In this environment, leaders who can't read the emotional temperature of their teams will lose them.

It's no longer just about being the most knowledgeable, experienced, or qualified leader. It's about being the one who can rally people through uncertainty, communicate with clarity, and build resilience in emotionally fragile times.

And that? That requires Emotional Intelligence.

Now, over to you!

Do you know your EQ level?

**If you don't, it's time to find out—because in today's leadership game, EQ is the new currency. And the leaders who don't have it? They won't be leaders for long**

# 5 core and 5 elective skills every leader needs now.

Let's begin with a simple truth: your title doesn't make you a leader—your team's energy, output, and loyalty do.

Leadership today isn't about corner offices, charisma, or how many books you've read on stoicism. It's about how well you can guide a group of very different people (some remote, some barely present, a few quietly job-hunting) toward a shared goal—with clarity, integrity, and hopefully, minimal casualties.

Gone are the days when technical skills and strategic plans alone could carry the day. Today's best leaders must blend decisiveness with empathy, data with intuition, and ambition with rest.

If leadership were a university degree (and really, it should be a lifetime course with no graduation date), then it would include 5 Core and 5 Elective subjects—skills you cannot afford to overlook, and bonus competencies that will set you apart. Here's your leadership curriculum for the modern world. Take notes. There will be a test (it's called your team's performance).



# The 5 core subjects.

## Learn these or risk becoming obsolete.

These are your essentials—like brushing your teeth or showing up on time for investor calls. Skip them and your team will feel it. Deeply.



### Delivering results (without becoming a tyrant)

Let's start where most leadership books end—results. Good intentions, great culture, and inspiring quotes are lovely, but your job is to deliver. That means setting clear goals, tracking progress, holding people accountable, and removing barriers.

#### Why it matters

Leadership without outcomes is just a TEDx talk. No results = no trust.

#### Watch out for

Mistaking busyness for productivity. A flurry of activity doesn't mean the right things are getting done.



### Smart decision-making under pressure

In a BANI world (Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, Incomprehensible), there's rarely a perfect answer. The best leaders assess risk, consult wisely, decide quickly—and own the consequences.

#### Why it matters

Indecisiveness breeds confusion. Speed and accountability build confidence.

#### Watch out for

Death by consensus. Sometimes, being liked must take a back seat to being effective.



### Emotional intelligence (EQ) The leader's sixth sense

Gone are the days when "leave your emotions at the door" was the mantra. Today's leaders are emotional detectives—reading the room, managing conflict, and knowing when to lean in or back off.

#### Why it matters

Teams thrive when they feel seen. EQ fosters trust, retention, and psychological safety.

#### Watch out for

If you're the last to find out someone's quitting, your EQ radar is off.



### Adaptive communication Talking so people actually listen

You may have crafted the perfect strategy deck, but if your team zones out after slide 6, what's the point? Leading today means speaking clearly, often, and with just the right tone for just the right channel.

#### Why it matters

Communication is the delivery system for vision. If it breaks, so does everything else.

#### Watch out for

"Let me clarify" should be a signal, not a recurring slogan.



### Talent development Growing people, not just products

Leaders aren't judged by their own achievements anymore. They're judged by what they help others achieve. Coaching, mentoring, and developing your team is the long-term power play.

#### Why it matters

High-performing teams aren't hired fully formed. They're nurtured, challenged, and believed in.

#### Leadership test

Can you name your top three team members' career goals? No? Time to lean in.

# The 5 elective subjects.

## Optional, but they separate the good from the great

These are not mandatory, but in today's unpredictable, purpose-driven workplaces, they're your edge. Leaders who invest here aren't just effective—they're magnetic.



### Rest and resilience High-performing teams know when to pause

Pushing harder isn't always the answer. Sustained performance comes from cycles of work and recovery. Leaders must role-model rest, not romanticise burnout.

#### Why it matters

Your team isn't a machine—and neither are you.

#### Leadership flex

Normalise PTO, don't guilt-trip it. Burnout is not a badge of honour.



### Feedback fluency Say it so it lands

Feedback should be like a good espresso—strong, timely, and never watered down. But it should also be human. Deliver praise with presence and correction with care.

#### Why it matters

Feedback is fuel—when it's real. It helps people grow, and keeps teams agile.

#### Try this instead of "good job"

Here's what I noticed, here's what worked, and here's what could elevate it further.



### Cultural intelligence Leading beyond your own bubble

Today's teams are diverse in every possible way—culture, gender, generation, geography. Curiosity about these differences is more than nice—it's essential.

#### Why it matters

Innovation is born from difference. Exclusion kills creativity and morale.

#### Red flag

If everyone on your team agrees with you too quickly, it's either fear—or sameness.



### Digital dexterity You don't need to code, but you can't be clueless

You don't need to be a tech guru, but you do need to understand the tools your team uses—and how AI, automation, and analytics are reshaping your business.

#### Why it matters

Leaders who resist technology become blockers, not builders.

#### Cheat code

Learn the difference between data and insight. One informs. The other transforms.



### Strategic use of storytelling and humour

A well-timed story builds trust. A light touch of humour disarms tension. If you can speak like a human and still inspire, you've got a leadership superpower.

#### Why it matters

People forget bullet points. They remember how you made them feel.

#### Word of caution

Don't force it. One bad dad/mum joke too many, and you're in "cringe" territory.

# Do you have a personal board of directors yet?

In the ever-changing terrain of modern leadership, one truth is becoming increasingly clear: leaders who walk alone, falter.

The pandemic may have popularised the phrase “you are not alone,” but in the professional sphere—especially at the top—it often feels like you are. CEOs, founders, entrepreneurs, and senior executives carry the crushing weight of strategic choices, people issues, market volatility, and personal identity all in one breath. But while organisations benefit from Boards of Directors that offer oversight, counsel, and accountability, most individuals have no equivalent.

This is not just an oversight—it’s a missed opportunity for resilience, clarity, and growth.

It’s time to ask: Do you have a Personal Board of Directors yet?

## What is a personal board of directors?

A Personal Board of Directors (PBOD) is a group of 4–7 trusted individuals who serve as your strategic sounding board—not for your business, but for your life and leadership. They offer diverse perspectives, hold you accountable, challenge your assumptions, and help you lead with wisdom.

These are not “yes-men.” Nor are they mere mentors or peers. The best PBODs are structured, intentional, and aligned with your purpose and stretch goals. They exist not to flatter you, but to fortify you.

The idea has been quietly embraced by some of the world’s most successful individuals. Oprah Winfrey refers to her “advisory circle.” Bill Gates leans heavily on Warren Buffett and a network of trusted advisers. And while these examples sit at the summit of global leadership, the principle applies at every level: no one grows sustainably without challenge, accountability, and perspective.

## Why you need one now

Today’s leadership environment is uniquely fraught. The VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) model no longer captures it all. We now live in a BANI world—Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible. Decisions are made faster, with less information, in higher-stakes environments, and with greater scrutiny than ever before.

This demands a new kind of leadership: emotionally intelligent, values-driven, and well-supported.

A Personal Board of Directors gives you:

- **Clarity in Complexity:** In the fog of daily decisions, your PBOD helps you reconnect with what matters most.
- **Truth Over Comfort:** They challenge your blind spots, ego, and cognitive biases.
- **Psychological Safety:** Leadership is lonely. Your board offers space to process and be human.
- **Strategic Growth:** A good PBOD stretches your thinking and sharpens your judgment. They ask: “What’s next?” and “What’s holding you back?”

## Who belongs on your PBOD?

Assembling a high-impact PBOD requires more than pulling together your smartest friends. Think of it as a team of diverse specialists, each fulfilling a different purpose.

Consider the following roles:

- **The Wise Elder:** Seasoned, grounded, with a long view of leadership and life. Offers historical and ethical grounding.
- **The Challenger:** Unafraid to push back. Asks uncomfortable but essential questions.
- **The Mirror:** Someone who knows your patterns and calls out inconsistencies.
- **The Innovator:** A creative thinker who expands your view and helps you break old mental models.
- **The Specialist:** Deep in a field you value—finance, legal, governance, HR, etc.
- **The Compass:** Keeps you anchored to your values and principles when ambition or pressure tempts compromise.

You don’t need all of these, but diversity is key. Avoid surrounding yourself with people who think just like you—or who are reluctant to offer critique.

## How to set it up

A PBOD isn’t built overnight. And it’s not about scheduling awkward quarterly Zoom calls. It’s about creating a rhythm of counsel, reflection, and accountability.

Here’s how to do it:

### 1. Select Intentionally

Reach out to people who bring depth, not just visibility. Be clear on why you’re inviting them. Share your aspirations, your leadership journey, and the role you hope they can play.

### 2. Clarify the Engagement

This is not a legal board with fiduciary responsibility—it’s a relationship. You might meet one-on-one or as a group. Some leaders prefer informal check-ins; others hold an annual “Life AGM” to evaluate their goals and values.

### 3. Be Open

You will only get as much value as you are willing to reveal. Share your dilemmas. Own your fears. Ask them not just “What would you do?” but “What am I not seeing?” or “Where am I playing small?”

### 4. Keep It Alive

Refresh your board over time. As your life and career evolve, so will your needs. Rotate members, add new voices, and occasionally audit: Who still energises and challenges you? Who doesn’t?

### 5. Offer Value Back

A PBOD is a privilege. Don’t take it for granted. Be generous with your own time, introductions, insights, and gratitude.

## Pitfalls to avoid

### • Selecting Only Cheerleaders

If everyone on your PBOD agrees with you, you’ve built a fan club—not a board.

### • Treating It as a Status Symbol

This is not about name-dropping your high-powered friends. It’s about impact. The person who sees you clearly is more valuable than the one with the biggest title.

### • Lack of Follow-Through

Having a PBOD is only useful if you integrate the feedback. Don’t become a seeker of advice who refuses to evolve.

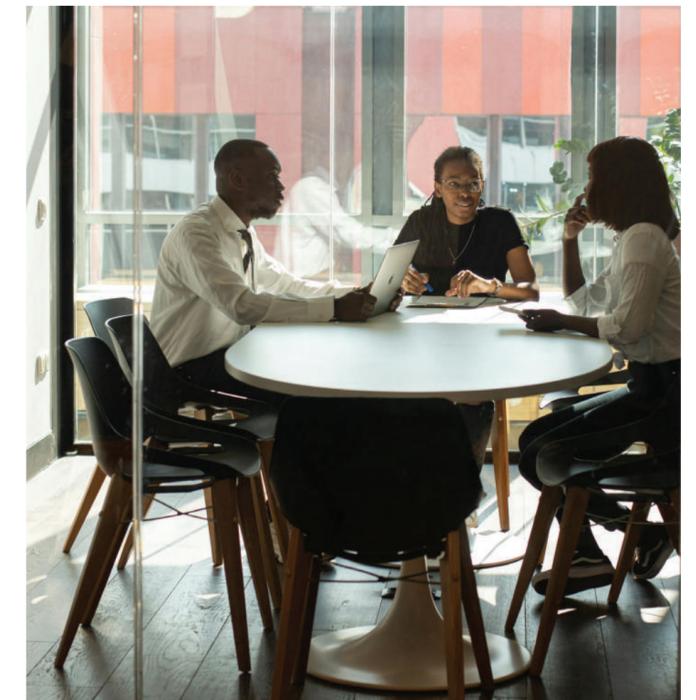
## What success looks like

When activated well, a PBOD becomes a quiet force behind your visible impact.

It shows up in:

- **Sharper decision-making**
- **Stronger personal alignment with professional ambition**
- **Reduced burnout through perspective and support**
- **Faster learning through trusted feedback loops**
- **Greater humility, anchored in truth rather than insecurity**

Ultimately, your PBOD helps you remain not only effective but also whole. And in a world that glorifies “high performance,” wholeness is the real win.



# The final assignment: audit yourself honestly.

If you're still relying solely on your subject matter expertise to lead, you're behind.

Today's teams want more than knowledge.

They want clarity, courage, compassion—and results.

They want a leader who gets it and still gets it done.

So ask yourself:

- Am I delivering outcomes and developing people?
- Am I communicating to be understood or to sound impressive?
- Does my team thrive—or survive—under my leadership?
- When was the last time I truly rested, listened, or laughed with them?



## London Gatwick Here We Are!

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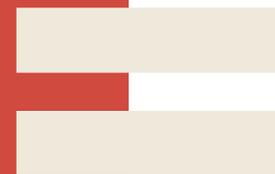
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AI is no longer  
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reshaping how  
we lead, learn,  
and work.

How AI is reshaping HR,  
challenging views on  
algorithmic decisions,  
and redefining leadership  
amid rapid change.

Covering topics from  
digital detoxes to  
resilience neuroscience,  
it offers guidance for  
navigating the future  
of work with purpose  
and clarity.





**Dr. Laila Macharia**  
Co-Founder and Chair  
Africa Digital Media Institute (ADMI) and  
AI Academy

# AGI's double-edged promise to HR.

Over the years, I've guided organisations through countless tech shifts. But few forces feel as powerful—or as unsettling—as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI).

AGI is no longer science fiction. Its rapid rise is rewriting the playbook for human resource management and talent development. For senior HR leaders, this moment demands ambition—and caution. We have to harness AGI's explosive potential for productivity while staying vigilant against its very real risks.

## AGI's double-edged promise

AGI can supercharge human ingenuity in ways old-school automation simply couldn't. Imagine generating a fully vetted talent-acquisition strategy in minutes—or creating personalized learning paths for thousands of employees, updated in real time to reflect individual performance data. Timelines shrink. Costs drop. Strategic impact grows.

But AGI also concentrates risk. One flawed prompt can ripple through recruitment pipelines, learning systems, or performance dashboards. Worse, bad actors can weaponise the same tools—faking credentials, fabricating performance reviews, or spreading synthetic rumours that erode trust.

## Rethinking team management for the AGI era

Leading large teams in this new landscape requires three critical shifts:

### 1. From Process Owners to Risk Sentinels

Teams can't just follow best practices—they must understand the new "attack surfaces" AGI introduces. Embedding Risk Sentinels—project leads who balance delivery and defense—is key for every major initiative.

### 2. From Static Roles to Fluid Capabilities

Rigid job descriptions are out. Instead, build capability taxonomies that map the skills people need to manage, oversee, or delegate when AGI enters the equation. AI literacy is now fundamental.

### 3. From Annual Reviews to Continuous Guardianship

AGI's speed makes annual performance cycles obsolete. Instead, implement ongoing health checks, triangulating employee outcomes, AI-generated outputs, and governance metrics in real time.

## Sparking innovation while staying safe

AGI can unleash tremendous creativity—but only with the right culture and guardrails:

### Sandboxing and Prototyping

Give teams low-risk "innovation sandboxes" to test new ideas against controlled data and environments. Organisations dedicating even 10% of developer time to AGI experimentation often see double the breakthrough rate.

### Cross-Functional AGI Guilds

Bring together HR, IT, legal, and business leaders to co-create prompt libraries, ethical guidelines, and adoption playbooks. These guilds become crucial spaces where brilliant ideas—and potential risks—surface early.

### Seed Funding for Pilots

Fund small, time-boxed pilots with clear goals. Celebrate both successes and valuable failures to build institutional knowledge for broader rollouts.

## Guarding against AGI risks

Unchecked AGI can damage brand reputation, employee morale, and legal standing. Mitigate the risks with:

### Governance Frameworks

Set clear policies around data privacy, IP, and acceptable use. A three-tiered model—global principles, divisional standards, and project-level controls—ensures everyone knows the rules.

### Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) Reviews

Where AGI outputs influence decisions like hiring, performance, or compensation, keep a human in the loop. A few extra minutes of oversight can prevent costly errors.

### Continuous Auditing and Explainability

Invest in tools that track prompt histories, decision rationales, and anomalies. Audit trails aren't optional—they're crucial for compliance and trust.

## Building AGI-ready talent

A capable workforce doesn't appear overnight. It requires deliberate investment:

### AI Literacy Curriculum

Develop modular training that spans from foundational concepts (what AGI can and cannot do) to advanced practices (ethical prompt engineering, bias mitigation, adversarial testing).

### Mentorship and Rotation

Pair HR professionals with AI engineers in rotational assignments. This cross-pollination accelerates mutual learning and surfaces real-world challenges faster.

### Leadership Cohorts

Create executive learning journeys—targeted, cohort-based programs where leaders tackle live AGI case studies, receive peer feedback, and emerge ready to sponsor initiatives responsibly.

## The road ahead: stewardship in an AGI world

AGI doesn't diminish the value of human judgment—it elevates it.

As HR leaders, our mission is twofold: to unleash AGI's power for innovation, engagement, and growth—and to shield our people and organisations from its darker edges. By redefining roles, embedding strong governance, and committing to ongoing learning, we can lead our teams into this bold new era with confidence and care.

The future belongs to those who balance ambition with accountability. That's where our greatest opportunity lies.



# Beyond the algorithm: 7 traits to stand out in an AI-driven workforce.

**Nadine Mwangi**  
 HR Analyst & Marketing Lead  
 RIKA Africa



There's been a lot of noise lately about AI taking over the workforce, with some even going as far as to say that in a few years, humans will be irrelevant. And while it's true that AI has the potential to automate certain tasks, particularly those that are repetitive or routine, that doesn't mean people are being replaced as a whole. In fact, the need for the human touch — our empathy, judgment, creativity, and connection — has never been more important. I believe the ideal future isn't one where AI takes over everything, but one where it handles the menial tasks, giving us more space to focus on complex, enriching, and meaningful work. Or better yet, it becomes a tool that enhances what we already do.

We're in the middle of a digital revolution, much like when computers and the internet first became mainstream. Yes, those technologies eliminated jobs like typewriting, switchboard operation, and manual filing, but they also created entirely new industries and transformed the way we live and work.

Imagine if people back then had resisted computers altogether just because they feared change. We'd remind them to look at the bigger picture.

So now, as AI continues to evolve, our challenge is to identify the human traits that will help us thrive not in competition with AI, but in partnership with it.

## 1. Emotional intelligence

Computers and AI have come a long way from their cold, robotic past. In fact, these days, you can even ask AI to help craft a sensitive email or give you tips on managing a tough conversation. But even as it becomes more emotionally "aware," it still can't replace genuine human empathy and connection. Emotional intelligence (EQ) is more than just reading a room or sounding polite; it's about responding with care, understanding perspectives, and nurturing trust over time. In the workplace, that's huge. When people feel seen and supported, it leads to increased engagement, higher productivity, and lower turnover. Research in HR consistently shows that strong interpersonal relationships at work are linked to better collaboration and well-being. As AI handles more of the transactional tasks, building connection is where we as humans need to double down, because no machine can replace the power of authentic human connection.

## 2. Human-centred creativity

While AI has made impressive strides in generating creative content, there's still a clear difference between machine creativity and the kind that's rooted in human experience. Human-Centred creativity draws on empathy, lived reality, and cultural nuance, which are things AI cannot feel or fully understand. Research shows that even when AI can produce original-looking outputs, it lacks the intention, emotional insight, and social relevance that often define truly meaningful work. And do not be fooled that creativity is just for artists or designers; it's an essential skill across all professions. Whether you're brainstorming new ways to solve problems, improve workflows, or connect with clients, creative thinking is key to driving growth and innovation. The challenge is that many of us don't get to exercise these creative muscles regularly, especially when we're in rigid, task-heavy roles (where thankfully, AI might now be stepping in). So, if we want to stand out in an AI-driven world, we need to start embracing more of the messy, imaginative, and deeply human parts of our thinking.

## 3. Expertise

In a time where AI can give us quick answers and endless information, what defines an expert? I believe that in today's world, expertise isn't just about having a deep well of knowledge on a subject matter, it's about knowing how to use that knowledge i.e. knowing how to apply human judgment in ways that AI can't. Machines can recognize patterns, but they don't understand nuance, emotion, or the broader context that often shapes good decision-making.

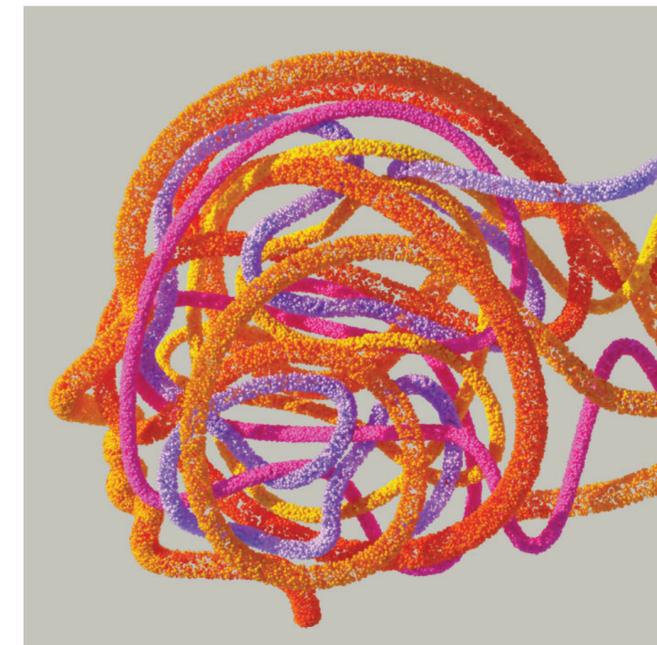
When you've spent time developing deep knowledge in your field, you start to pick up on subtleties that go beyond data and you're able to ask better questions, make smarter choices, and notice things that don't always show up on a spreadsheet. That kind of insight takes time, experience, and a level of care that can't be automated.

AI can definitely support your work, but people who bring both mastery of a domain and sound judgment to the table will always have an edge. In a noisy, fast-paced world, expertise rooted in discernment is what helps you stand out.

## 4. Curiosity and continuous learning

What we're seeing with AI today is likely just the tip of the iceberg — its capabilities will continue to evolve, and so must we. To thrive in this kind of rapidly changing environment, we need to stay curious, open-minded, and committed to learning. That mindset, often called a growth mindset, is what helps us embrace change instead of fearing it. Research shows that employees with a growth mindset tend to be more resilient, adaptable, and effective at problem-solving. They also tend to take more initiative, learn from feedback, and contribute more creatively to their teams. In contrast, a fixed mindset can make people defensive or resistant in the face of change, which is risky in a fast-moving world.

If we want to future-proof our careers, staying curious is no longer optional, it's a professional superpower.



## 5. Strategic thinking

AI is amazing at processing data and identifying patterns, but strategic thinking is still very much a human skill. It's not so much about knowing the facts, it's about figuring out what to do with them. Strategic thinking draws on experience, expertise, and a deep understanding of people and context to choose the best course of action in any given situation. It means zooming out to see the bigger picture, weighing long-term impact, and making decisions that are both informed and intentional.

We can (and should) leverage AI to help with analysis and forecasting, but it's the human mind that connects the dots, considers the ripple effects, and makes calls that align with values and vision. In a workforce shaped by AI, those who can think strategically will be the ones trusted to lead the way.

## 6. Integrity and ethics

AI may be able to simulate good behaviour, but it doesn't have integrity — it doesn't have values, a conscience, or a sense of what's right and wrong. Humans do. Our ethics are shaped by a mix of upbringing, personal experiences, culture, religion, and the communities we're part of. When we bring that ethical grounding into the workplace, we become trusted colleagues, compassionate leaders, and reliable decision-makers.

Research shows that integrity is linked to stronger leadership, greater team trust, and healthier organisational culture. Think of leaders like Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King Jr.; what set them apart wasn't just their intelligence, but their strong moral compasses and unwavering principles. In the workplace, integrity isn't just a "nice to have", it's a core trait that shapes how we lead and show up every day.

## 7. Future readiness

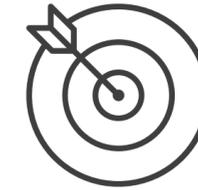
Now more than ever we're living in a VUCA/BANI world, and the future won't just reward people who can adapt to change, it will reward those who can anticipate them and act with clarity even in the midst of chaos. Future readiness is about keeping an eye on where the world is heading and aligning your skills, mindset, and business approach to stay ahead of the curve.

It's not about having all the answers, it's about asking the right questions and staying open to what's next. This means being curious about new technology, paying attention to social and economic shifts, and thinking creatively about how we work. Organisations need forward-thinking people who can help them stay relevant, resilient, and ready. In this kind of world, looking ahead isn't optional, it's essential.

**AI isn't going anywhere. If anything, it's only going to become more integrated into how we work. Instead of seeing it as a threat, we can choose to see it as a tool; one that frees us up to lean deeper into the things that make us uniquely human. The future belongs to those who can work alongside AI while nurturing the emotional, creative, and ethical traits it can't replicate. By cultivating these skills, we're not just protecting our value, we're evolving it. These are the people who will thrive in the workforce of the future.**

# Leading polarities and managing paradoxes in the future of work.

## 5 statistical paradoxes data scientists should know.



### Accuracy Paradox

It shows that accuracy is not a good metric for classification.



### Base Rate Fallacy

When testing rare events, there are more false positive results than positive results.



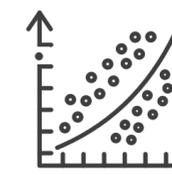
### Gambler's Fallacy

A mistaken belief that if some event occurs more often in the past, it will affect the future prediction.



### Simpson's Paradox

When trends appear in a group of data, but they change as the groups are combined.



### Berkson's Paradox

This paradox happens when the relationship between two variables appears to change when data is aggregated.

In the evolving world of work, leaders are increasingly confronted not with problems that require solutions, but with polarities that demand navigation.

These are not simple choices between two opposing options—rather, they are interdependent tensions where each side has its own upsides and downsides. When managed well, polarities generate energy, innovation, and sustainable performance. When mismanaged, they cause frustration, stagnation, and internal conflict.

Take, for example, the tension between stability and agility. Organisations need systems, structure, and consistency to ensure reliability. But they also need flexibility, adaptability, and speed to survive and thrive in fast-changing environments. Choosing one at the expense of the other leads to dysfunction.

The art of leadership, then, lies not in solving this tension, but in managing it.

This is the essence of Barry Johnson's Polarity Management model—one of the most useful yet underutilised frameworks in modern leadership.

## Understanding polarity management

Barry Johnson introduced the concept of Polarity Management in the 1990s to address a recurring leadership blind spot: the tendency to treat enduring tensions as problems to be solved. In reality, many organisational challenges—such as centralisation vs. decentralisation, control vs. empowerment, global consistency vs. local adaptation—are not solvable. They are polarities: dynamic and ongoing tensions that must be balanced over time.

The Polarity Management framework uses a simple but powerful visual tool called the Polarity Map.

This map helps leaders:

- Identify the two poles (e.g., global alignment and local responsiveness)
- Understand the positive outcomes of each pole (the upside)
- Recognise the risks of over-relying on either pole (the downside)
- Create early warning signs and action steps to maintain balance

## Real-life examples of paradoxes in action

### Global Consistency vs. Local Responsiveness

Multinational companies continually face the paradox of driving global alignment while respecting local market realities. For example, Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan has a global framework for environmental and social impact, but its execution varies by region. In Kenya, the focus may be on plastic waste reduction; in India, water conservation; in Nigeria, supply chain inclusion. The success of the plan lies in balancing the global narrative with local ownership.

### Employee Autonomy vs. Organisational Control

As organisations become more agile and distributed, empowering employees becomes essential. However, autonomy without alignment can lead to chaos. During the pandemic, many firms shifted to remote work, giving teams more freedom. Companies like GitLab, which is fully remote, have thrived by pairing autonomy with strong documentation, performance rhythms, and clear values—showing how control mechanisms can support rather than stifle freedom.

### Short-Term Delivery vs. Long-Term Strategy

In a downturn or crisis, organisations are often pulled into short-term firefighting. But over-indexing on the present can starve the future. Leading firms in the tech sector—such as Microsoft under Satya Nadella—have excelled by holding both: delivering quarterly results while investing in long-term transformation (e.g., cloud, AI, culture renewal). This duality has driven sustainable shareholder value and employee engagement.

## Why this matters now: the BANI context

We've moved beyond VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) to BANI: Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, and Incomprehensible. In such a world, the illusion of simple, linear problem-solving falls apart. Leaders must instead:

- Acknowledge ambiguity
- Build adaptive capacity
- Hold multiple truths simultaneously
- Make peace with competing priorities.



Traditional leadership frameworks often push for clarity and decisiveness. But the new leadership imperative is to stay with the tension—to remain curious, facilitate dialogue, and resist the urge to prematurely “solve” complex tensions with binary choices.

## Applying polarity management in practice

Let's apply Johnson's framework to the polarity of Remote Work vs. In-Office Collaboration, one of the most contentious debates in the post-pandemic workplace.

	Remote Work	In-Office Collaboration
<b>Upside</b>	Flexibility, autonomy, cost savings	Culture, innovation, serendipitous collaboration
<b>Downside</b>	Isolation, reduced team cohesion	Commuting fatigue, higher overhead
<b>Overfocus Risks</b>	Disconnection and silos	Resistance to change, attrition
<b>Early Warnings</b>	Low morale, fragmented culture	Declining engagement, burnout
<b>Action Steps</b>	Invest in digital engagement, hybrid rituals	Reimagine offices for collaboration

The goal is not to pick one or blend them thoughtlessly. It's to be intentional and dynamic—adapting as the environment evolves.

While Polarity Management offers a foundational lens, other adaptive leadership models support the same premise:

- Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership encourages leaders to distinguish between technical problems and adaptive challenges that require new learning.
- McKinsey's Dual Operating System recommends running a stable hierarchy alongside an agile network.
- Design Thinking invites co-creation with stakeholders who represent different poles of the tension.

All of these frameworks converge on one truth: leadership today is not about certainty, but about navigating complexity with humility and clarity.

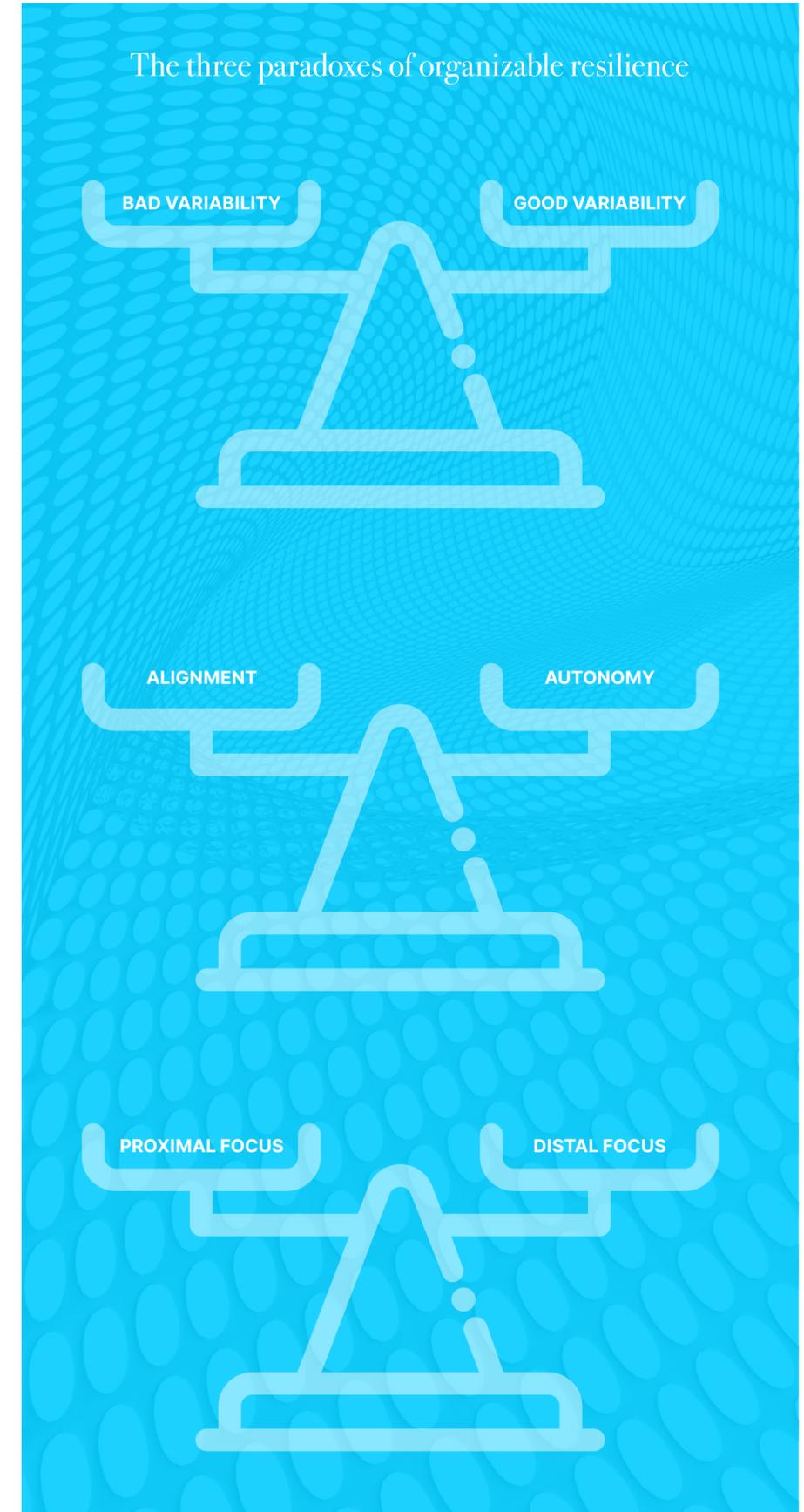
In a world marked by paradox, the leader's job is to see the whole picture—to honour the value of opposing truths, and to guide their organisations through the productive tension they create.

Barry Johnson's Polarity Management is not a niche tool. It's a mindset—a discipline of holding space for ambiguity, resisting false choices, and moving between poles with grace.

As Africa's organisations confront global shifts, generational changes, and disruptive technologies, this model becomes not just useful, but essential.

As RIKA Fellows and leaders committed to shaping Africa's future of work, we would do well to ask not, “Which side is right?”—but rather, “How can we honour both sides and lead through the tension?”

**That is the leadership Africa needs now.**



# Fuelling productivity through coercive digital detoxes.

**W**e are always on. Always available. Always connected. But the cost is no longer hidden. It is showing up—everywhere. From plummeting energy levels to deteriorating cognitive function, from fractured attention spans to rising workplace burnout—there is mounting evidence that being constantly digitally connected is eroding productivity, health, and creativity at scale.

If I were a CEO today, one of the most radical yet necessary interventions I would institute across the organisation is this:

**A mandatory weekly 'Digital Detox and Physical Activity Day'.**

- **From 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., one day every week.**
- **All devices surrendered.**
- **No screens.**
- **No emails.**
- **No Slack.**
- **No TikTok.**
- **No Teams.**

Just physical movement, collective human presence, and deliberate digital rest.

This would not be a voluntary wellness initiative relegated to HR posters or one-off retreats. It would be operationalised, tracked, mandated—and championed from the top.

Why? Because our current way of working is no longer sustainable.



## THE PROBLEM? Hyperconnectivity is killing focus and energy

We are witnessing the consequences of chronic digital saturation in real time:

**A Harvard Business Review** study found that knowledge workers check their email or messaging apps once every 6 minutes, on average.

**The American Psychological Association** links constant connectivity with “cognitive overload, decision fatigue, and burnout.”

**The World Health Organisation** now recognises burnout as an occupational phenomenon—and it is being accelerated by the “always-on” culture.

**A 2023 report by McKinsey** found that “context switching” due to digital tools causes up to a 40% drop in productivity.

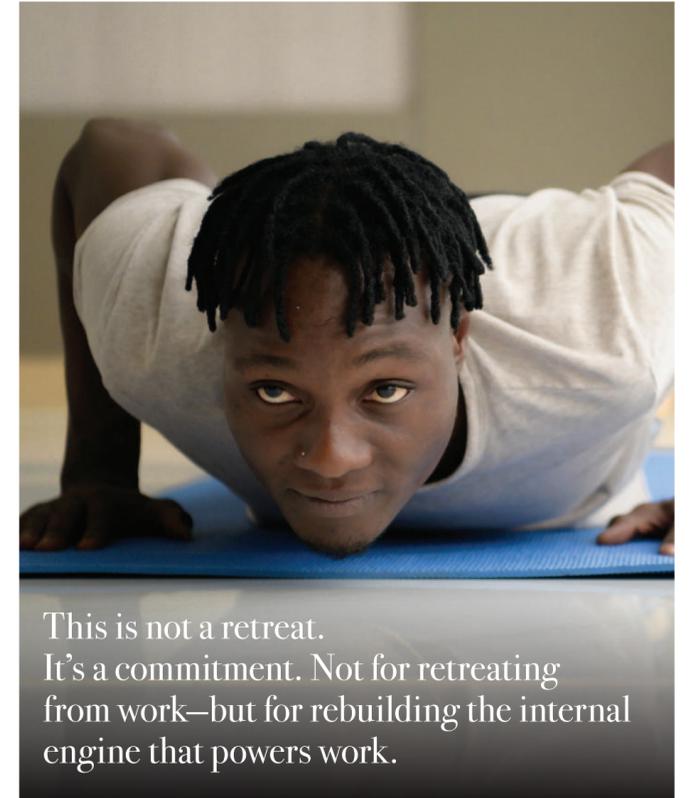
Sleep quality, physical fitness, and social connection—all fundamental to high performance—are steadily declining due to late-night scrolling and fragmented digital habits. When the human brain is overloaded with inputs—videos, notifications, chat messages, hashtags—it begins to operate defensively. Creativity drops. Memory fails. Fatigue sets in. Strategic clarity gives way to reactivity. Even in high-performing environments, people feel drained, distracted, and disillusioned. And let’s not mistake presence for performance. The physical acts of logging in is not the same as showing up meaningfully.

## THE SOLUTION? Coercive digital silence + physical movement

The idea of a “coercive” weekly detox may sound extreme—but that’s precisely the point. Leaders must now recognise that passive, voluntary wellness approaches are insufficient against the scale of today’s digital addiction.

This proposal is simple in structure, yet radical in implication:

- **Frequency:** One full day per week (e.g., Fridays).
- **Duration:** 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- **Mandatory:** All staff to participate, no exceptions except for critical services on rotation.
- **Digital Disarmament:** All devices—phones, laptops, tablets—are handed in at designated stations. Emergency contact protocols are preserved, but access to email, social media, and messaging is suspended.
- **Physical Activity Focus:** Organised walks, yoga, dance, swimming, team hikes, sports. Each office or region can customise based on local realities, but movement is non-negotiable.
- **Rostered Participation:** Attendance is tracked, and integration into weekly planning is enforced. No meetings, no deadlines scheduled on Detox Day.



## THE BENEFITS? What this achieves for the organisation

Instituting this discipline would bring measurable benefits across five critical dimensions:

- 1. Cognitive Renewal**  
One full day without inputs allows the brain to reset. People return sharper, more focused, and less reactive. Attention spans rebuild, and deep work becomes possible again.
- 2. Emotional Regulation**  
Reduced screen time correlates with lower anxiety, improved mood, and better interpersonal interactions. Teams re-engage with one another not as avatars, but as people.
- 3. Physical Health**  
A sedentary workforce is an expensive workforce. Encouraging movement reduces absenteeism, lowers long-term health insurance costs, and elevates energy levels.
- 4. Innovation and Creativity**  
Numerous studies, including those from Stanford and the University of Michigan, show that physical activity—especially walking—boosts divergent thinking and problem-solving. Innovation requires mental whitespace. Detox provides it.
- 5. Cultural Signal**  
Implementing this practice sends a powerful, unmissable message: “Our people are not machines. We prioritise sustainability over performative busyness.” It becomes a cornerstone of employer brand and a differentiator in talent retention.

# The neuroscience of change and building resilience.

There is a prevailing assumption in many leadership circles that resistance to change is primarily psychological—an attitude problem, or a matter of motivation. But as neuroscience increasingly shows, resistance to change is far more profound. It is biological.

Our brains are wired to favour predictability, safety, and familiarity. When we face change, especially sudden or prolonged uncertainty, it activates deeply embedded threat responses that trigger stress, confusion, and sometimes even paralysis. As we look around the world today—from rising unemployment and job redundancies to tariff wars, supply chain disruptions, and geopolitical instability—we see individuals and entire workforces struggling to adapt. Not due to a lack of will, but because they are being neurologically overwhelmed.

## Why the brain resists change

At the heart of this resistance is the brain's threat-reward system, particularly governed by a region called the amygdala. The amygdala is responsible for detecting threats and triggering the fight-flight-freeze response. It does not distinguish between a physical threat (like a predator) and a psychological one (like a restructure, job loss, or role change). Any deviation from what is known can feel dangerous.



Why change feels harder than ever.

The prefrontal cortex, responsible for rational thinking, planning, and decision-making, is also the most energy-intensive part of the brain. It tires quickly, especially under stress. When people are bombarded with change—organisational shifts, new technologies, altered team structures—the brain literally begins to conserve energy by avoiding additional processing. This is why people often cling to old routines or default to familiar behaviours, even when they're no longer effective.

In short: our neurological wiring favours the status quo. It sees change as effortful, risky, and energy-consuming. For some, particularly those with heightened anxiety or lower adaptability, the impact can be even more acute—manifesting in withdrawal, cynicism, or visible health decline.

## The toll of today's global shocks

The cascading changes of the past few years—from pandemic shocks to rising global protectionism, reduced development aid flows, and a global shift towards job automation and redundancy—are no longer episodic. They are chronic and compounding. And many individuals are not just resisting change; they are neurologically unable to process or re-imagine the future.

We are seeing this in:

- Rising stress-related illnesses
- Declining mental well-being in formerly high-performing employees
- Workplace disengagement despite strong messaging
- Increased burnout among mid-level managers

Some individuals and teams appear to be “stuck,” not because they lack capability, but because they are neurologically maxed out. Their cognitive load has exceeded what their systems can carry.

## What this means for leaders

As leaders, our role is not to push harder or communicate louder. It is to understand that change fatigue is biological, and that real adaptation requires us to create safety, reduce fear, and build resilience from the inside out.

This understanding should not lead to resignation but to compassion—and more importantly, action.

## Strategies for leading with the brain in mind

### 1. Acknowledge the Fear Response

Normalize conversations about uncertainty and discomfort. The act of naming fear reduces its power. Psychological safety is a precursor to neural openness.

### 2. Design for Small Wins (Activate Dopamine)

When people achieve small, achievable goals, it triggers the brain's reward chemical—dopamine. This encourages engagement and reduces resistance. Design change journeys with visible progress markers.

### 3. Limit Cognitive Overload

Avoid rolling out too many simultaneous initiatives. Stagger change where possible and give people time to process. The prefrontal cortex functions best under clear, focused attention.

### 4. Use Nudge Theory

Subtle, low-pressure cues that influence behaviour—like default settings, reminders, and behavioural framing—can help embed change without overwhelming the brain. Nudges work with, not against, neurological patterns.

### 5. Train for Emotional Agility

Encourage self-awareness, emotional labelling, and adaptive thinking. Leaders can be trained in mindfulness and self-regulation techniques to better model these behaviours. Research shows mindfulness shrinks the amygdala and enhances resilience.

### 6. Promote Peer Support Structures

The brain is social. When people experience change in community, with shared struggles and mutual encouragement, mirror neurons activate, reinforcing learning and belonging.

### 7. Introduce “Recovery Norms”

Just like athletes need recovery time, so do employees undergoing transformation. Encourage digital detoxes, renewal spaces, and norms around rest and renewal to prevent chronic cortisol overload.

### 8. Invest in Narrative and Meaning

Storytelling helps make sense of disruption. Leaders should frame change through purposeful narratives—why it matters, who it serves, and how people are part of the journey. This activates meaning-making centres of the brain and reduces resistance.

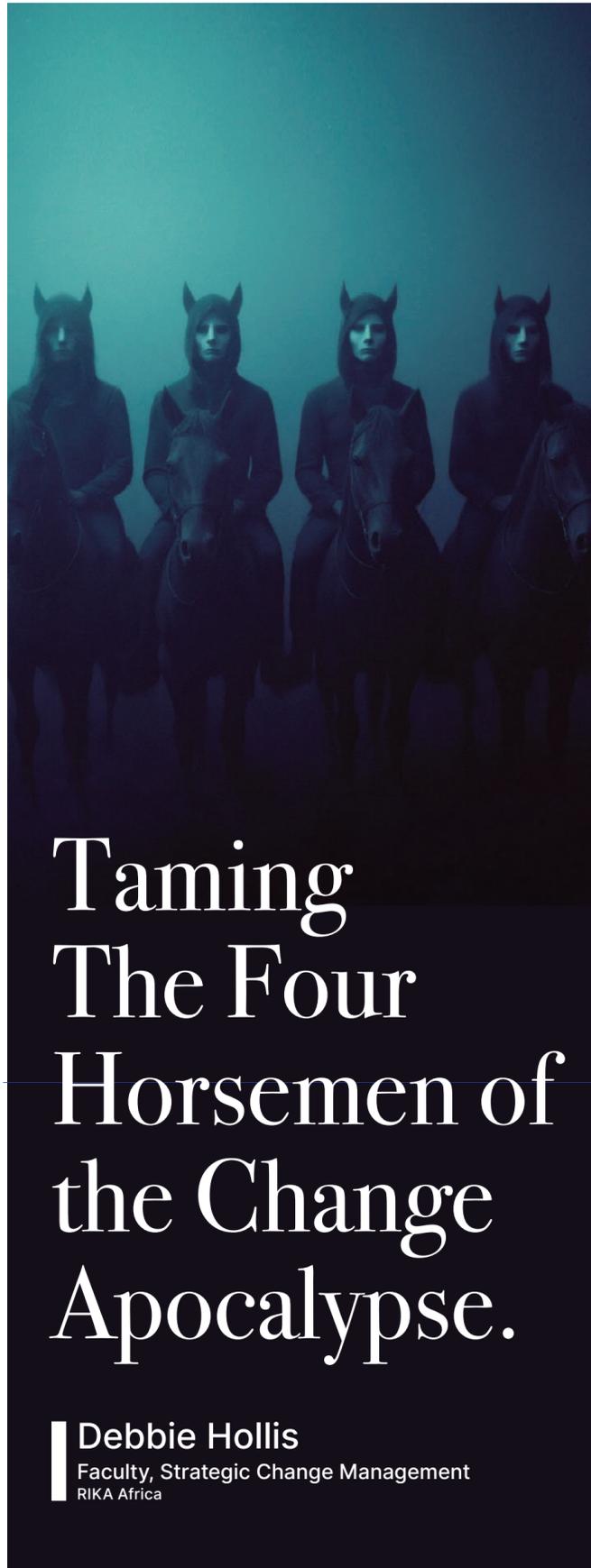
## Building resilience for the long haul

Resilience is not toughness or the ability to “bounce back” quickly. Neuroscience suggests that true resilience is the ability to stay engaged under prolonged pressure without burning out. It is about replenishing internal resources, re-authoring personal narratives, and maintaining perspective even as conditions remain uncertain. Some organisations are now embedding resilience training into leadership development—teaching leaders how to regulate their own stress, build recovery habits, and coach their teams through emotional turbulence.

## Reimagining responsiveness

As RIKA Fellows and leaders across Africa and beyond, our challenge is not just to design better strategies—it is to design with the brain in mind. When we understand how people are wired, we stop demanding compliance and start enabling true adaptation. The world is not going to slow down. But with greater neuroscience-informed leadership, we can help people move forward—even when their instincts tell them to freeze.





## Heralding the “end times” for change initiatives from earth to sky, The Four Horsemen of the Change Apocalypse have ridden roughshod over countless change initiatives.

Deeply ingrained in all of us are four very human psychological barriers, which are the main reasons we resist change.

These barriers can be summarized in the acronym C.U.R.B: Clinging to What We Have (Loss Aversion), Uncertainty Aversion, Reactance, and Belief Perseverance.

Recognizing these Four Horsemen as part of our self-protection mechanisms and working with them instead of trying to suppress them is key to taming change resistance.

Let’s peel back each of these psychological barriers and reveal some ideas on how to overcome them.

**Enter The Horseman of clinging to what we have (loss-aversion)**  
Loss aversion is the reason why people would rather hold on to the 20 USD they already have than potentially get 30 USD in the future.

We fear loss. Even if we are being offered something better, our brain is busy panicking because of an imaginary voice telling us what we’re “losing”.

How to help people let go (or at least loosen their grip):

- Show what’s not actually being lost. People assume change equals deprivation. Reassure them: “You’re not losing control; you’re gaining new skills.”
- Flip the script. Emphasize what they’ll miss out on by not changing. (“Stay behind, and you could end up as the Kodak of your industry!”)
- Give a soft landing. Make transitions gentle. Avoid just yanking the old system away like a tablecloth trick.

### Next The Horseman of uncertainty aversion: the man-eating lion behind the bush

Humans are wired to prefer predictability. That’s why we love maintaining the status quo; when things are predictable, we relax. But toss in change, and suddenly our self-preserving, primordial mind kicks in to assess whether the change in our environment is a dear friend emerging from the mist or a man-eating lion behind the bush.

How to cut through the fog:

- Paint a picture. Even if the full plan isn’t ready, share what you do know. We can handle gaps, but we really don’t like a complete black box.
- Break it into bite-sized pieces to make it easier to try. Saying “We’re climbing Kilimanjaro” is terrifying. Saying, “Let’s take a walk to base camp” feels doable.
- Be the calm in the storm. If you panic, everyone panics. If you’re composed (even if you’re winging it), people will mirror your steadiness.

Think of leading through uncertainty like being a flight attendant in turbulence. You can’t stop the bumps, but you can smile and hand out chicken or beef while assuring everyone the wings aren’t falling off.

### And then comes The Horseman of reactance: the inner toddler screaming “you’re not the boss of me!”

Reactance is that knee-jerk rebellion someone feels when they’re being forced into something. It’s the mental version of folding your arms and saying, “Nope!” even if deep down, you might agree with the idea. It’s not about what you have been told to do. It is about your autonomy. People don’t like being pushed; they like to choose to be pulled. We all have anti-persuasion radar built into our wiring and the moment we detect we are being coerced, we tend to push back; not necessarily because the change is wrong, but because we want to reclaim our sense of control.

How to tame the inner rebel:

- Invite, don’t command. Think less “captain shouting orders” and more “captain inviting input”. Involve people so that they feel like co-pilots, not cargo.
- Use soft language. “Here’s an idea to consider...”. This works so much better than “Do this or else”. No one likes the verbal equivalent of a bulldozer.

- Explain the “why”. Most people will hop on a train if they know where it’s going and why it’s better than their current ride.

Reactance melts away when people feel like they’re choosing to change, not being dragged into it against their will.

### And Finally, Bringing Up the Rear, The Horseman of Belief Perseverance

Beliefs are like our old, comfy couches. They may be outdated but we cling to them because they’re so comfortable. Asking people to ditch a long-held belief is a very hard ask that is not going to go well. This is because beliefs aren’t just ideas – they’re identity glue. Our beliefs about who we are, how things should be or how the world works form the lens through which we interpret our reality. So, when new ideas challenge our old ones, we tend to feel like our whole self is under attack and the world as we know it is at risk of being destabilized. We often experience what is known as cognitive dissonance and instinctively defend the old paradigm to once again regain our comfort zone.

How to encourage opening up to new ideas:

- Empathize. Understand that belief isn’t just logic; it’s personal history. Respect the sentiment, even if the facts need an update. Start by understanding why people hold their beliefs. Often, these ideas have served them well in the past. Recognizing this creates rapport and helps you to reduce the risk of triggering people’s flight or fight defence mechanisms.
- Build bridges from the old to the new. Instead of framing the change as a replacement, present it as an evolution or enhancement. Connect new ideas to familiar values. For example, not saying, “Everything you believed is wrong.” Instead saying, “Here’s how this builds on what you already know.” You’re not demolishing the building; you’re renovating the house.
- Use stories and examples. Data is logical and makes people nod, but stories make people feel. To activate belief flexibility, use both to help people see others like them successfully adapt to change.
- Encourage reflection, not confrontation. Instead of challenging beliefs like a courtroom lawyer, ask less combative questions that gently prompt people to reconsider their assumptions: “What would happen if we looked at it this way?”



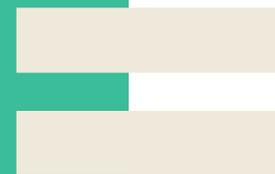
Human resistance to change is not irrational – it’s deeply rooted in our psychology.

The Four Horsemen of the Change Apocalypse: Clinging to What We Have (Loss Aversion), Uncertainty Aversion, Reactance and Belief Attachment all serve protective functions.

Effective change leadership honours this reality by working with, rather than against, human nature to C.U.R.B resistance. When leaders approach change not as a battle to be won, but as a relationship to be nurtured, transformation becomes possible.

# Inside the world of RIKA and the dynamic people driving meaningful change.

Celebrating RIKA Africa's alumni and showcasing the current cohort—emerging leaders who are continuing the RIKA legacy and embodying the values of purposeful leadership and impact. They reflect the growing reach and relevance of RIKA's leadership development initiatives across the continent.



Great faculty do more than teach—they awaken. They don't just transfer information; they stir insight, provoke reflection, and ignite the kind of learning that lingers long after the session ends.



The best teachers don't stand above—they stand beside. They hold space for uncertainty, push for clarity, and gently demand that we meet our better selves. They teach not just through content, but through presence—how they listen, how they question, how they believe.

Executives know strategy. But great faculty remind us how to see, how to unlearn, how to think again. They introduce us not only to new models—but to new mirrors.

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Inside the world of RIKA:

Conversations with fellows and alumni



**Brendah Nambalirwa-Tzadok**  
General Manager  
M-KOPA, Uganda

# From HR to enterprise leadership.

**B**rendah is a dynamic leader whose career journey has taken her from aviation to spearheading people strategies across Africa. With a passion for designing impactful employee experiences and harnessing the potential of the millennial workforce, she has transitioned from leading HR to stewarding the whole organisation. Brendah currently serves as General Manager for Uganda at M-KOPA. A RIKA Fellow, Brendah is driven by a personal mission to deliver people-centred solutions that empower employees and fuel organisational success in a rapidly evolving business landscape.

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE PROGRAMME? WHAT MOMENTS STOOD OUT MOST TO YOU?**

As an introvert, one of the most valuable gifts RIKA gave me was the opportunity to connect with a brilliant community of professionals from across Africa, many of whom remain a meaningful part of my network today.

The programme's structure was thoughtfully designed, with modules led by world-class faculty that blended technical, business, digital, leadership, and change management content. Each session offered not just theory, but practical, actionable insights that I could immediately apply in my work.

The most profound moment for me came during the kick-off session, when Dave Ulrich challenged us to rethink our identity as HR professionals: not just as enablers of people processes, but as architects of value. His message was clear and compelling: after attending RIKA I have been elevated from leading HR to stewarding MKOPA-Uganda as the General Manager. That reframing changed how I showed up at work: more strategically, and more commercially aware, and ultimately played a key role in my transition into a broader business leadership role.

**HOW HAS RIKA INFLUENCED YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE OR APPROACH?**

RIKA reinforced for me the critical importance of adaptability and lifelong learning in leadership.

The programme's grounding in real-world challenges was a powerful reminder that to remain effective, leaders must stay informed, agile, and focused on creating value at every turn. I was particularly challenged to strengthen my digital fluency and become more intentional in how I communicate strategy and vision.

The exposure to diverse perspectives also pushed me to refine how I engage with different audiences—balancing empathy with clarity to lead with both head and heart.

**WHAT TRENDS DO YOU THINK WILL DEFINE THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP IN THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS?**

Adaptive leadership will be essential. The pace of change isn't slowing down, and leaders will need to balance quick decision-making with long-term thinking, often in the face of uncertainty.

As AI becomes more embedded in how we work, leaders will need to guide their teams in using it not just efficiently, but ethically and to apply a combination of machine capability and human skills like empathy, judgment, and creativity. With hybrid and remote work here to stay, leadership will be less about physical presence and more about intentional connection—finding new ways to build culture, trust, and clarity across distributed teams.

**WHAT SKILLS DO YOU THINK HR AND TALENT LEADERS MUST DEVELOP TO REMAIN RELEVANT IN THE FUTURE OF WORK?**

Data literacy and people analytics will be non-negotiable; being able to gather meaningful workforce data, interpret insights, and use them ethically to guide strategic decisions. Expertise in AI and technology integration will be essential, ensuring that AI tools enhance talent processes while human judgment remains central in critical decisions.

Beyond these technical skills, HR leaders must also be great storytellers, able to communicate vision and inspire change clearly.



“ We must shift from traditional HR activities and start asking, ‘How are we driving value for the business and its shareholders?’ ”

Inside the world of RIKA:

## Conversations with fellows and alumni

### Innocent Appolinary Ndika

Head of Planning and Business Performance  
Equity Bank Tanzania  
Tanzania

# Empowering people, driving impact.

CLASS OF 2024

Innocent is the Head of Planning & Business Performance at Equity Bank Tanzania, with a solid track record in strategic planning, organisational effectiveness, and talent development. With prior leadership roles in HR, MSME, and SME banking across top financial institutions like CRDB Bank, he blends deep financial expertise with a people-Centred approach to business growth.

A RIKA Fellow and multi-certified professional, Innocent is widely respected for his integrity, business acumen, and commitment to driving sustainable impact in East Africa's financial sector.

#### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE PROGRAMME? WHAT MOMENTS STOOD OUT MOST TO YOU?

It took me six days to decide whether to enrol, as I was unsure it would align with my transition from HR to Strategy and Business Planning. But the reality of the programme exceeded my expectations—it goes far beyond HR. It's a comprehensive leadership development experience designed for changemakers across HR and non-HR functions, in both profit and non-profit sectors, and at different leadership levels.

As someone passionate about transformation, I was impressed by the diverse cohort from across Africa and the exposure to global thought leaders like Prof. Dave Ulrich, Prof. PLO Lumumba, Deborah Exell, and Susan Githuku. It was not only a space for learning and networking, but also a platform to share global trends, HR practices, and people solutions across industries and countries.

The programme has been a catalyst in my leadership journey—expanding my perspective and transforming my mindset. I look forward to participating in future RIKA events and programmes.

#### WHAT WAS YOUR MOST VALUABLE INSIGHT OR TAKEAWAY FROM THE PROGRAMME?

My biggest takeaway was the evolution of the HR function from an administrative role to a strategic one. Today, HR has the power to reshape human capital and leadership, helping organisations navigate technology and shifting business dynamics.

Organisational resilience now depends on embedding people and culture strategies throughout the business, from design to execution. The focus is no longer on enforcing policies, but on creating value for all stakeholders—customers, employees, investors, and more.

This requires HR leaders to adopt an outside-in, forward-looking mindset: understanding business strategies, anticipating future trends, and aligning talent, skills, culture, and systems to support growth, continuity, and results.

#### IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITIES ARE MOST CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE?

Leadership agility is essential. Leaders who can adapt quickly, collaborate effectively, and guide teams through change will thrive in the face of VUCA and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

It's a comprehensive leadership development experience designed for changemakers across HR and non-HR functions, in both profit and non-profit sectors, and at different leadership levels. A people-centric mindset, grounded in self-awareness and team awareness, helps leaders engage, support, and motivate teams to achieve results.

In addition, leaders must think globally—connecting international trends and disruptions to local strategy. Finally, data-driven decision-making is a game-changer.

Leaders who embrace AI and predictive tools can study trends, extract insights, and take timely, informed action.

#### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO LEADERS LOOKING TO BUILD HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS IN TODAY'S FAST-CHANGING BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT?

In a world shaped by VUCA and BANI dynamics, leaders must foster agility and resilience within teams. High-performing teams and a strong culture remain critical for sustainability and investor confidence.

First, build self-leadership from the ground up. While top-down direction is key, individual behaviour drives team energy and supports goal achievement.

Second, align talent with potential. Empowering people with the right tools and responsibilities boosts morale and productivity.

Third, promote a culture of transparent communication. Open dialogue and regular feedback across all levels encourage innovation and continuous improvement. Fourth, lead by example. Leaders who live the organisation's values generate positive energy and strengthen influence.

Also, create a framework for recognising performance—both high and low.

Differentiated rewards help maintain motivation and clarity. Finally, strong board oversight is essential. A diverse, effective board ensures good governance, manages ambition, and balances stakeholder needs for long-term success.

“

Emotional intelligence is also critical, especially given evolving cultural dynamics and the entry of Gen Z and Alpha into the workforce.

Inside the world of RIKA:

Conversations with fellows and alumni

**Doyinsola Atanda-Obalaku**

Head of Human Resources  
Prudential Zenith Life Insurance  
Nigeria

# Driving strategic leadership.

**D**oyinsola is a strategic HR and talent management leader with deep cross-continental experience spanning Europe and Africa. She brings a strong track record of aligning HR strategy with business goals—driving impactful initiatives in talent acquisition, performance management, and leadership development. A RIKA Fellow, Doyinsola is passionate about building agile, future-ready workforces that accelerate both individual growth and organisational success.

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE RIKA LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME? WHAT MOMENTS STOOD OUT MOST TO YOU?**

My experience at the RIKA Leadership Programme was transformational and technically enriching. The programme provided a unique platform to reskill and advance my capabilities as a value-driven leader while gaining global perspective on diverse areas including workforce planning, leadership styles and agility, organisational design, managing change, strategic and new trends/shifts in talent management, etc. Some of the key defining moments include the limitless access to an array of useful resources (research papers, journals and articles), interaction with renowned global HR thought leaders, interactive learning and engagement with fellow cohort members from diverse regions on topical areas, and business simulation sessions where I had to engage, deliberate and unify diverse perspectives as a team. This propelled me to think beyond local contexts, reinforced an inclusive approach to achieve successful engagement and provided the opportunity to balance self-awareness, resilience, and visibility to impact self and others.

**HOW HAVE YOU APPLIED THE LESSONS LEARNED IN RIKA TO YOUR CURRENT ROLE OR ORGANISATION?**

In my current role as the Head of Human Resources, the experience and key learning points from the RIKA Leadership Programme have enhanced my continuous drive to align people strategy with business goals and an outlook of transformation, introduced data-driven decision-making into our HR operations, and strengthened our leadership development and employee engagement frameworks to promote inclusiveness. The ample resources have been a point of reference in navigating change, promoting collaboration, and maximizing performance.

**HOW HAS THE ROLE OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP EVOLVED IN RESPONSE TO CURRENT BUSINESS CHALLENGES?**

The role of executive leadership has evolved significantly in response to today's multidimensional and fast-changing corporate environment. For sustainability and to remain relevant, leaders are expected to embody and uphold agility, empathy, and strategic foresight—a shift from the traditional management approach. To embrace the future of work, executive leadership has evolved from managing and controlling resources to empowering and enabling resilient, ethical, and people-focused organisations as part of the competitive advantage to continue thriving.

Here are a few areas of such shift:

- From dictatorship leadership style to a collaborative, inclusive and team-based approach where diverse targeted ideas and recommendations lead to more innovative solutions to leverage as applicable.
- Leaders taking the lead by championing and modelling the company's core values, for employees to emulate and embrace. This action stems from the realisation that strong organisational culture is essential to achieve trust and boost performance across the board.
- A balanced focus and dedication to maximising financial returns on shareholders' investment (profits) and upholding sustainable and ethical business practices for long-term all-round organisational success.

**WHAT ROLE SHOULD LEADERS PLAY IN EMBEDDING A STRONG CULTURE OF LEARNING WITHIN THEIR TEAMS? WHY IS LEARNING, RESKILLING AND RETOOLING SO VITAL?**

Leaders play a crucial role in steering the direction the organisation takes in respect to company's policies, processes, values and culture. Specifically, to uphold and promote a strong culture of learning within teams and across the organisation, there should be increased focus on channelling a significant part of annual budget towards facilitating targeted employee development, capability improvement and trainings (both local and global). In addition, sponsoring team members to complete relevant professional programmes and certifications can be helpful. This can include meeting the cost of a programme, allocating time for employees' training, and granting examination leave to allow time to prepare for examinations. Other actions include

running a performance management system that ensures individual learnings and developmental goals are integrated into the performance objectives, and recognizing achieved developmental milestones. These actions reinforce a culture that sees learning and growth opportunities as a business priority and not as optional or a secondary commitment. Learning, reskilling, and retooling are vital for business and organisational sustainability, industry competitiveness and positioning, and continuous thriving in the current fast-changing world of work. For instance, digital transformation (i.e. automation and artificial intelligence) is reshaping existing processes, and to remain productive and make impact, employees must learn new skills, as necessary. Also, innovation and business growth lead to creation of new roles and job opportunities. Therefore, reskilling and retooling create an avenue for existing talent and employees to meet the expectations that such new roles demand and this helps to minimise dependence on external hires. Finally, organisations that nurture a clear learning and developmental path for the workforce are able to harness this as a value proposition in the area of talent attraction, engagement and retention.

“

To embrace the future of work, executive leadership has evolved from managing and controlling resources to empowering and enabling resilient, ethical, and people"-focused organizations as part of the competitive advantage to continue thriving.

Inside the world of RIKA:

Conversations with fellows and alumni

### Gisele Uwase

Associate Director, HR  
BioNTech SE  
Rwanda

# Leadership with vision and empathy.

**G**isele is a seasoned HR leader with over a decade of experience driving strategic talent initiatives across diverse industries. As Associate Director of Human Resources at BioNTech Rwanda, she specializes in organisational development, executive coaching, and workforce transformation.

A RIKA Fellow, Gisele is passionate about building inclusive, high-performance cultures that align people strategy with long-term impact.

#### WHAT INSPIRED OR MOTIVATED YOU TO APPLY FOR THE RIKA LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME?

I've always believed that Africa's future depends on our ability to design solutions that are globally informed yet rooted in our lived realities. When I came across the RIKA Leadership Programme, it ignited a deep yearning in me to be stretched, and to grow into an HR leader who reimagines what it means to serve with cultural intelligence, strategic foresight, and a commitment to inclusive, resilient workplaces that reflect Africa's richness.

Seeing names like Professor PLO Lumumba and Dave Ulrich on the program lineup was nothing short of exciting. It was a sign that this was not just another leadership course. It was a bold convergence of African intellectual firepower and world-class HR expertise. In that moment, I knew I was not simply enrolling in a program but stepping into a movement which reshapes the African narrative.

#### IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITIES ARE MOST CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE?

In a world defined by volatility and reinvention, the most vital leadership qualities are cultural intelligence, strategic foresight, and adaptive empathy.

Having worked in multicultural and multinational environments, I've seen how AI, hybrid work, and generational shifts are redefining the workplace. Cultural intelligence helps leaders build trust and belonging; strategic foresight equips them to anticipate change; and adaptive empathy allows them to lead with compassion in uncertainty.

Leadership today isn't about having all the answers; it's about the courage to ask better questions, co-create inclusive solutions, and hold space for transformation.

#### WHAT SKILLS DO YOU THINK HR AND TALENT LEADERS MUST DEVELOP TO REMAIN RELEVANT IN THE FUTURE OF WORK?

To remain relevant in the future of work, I believe HR and talent leaders must intentionally cultivate a blend of technological fluency, strategic agility, and human-Centred leadership.

AI is reshaping not just tasks, but how we define work. We need to integrate it ethically, balancing efficiency with empathy. At the same time, we're managing generationally diverse teams, each bringing distinct expectations that we must understand and honour.

We also need strategic foresight to anticipate workforce and business shifts before they arrive. And above all, adaptive empathy—leading with emotional intelligence—remains our most enduring asset.

The pace of change also demands that we develop strategic foresight, the ability to anticipate shifts in workforce trends, business models, and stakeholders' expectations. We must move beyond reactive problem-solving and become proactive architects of organisational resilience, crafting quickly adjustable strategies that align talent with evolving business needs.

And most importantly, in a world marked by complexity and uncertainty, I believe the most enduring skill is adaptive empathy which I see as the capacity to lead with emotional intelligence.

#### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO LEADERS LOOKING TO BUILD HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS IN TODAY'S FAST-CHANGING BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT?

I would challenge leaders to move from building high-performing teams to nurturing high-impact innovators. The future needs teams that are agile, creative, and resilient.

Here's what I recommend:

##### Invest in digital literacy

Technology is no longer a support function; it is a strategic enabler. Leaders must ensure their teams are not only comfortable with digital tools but are also empowered to use them creatively. This means going beyond basic training and fostering a mindset of continuous learning and curiosity about emerging technologies.

##### Co-create strategies with their teams

Gone are the days of top-down decision-making. I have noticed first-hand how teams thrive when they are part of the journey. Co-creation builds ownership, unlocks diverse perspectives, and ensures that strategies are grounded in the realities of those who will execute them.

##### Foster a culture of innovation and resilience

Change is constant, and disruption is inevitable. In today's world, in my opinion, high-performing teams are those that can adapt, bounce back, and even thrive in uncertainty. Leaders must create safe spaces for experimentation, encourage bold thinking, and normalize failure as part of the innovation process (blaming cultures will not allow innovation).

As HR professionals, we must support our leaders in designing systems that shift from tracking performance to unlocking potential, shifting the focus from "high-performer" to "high-impact innovator" to reflect the demands of today's dynamic world.

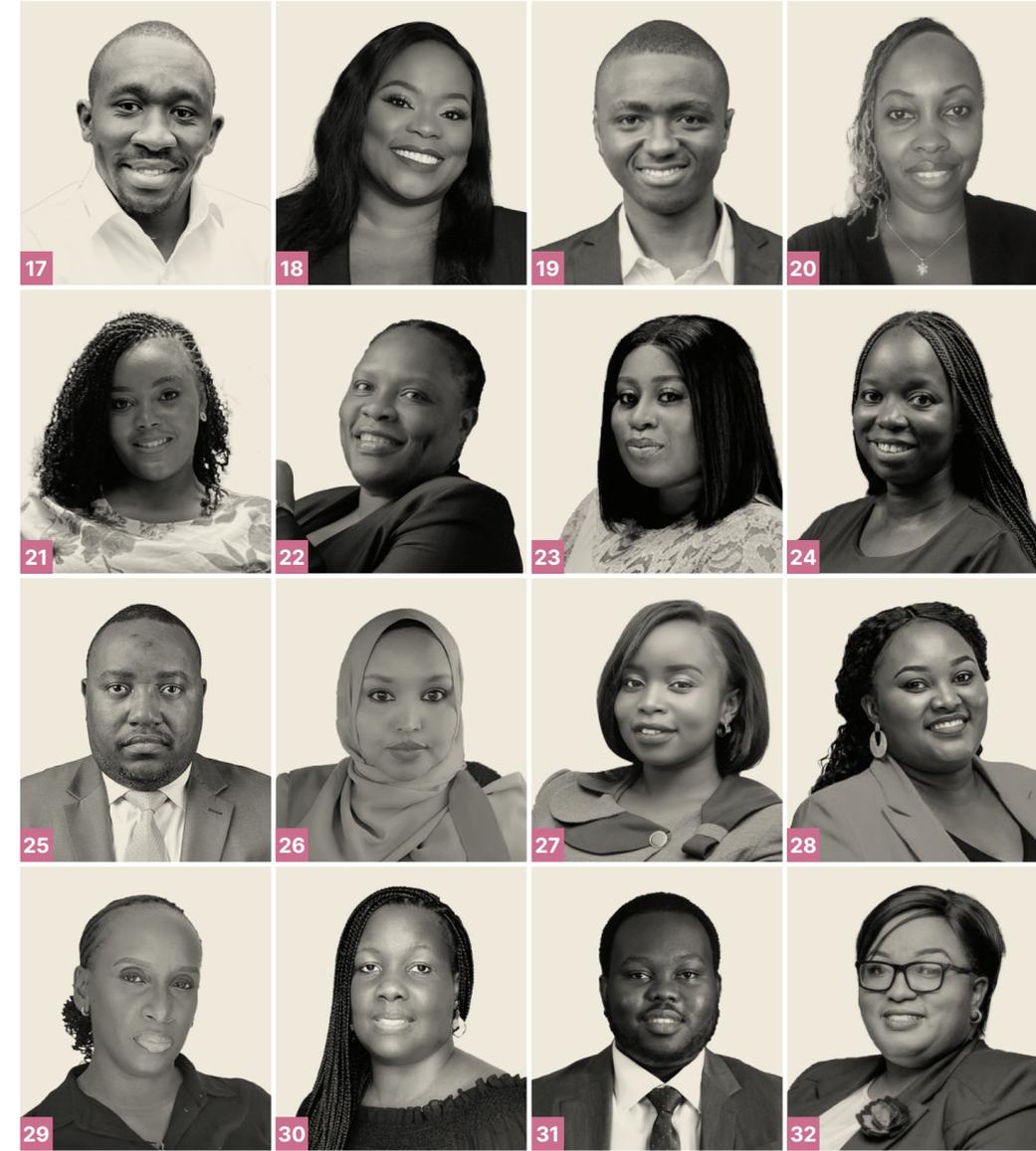
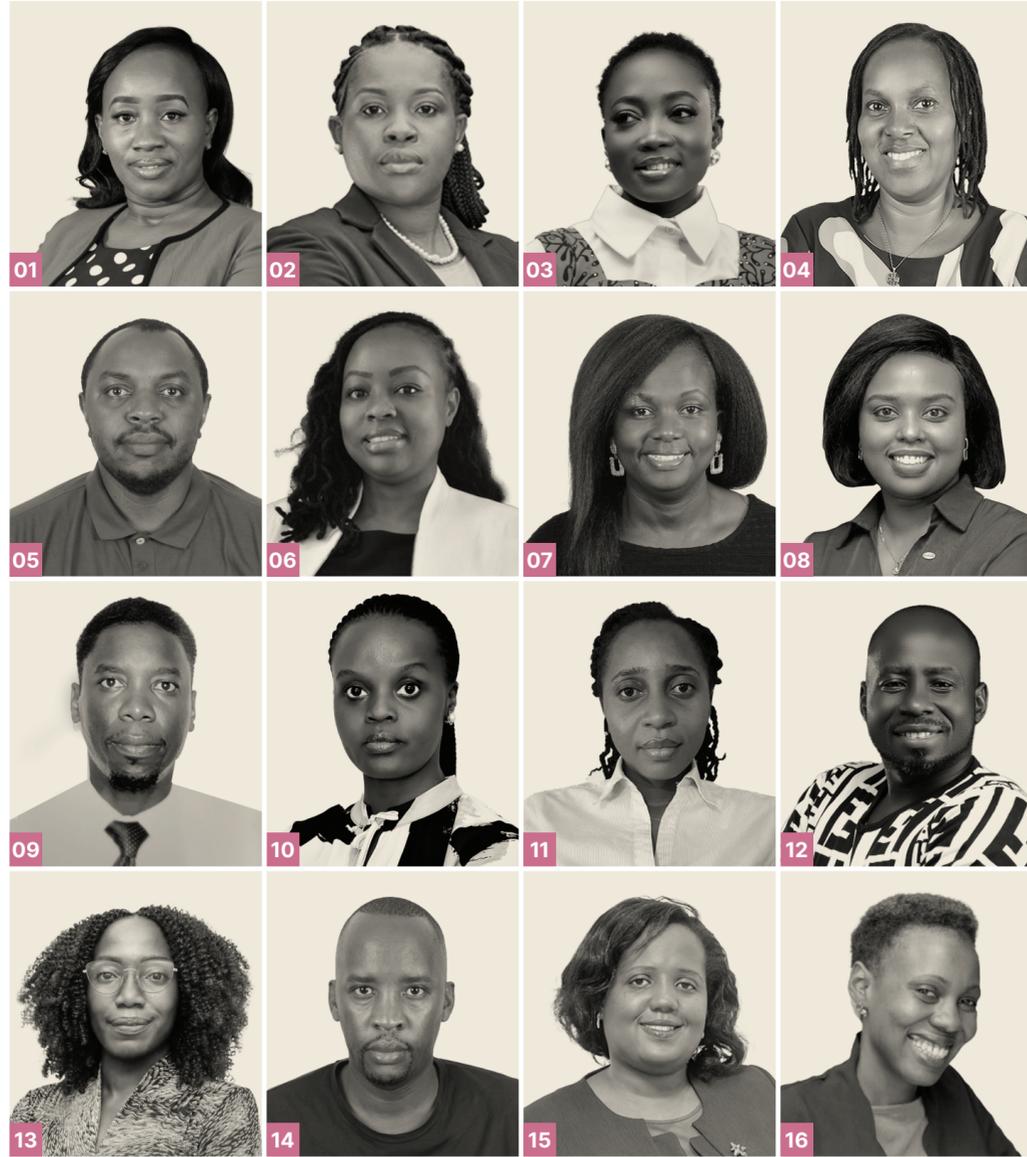
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I knew I was not simply enrolling in a programme but stepping into a movement which reshapes the African narrative.

# Cohort 6

April - July 2025

RIKA's latest wave of changemakers.



- 01 Anne Ireri
- 02 Brenda Mboku
- 03 Christiana Amarah
- 04 Elizabeth Waiyego
- 05 Elson Mushi
- 06 Emma Ogongo
- 07 Fiona Ngesa
- 08 Galina Kaneza
- 09 George Adalla
- 10 Gloria Nalumansi
- 11 Happiness Steven
- 12 Joseph Duku
- 13 Juliana Musaazi
- 14 Kintai Kiptoo
- 15 Linda Ndyanabo
- 16 Maria Kyamulabye
- 17 Martin Githaiga
- 18 May Nyaga
- 19 Morris Kimeu
- 20 Muthoni Kinyua
- 21 Natalie Mbuvi
- 22 Nchimunya Silenga
- 23 Olufunmilola Onianwa
- 24 Phiona Namayanja
- 25 Raoul Sukakumu
- 26 Sahra Geheyr
- 27 Shamim Walusimbi
- 28 Sheilla Kemigisa
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- 30 Susan Kapedha
- 31 Timothy Muuo
- 32 Wane Mhango

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Because ultimately, your leadership isn't what you say –it's how they feel working with you.

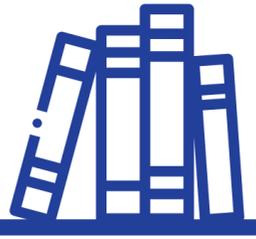
# Books reviews to inspire and empower.

In a rapidly transforming continent, staying informed and inspired is essential for those leading the change.

This section curates essential reads for strategists, leaders and change-makers who are shaping Africa's future.



# 12 books that will change how you lead.



Imagine if every great leader carried a secret toolkit—filled not with gadgets, but with timeless wisdom and breakthrough ideas that could transform challenges into opportunities. In the whirlwind of today's fast-paced world, this toolkit is more essential than ever. Leaders worth their salt don't just rely on instinct; they seek out knowledge that sharpens their vision, fuels innovation, and inspires their teams to greatness.

These twelve books are more than just widely recommended—they're field-tested companions for those leading in complexity, uncertainty, and constant change. Each entry below has been selected not just for its insights, but for its capacity to shift mindset and behaviour in meaningful, practical ways.

By Susan Githuku



## THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

**Stephen R. Covey (1989)**

Now over three decades old, this enduring classic feels as fresh as ever. Written during a time when leadership literature was dominated by personality-driven hacks, Covey reoriented the conversation toward principle-centred leadership. The seven habits—ranging from "Be Proactive" to "Sharpen the Saw"—build a coherent framework for personal and interpersonal effectiveness. What gives this book its power is its integration of character, purpose, and relationships. Covey argued that lasting leadership begins with inner mastery and alignment to values, not short-term tactics. Unique takeaway: True effectiveness is about balancing production and production capability—sustaining the engine, not just chasing outcomes.

## START WITH WHY

**Simon Sinek (2009)**

This was the book that launched a thousand TED Talks—and for good reason. Sinek reframed how leaders think about influence. Using the deceptively simple "Golden Circle" (Why → How → What), he challenges leaders to reverse the usual messaging order and start with purpose. But what's often overlooked is Sinek's neurological argument: he connects this model to how the human brain makes decisions—first emotionally, then rationally. Interesting context: Sinek was originally a marketing consultant. His idea took root after observing that great leaders and organisations (Apple, Martin Luther King, the Wright brothers) won hearts because they were clear about why they existed—not just what they sold.

## EXTREME OWNERSHIP

**Jocko Willink & Leif Babin (2015)**

Two former Navy SEALs deliver a hard-hitting message: if you're in charge, everything is your responsibility. No excuses. No finger-pointing. The structure of the book—military mission, leadership principle, business application—makes the insights incredibly digestible. Yet beneath the rugged tone lies a profound truth: decentralised command (empowering others) only works when leaders take radical ownership first. Why this matters: In the chaos of modern organisations, clarity of responsibility is rare. This book arms leaders with the mindset to create it.

## THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

**James Kouzes & Barry Posner (1987, updated regularly)**

With its origins in rigorous empirical research, this book's greatest strength is its accessibility. Kouzes and Posner didn't just theorise—they interviewed thousands of leaders over decades. The result? Five practices that underpin great leadership regardless of industry: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. A key insight in the book is that recognition and celebration are not soft bonuses; they are strategic imperatives in building trust and momentum. The book continues to be refined and the most recent editions incorporate global and generational shifts, making it relevant for today's multicultural, hybrid workplace.

Leadership is not a single moment of brilliance. It's the cumulative effect of daily choices, perspectives sharpened over time, and the courage to question old models. These books do not agree on every point, and that's precisely the value: leadership isn't about finding the one truth—it's about building your lens.

## LEADERS EAT LAST

**Simon Sinek (2014)**

Sinek returns—but this time from a different angle. Instead of focusing on purpose, he explores the biology of safety and trust. Drawing from neuroscience and evolutionary psychology, he makes the case that great leaders are not heroic visionaries but architects of trust. They create environments where people feel safe to take risks, collaborate, and thrive. An interesting detail about the book is that the title comes from a Marine Corps tradition. Senior leaders eat after their teams—not out of politeness, but as a lived value system.

## DRIVE

**Daniel H. Pink (2009)**

This is the book that restructured how companies think about motivation. Pink dismantles the "if-then" reward system and builds a compelling case for autonomy, mastery, and purpose as the new levers of engagement. His writing blends science, storytelling, and strong design thinking. The book includes a toolkit at the end—ideal for HR leaders and team managers—to audit and redesign roles for intrinsic motivation. It's not just theory; it's a manual.

## THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM

**Patrick Lencioni (2002)**

Lencioni does something clever here: he tells a story. A fictional tale of a failing executive team becomes the delivery mechanism for a deeply practical framework. The five dysfunctions—lack of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results—are almost diagnostic in nature. What has always set this book apart for me is that Lencioni makes the case that productive conflict is a hallmark of effective teams, not a problem to be solved. This is particularly relevant in cultures that prize harmony over performance.

## THE INNOVATOR'S DILEMMA

**Clayton M. Christensen (1997)**

Christensen, the late Harvard Business School professor, wrote this quietly disruptive book during the dot-com boom—a time when most companies were drunk on their own success. His thesis? The very practices that made companies successful (e.g., listening to top customers, refining core offerings) also made them vulnerable to disruption. It was a revelation then, and it still is. A timeless takeaway is that leaders must learn to resource and protect disruptive innovations that initially seem unviable. Otherwise, someone else will. Look at Kodak!

## ESSENTIALISM

**Greg McKeown (2014)**

McKeown's book is deceptively simple but profoundly hard to live out. At its core, Essentialism is about focus—saying no to the trivial many and yes to the vital few. Unlike productivity books that teach hacks, this one insists on mindset: clarity, trade-offs, and intentional design of one's energy. For me this book lands because, in an age of burnout and digital distraction, it is less a book and more a leadership intervention. The discipline of "less but better" is what separates overwhelmed managers from focused, impactful leaders. Ponder on that.

## THE FIRST 90 DAYS

**Michael D. Watkins (2003)**

Transitions make or break careers. Watkins' book is the definitive playbook for navigating new leadership roles—especially in the first critical three months. It's highly structured and analytical, making it ideal for senior leaders who must quickly assess teams, culture, stakeholders, and opportunities. The book provides templates and tools to map out learning agendas, stakeholder strategies, and early wins. If you're onboarding a senior hire—or stepping into a new mandate—this is required reading.

## LEADING WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

**Daniel Goleman (2000, updated regularly)**

When Goleman first introduced the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) to the leadership world, it was considered soft. Today, it's foundational. This book extends offers practical tools for leaders to cultivate self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation—the five core domains of EQ. Goleman's thesis is clear: cognitive intelligence gets you the job; emotional intelligence makes you great at it. Why it matters now: In a world of BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) dynamics, the emotionally intelligent leader is no longer a nice-to-have but a strategic necessity. Teams no longer follow titles—they follow tone, trust, and presence.

## GRIT: THE POWER OF PASSION AND PERSEVERANCE

**Angela Duckworth (2016)**

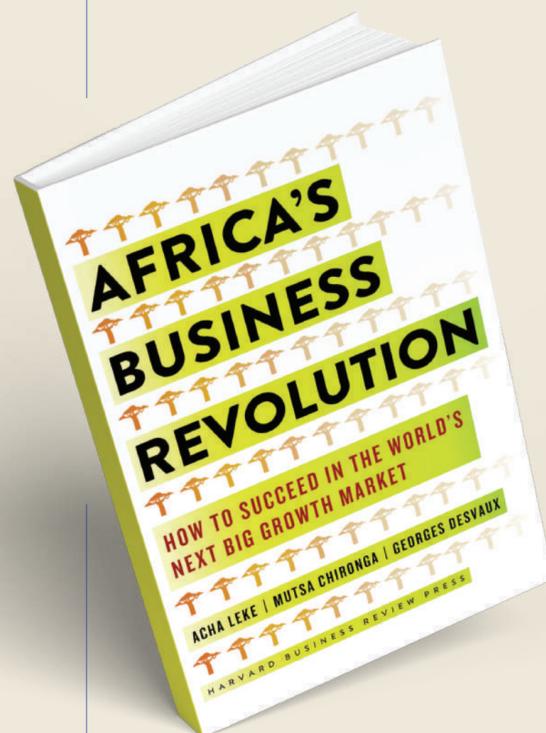
Duckworth's work reads like an antidote to the obsession with talent. A psychologist and former teacher, she spent years studying what makes some people succeed despite setbacks while others burn out. Her answer? Grit—a blend of passion and sustained persistence over time. What elevates this book beyond mere motivational rhetoric is her data-backed dismantling of the "talent myth." The standout takeaway is that Grit isn't just about hard work; it's about enduring commitment to a long-term goal.

# Reading Africa right.

Essential books and reports every executive should know

Africa's economic transformation is one of the most compelling and complex stories of the 21st century. With a population set to double by 2050, vast natural resources, rapid urbanisation, and accelerating digital adoption, the continent presents a rich tapestry of opportunity. But success here demands more than conventional market entry strategies—it requires grounded insight, long-term vision, and a deep appreciation for the continent's diversity.

For corporate leaders and investors ready to move beyond headlines and into real engagement, a new canon of books, reports, and field-based research is emerging. Among the most authoritative voices in this space is Acha Leke, Senior Partner and Chair of McKinsey's Africa practice. Through years of advising companies and governments across several countries, Leke has helped reshape how global and African businesses understand the continent.



## AFRICA'S BUSINESS REVOLUTION: HOW TO SUCCEED IN THE WORLD'S NEXT BIG GROWTH MARKET

**Acha Leke, Mutsa Chironga & Georges Desvaux (2018)**

This book stands out as a landmark text for anyone serious about understanding and engaging with Africa's business landscape.

What makes this book special is its combination of rigorous, proprietary McKinsey research and on-the-ground insights from 40 exclusive interviews with leading African CEOs and entrepreneurs. Rather than relying on abstract theory or outdated stereotypes, the authors use real case studies and hard data to illustrate how businesses are succeeding across the continent's diverse markets.

The book is particularly notable for:

- Reframing Africa's perceived "risks" as opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and growth, challenging the conventional narrative that too often sees the continent only through the lens of volatility.
- Highlighting the scale and dynamism of African enterprise, including the revelation that over 400 African companies now generate more than \$1 billion in annual revenue—an often-overlooked fact that underscores the continent's economic depth.
- Offering practical playbooks for executives: from mapping an Africa strategy and innovating business models to building resilience and unlocking local talent.
- Emphasizing the social impact of business—showing how companies are not only achieving financial success but also delivering essential services, creating jobs, and driving development outcomes.

The book's approach is both optimistic and pragmatic: it neither romanticizes Africa nor dwells on its challenges, but instead provides a nuanced, actionable guide for leaders looking to build profitable, sustainable enterprises.

# Other must-read books on Africa's economic and business landscape.

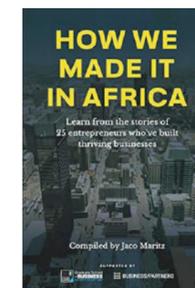
To fully understand Africa's evolving opportunity set, leaders must read broadly. These additional books—written by investors, journalists, analysts, and economists—offer sharp, complementary perspectives.



## THE NEXT AFRICA: AN EMERGING CONTINENT BECOMES A GLOBAL POWERHOUSE

**Jake Bright & Aubrey Hruby (2015)**

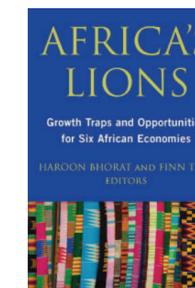
Authored by two experienced Africa analysts and investors, this book paints a portrait of a new Africa—tech-savvy, entrepreneurially driven, and globally connected. It features compelling case studies of growth in fintech, mobile infrastructure, agribusiness, and startup ecosystems. Why read it: It challenges the outdated frames of aid and instability and reframes Africa as a centre of innovation and entrepreneurial ambition.



## HOW WE MADE IT IN AFRICA: LEARN FROM THE STORIES OF 25 ENTREPRENEURS WHO'VE BUILT THRIVING BUSINESSES

**Jaco Maritz (2020)**

This collection of candid entrepreneurial journeys across multiple African countries is full of practical wisdom. These are not Silicon Valley narratives, but real accounts of navigating bureaucracy, raising capital, building talent, and staying resilient. Key insight: On-the-ground entrepreneurship reveals patterns and practices that formal market reports.



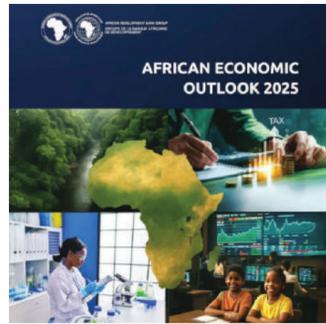
## AFRICA'S LIONS: GROWTH TRAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SIX AFRICAN ECONOMIES

**Edited by Haroon Borat & Finn Tarp (2016, Brookings Institution Press)**

This academic yet accessible volume offers deep dives into the economies of South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Mozambique, and Ethiopia. It examines productivity dynamics, job creation, structural transformation, and inequality across different policy regimes. For policy-sensitive investors, this is a data-rich reference for understanding country-level reform levers and structural constraints.

# Reports that matter: annual intelligence for Africa-focused strategy.

The best business decisions are often informed by the best public data. Several institutions publish consistently high-quality economic intelligence on the continent.



## AFRICAN ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

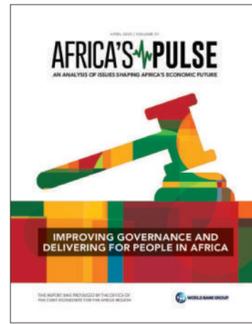
**African Development Bank – AFDB**

A thorough, continent-wide review of macroeconomic conditions, sectoral trends, and structural policy recommendations. Includes country spotlights and special thematic focuses each year.

## REGIONAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

**International Monetary Fund (IMF)**

A must-read for CFOs and economists, this report provides high-frequency economic data, monetary policy analysis, and projections for all major SSA economies.



## AFRICA'S PULSE

**World Bank**

Published twice a year, this flagship report monitors near-term economic developments and highlights structural challenges, such as climate vulnerability, fiscal health, and regional integration.

## THE AFRICA COMPETITIVENESS REPORT

**World Economic Forum**

Although not published annually, this report offers a comparative analysis of Africa's business environments, infrastructure gaps, education systems, and innovation capacity.



Too many strategy documents still reduce Africa to a single narrative—either boundless promise or perpetual volatility.

These books and reports reject that framing. They present Africa as it is: a continent of 54 countries, 1.4 billion people, thousands of sub-markets, and infinite variation.

What they share in common is an insistence on nuance.

An understanding that the business of doing business in Africa cannot be based on assumptions. And that those who come in to listen, learn, co-create, and adapt are the ones who will shape the continent's future—and their own.

For the thoughtful executive, this is not just a reading list. It is a strategic toolkit.

# The RIKA Leadership Summit 2024



Summit 2024 felt like the first pulse of something larger—a heartbeat for the future of work in Africa. It sparked conversations, nurtured relationships, and reminded us of the sacred responsibility of leadership. And in a powerful moment at Summit 2024, Cohorts 4 and 5 crossed the threshold from Fellows to Alumni—extending the RIKA legacy and strengthening the continent’s leadership pipeline.





# Playground for the mind

Where logic takes a coffee break and curiosity runs wild. Twist your thoughts into knots, untangle riddles that refuse to behave, and outsmart puzzles that might just outsmart you. Warning: side effects may include sudden bursts of genius, uncontrollable laughter, and an irresistible urge to solve just one more. Dive in if you dare—your brain will thank you (or challenge you) later!

## PROMINENT FORTUNE 100 COMPANIES

D	U	G	V	O	S	O	N	Y	Y	I	P	A	N
M	N	S	R	T	G	L	L	P	F	I	Z	E	R
S	I	M	N	O	A	A	O	C	T	E	S	L	A
S	L	L	I	Y	V	E	R	I	Z	O	N	D	S
A	E	A	K	O	A	A	J	E	S	A	S	I	V
M	V	I	E	T	R	G	N	U	S	M	A	S	L
A	E	G	G	A	O	T	R	A	M	L	A	W	H
Z	R	E	M	I	C	R	O	S	O	F	T	N	S
O	P	E	P	S	I	C	O	C	S	N	R	S	H
N	T	E	G	R	A	T	A	F	O	R	D	O	E
M	C	I	G	N	A	C	E	L	G	O	O	G	L
W	T	M	C	D	O	N	A	L	D	S	E	I	L
E	S	A	H	C	N	A	G	R	O	M	P	J	W
E	L	T	S	E	N	E	L	P	P	A	I	B	M

- |                |           |            |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| TOYOTA         | AMAZON    | SHELL      |
| VISA           | SONY      | TESLA      |
| JPMORGAN CHASE | VERIZON   | IBM        |
| PEPSICO        | APPLE     | MCDONALD'S |
| COCACOLA       | FORD      | WALMART    |
| PFIZER         | NIKE      | CIGNA      |
| TARGET         | MICROSOFT | NESTLE     |
| UNILEVER       | SAMSUNG   | GOOGLE     |

## CODEWORD PUZZLE

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	5	21	11	20		10	21	25	12	22	21	23	8
2	19		21		8		23		20		9		6
3	1	13	22	6	20	5	24		24	1	9	2	5
4	20		6		12		4		21		25		21
5	21	8	8		15		20		14	15	1	23	8
6	12				23	7	12	14	4		20		11
7	6		6		5			7		8		21	
8	5		23		24	1	16	20	5			23	
9	4	6	2	20	25		20		6	20	21	24	
10	23		26		21		4		9		17		21
11	20	3	20	9	24		21	12	21	18	6	23	13
12	5		22		20		22		22		22		20
13	5	15	22	6	8	6	10	7		10	20	1	8

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
					I							G

14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
		B										

Enter the letter in each circled cell in the order given below to reveal a themed answer:

1H	9G	1C	9K	12K	9L	3I	13D	5J	2G

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16				
17					18					19				
20					21					22				
				23				24						
25	26	27		28		29	30		31		32	33	34	35
36			37		38			39		40				
41					42					43				
44							45				46			
47						48		49			50		51	
					52		53		54		55			
64							65				66			
67							68				69			
70							71				72			

## SUDOKU

8	6			9			3	2
							4	
1	7					6		
			7					6
						3		5
7	2			6				8
	8							
					8			3
5	1				2		7	

Fill in the puzzle so that every row across, every column down and every 9 by 9 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Employers are saving

**\$2,342** in cost of hiring per role with skill-based tools

Date source: The State of Skills-based Hiring 2024, TestGorilla.

### Across

- Small retail store
- Shut loudly, as a door
- Fruit symbol of Georgia
- Surface for surfing
- Hydrant attachment
- Sound of a sneeze
- "That's too bad!"
- Author unknown: Abbr.
- Story's main idea
- Sprinting to score, in baseball
- Nonprofit's URL ender
- Golf peg
- Title for some wives
- Sneaker or sandal
- Reputation stain
- Moby-Dick captain
- Helps out
- Lazy person
- Attention-grabbing story
- Scornful smile
- High-fat, low-carb diet
- More or \_\_ (approximately)
- Dreadful
- Sales agents, for short
- Wall calendar square
- "The Raven" writer
- Full collection
- Getting every test answer right
- Sheriff's pursuit group
- Prefix for space or nautical
- Jab with a finger
- Barely visible
- Cat's weapon
- Highway turnover
- Informal conversations
- Recipe amts.
- Many, many, many years

### Down

- Ear-cleaning implement
- Angel's overhead ring
- Racetrack shape
- Green pasta sauce
- Most populous Chinese city
- Time-consuming
- Dating from
- Forget-\_\_ (flower)
- Highly inadequate
- Rebound of a sound
- "If I may interrupt..."
- Attend a party
- Weed-chopping farm tool
- Tax-collecting org.
- Second notes of a scale
- Swampy area
- Nose-horned African beast
- Thrifty person
- Pigpen sound
- Lawn-trimming tool
- Role model
- Reattached with sticky liquid
- High-IQ club
- Pretentiously creative
- "On tap" beverage
- Quench fully
- Three born together
- Crime-solving TV programmes
- "\_\_ have to?"
- Get a look at
- Make into law
- Wigwam relative
- Ark builder
- Largest continent
- "Money \_\_ everything"
- Goody hair products
- Sandy golf hazard
- Hugs-and-kisses symbols in love letters
- Similar (to)
- Big Apple baseball team
- Rank below cpl.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**41%**

of business leaders expect to redesign business processes within the next years with AI.

Date source: AI in HR: The Ultimate Guide to Implementing AI in Your HR Organisation, Gartner.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Companies are saving

**30%**

cost-per-hire through AI recruitment augmentation

Date source: Power Human Resource Service Delivery with AI, Deloitte.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**98%**

of companies consider all skills-based hiring tools to be effective.

Date source: The State of Skills-based Hiring 2024, TestGorilla.

## DID YOU KNOW?

By 2029, the global HR technology market will grow up to

**\$39.90 BILLION**

Date source: Human Resource (HR) Technology Market Size, Share & Industry Analysis, Fortune.





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While the continent boasts a young and vibrant population it does not have sufficient catalysts to transform the available talent into human capital assets. In several global surveys, Africa-based companies have reported major challenges in attracting and retaining the talent they need to run and grow their businesses.

This reality can be turned around.

“

The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.

Ralph Nader



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