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2010 clock is ticking

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What will your organization become exceptionally good at in the next four years?

The Soccer World Cup is coming to Africa. SA has little time to get ready for the world's biggest sporting event. Countless programmes and projects are under way to ensure the event's success. Every company should be asking, 'What's the opportunity for us? What should we do about it?' And every private sector organization should be asking, 'What's our role? What must we do, right now, to deliver on our mandate?'

But 2010 is more than just a date on the sporting calendar. By then, global events will have radically changed the world we live in. The competitive environment will be a lot more hostile than it is now. SA will have endured a presidential change, and the economy will hopefully be close to the 6% growth rate expected from the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA).

In short, the world we now know will be history. We'll all be in an unfamiliar place. The strategies we crafted in the intervening years may not work. The capabilities we built

may not be what we need. The results we want may elude us.

So consider another question: "What must your organization become exceptionally good at by 2010?"

More specifically, what must you be better at than anyone else? What strengths must you build? What skills must you develop and hone? What must you be able to do that you can't do now?

Five years is no time at all when you're in a race to the future. And the clock is ticking. Every day you lose is a cost to your organization. If you let the wheels spin today, you'll be in catch-up mode tomorrow – and you are unlikely to catch up. So every minute really does count.

The strategy on your desk in 2010 will only be as effective as the capabilities that underpin it. Building those capabilities will take a lot longer than you think. Now is the time to get busy.

By now, no one should be in any doubt that the biggest challenge facing SA is a shortage of skills in just about every sector. The problem will be magnified by government's planned R400 billion infrastructural spend. Finding or producing enough nurses, teachers, artisans, and engineers is a matter of extreme urgency – and huge difficulty.

But an even greater problem will be to

find enough managers. And they are critical, because without them nothing else works. Work must be organized. Someone must plan, schedule, ensure that the right people are in the right place at the right time, provide suitable resources, delegate tasks, monitor and adjust what's happening, and so on.

SA has had a management deficit for a long time. The situation has been made worse by a naïve belief that anyone can do anything, and that anyone can be a manager. But this flies in the face of reality. Management is a learned skill. You don't become good at it merely by working for a few years, reading a few books or attending a course or two. Systematic training and development are vital. Experience is essential.

By starting today, your organization could produce a body of competent executives by 2010. Surely, this should be your priority. Surely, this should be what you get really good at.

Managers really do make the difference. Growing them should be our national obsession. ✈

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