

# Wanted... the All-African CEO



By [Mosima Selekisho](#)

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Company executives are pragmatic about profit. They may be innovative, but they remain practical, they do what works or has good prospects of working. Even the most forward-thinking corporate leaders are rooted in the real world, they know today's earnings enable tomorrow's growth.

These traits suggest that trends embraced by business people have a practical chance of success. Which is why the *de facto* pan-Africanism implicit across much of the South African business community is such a hopeful development.

Previously, pan-Africanism was all about ideology and politics. In recent years, pan-Africanism has become a corporate issue, though some business leaders may shy away from the term.

The corporate dimension is solid evidence that continental harmonisation is not an impossible dream. It's a realisable objective.

It is refreshing to see that so many of our bankers, retailers, builders, engineers, farmers, miners and specialist professionals are eager to build an African footprint. They see huge potential in Africa and want to grow as sub-Saharan markets grow.

Both profits and national prosperity will rise as commercial relationships bring Africans together.



It is unreasonable, however, to expect a linear progression to greater amity and unity. There will be setbacks - as recent outbreaks of xenophobia make all too clear.

Xenophobia in South Africa soon provoked protests outside the premises of South African companies in other African states, underlining the danger that animosity towards fellow-Africans can impact businesses in multiple markets.

Clearly, a new leadership challenge is beginning to crystallise for South African brands with Africa-wide ambitions. Senior executives have to articulate an all-African philosophy and spell out a mission that embraces the notion of wide-ranging progress by the whole of Africa.

A 'them' and 'us' mentality cannot be allowed to take root.

As cross-border business growth continues, we are sure to see the emergence of the All-African CEO - the leader who is clearly at the helm of an Africa-wide business rather than the boss of a South African operation hoping for a second-string to its local bow.

Nigerian and Kenyan businesses, among others, will face a similar challenge as they step up investment in South Africa.

The number of South African businesses with significant sub-Saharan earnings will increase as local operations seek exposure to markets that grow much faster than the sub-2% level seen locally.

Candidates for senior positions should therefore prepare themselves for questions about their African vision. Knowledge of more than one African market will also be an advantage for those looking to break into senior management.

Anyone seeking a top job at a company with a broad African footprint will be expected to talk to regional growth potential as well as local industry prospects.

Some familiarity will be expected with developments such as the Tripartite Free Trade Area spanning the Southern African Development Community, the East African Community and the Community for Eastern and Southern Africa.

Tomorrow's pan-African CEO will constantly articulate an inclusive African vision. Growing companies with big African ambitions will be led by executives with an African sense of mission who will make it plain that Africa is our destiny, not our enemy.

That's the future. Let's embrace it.

## ABOUT MOSIMA SELEKISHO

Mosima Selekisho is a Director of Johannesburg-based TALENT AFRICA, a leading executive search and talent management company and an alliance of Korn Ferry, the world's largest executive search business.

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