

Business has more to give than money

The positive effect of business leaders becoming actively involved in under-resourced schools is immediate and dramatic

Leo Kok

There is a growing cynicism about corporate social investment (CSI) in South Africa and abroad. The checkbox-driven approach of the past, where an annual donation is scheduled, made and then soon forgotten, is disappearing in the light of evidence that these "investments" are neither sustainable nor particularly helpful.

Enter in its place the concept of business as a force for good, which recognises that businesses have so much more to give than just money. It recognises the complexity of many of the social and environmental challenges that CSI faces, and it asks of the business sector to take responsibility not just for providing some form of capital in support of a worthy cause, but take the lead in the development and, importantly, the implementation of any intervention.

Business as a force for good emphasises the need to apply sound business principles in making any form of donation. It also supports the notion that investment has to create capacity to be sustainable. Lastly, this new form of conscious capitalism understands that a well-planned and directed investment is an investment in future social capital.

A business that actively supports a good social cause is a business that recognises that human capital is a key success factor, both today and in the future. It supports the fact that future corporate success is dependent on a stable and well-functioning society and it accepts the direct link between being a good corporate citizen and the bottom line.

As an example of the need for good corporate social investment, consider the growing focus on education in South Africa. It is widely accepted that the South African primary education sector is in crisis, with an estimated 20 000 out of approximately 25 000 schools underperforming or struggling to operate.

This problem is at the forefront of the national consciousness and was again addressed in the national budget, where the education sec-



Skills for schools: Businesses have valuable leadership and management experience that can be passed on to school principals.

Photo: Madelene Cronjé

tor received the lion's share of the overall budget. No less than R265.7-billion was allocated to education, with the basic education sector receiving R191.1-billion of that budget.

But simply spending more money is not going to magically solve the problems in this sector. Stellenbosch University researcher Nick Spaull notes that South Africa spends 18 times more per child than Uganda, yet its academic output is the same. Other African countries, such as Kenya, far outperform South Africa with a much smaller budget.

A past of institutionalised segregation and little funds for or focus on township schools is certainly to blame for much of the malaise that the sector finds itself in, but the solution is much more complex and nuanced. It is in this complex environment that a simple CSI donation of computers, money or fresh paint does not address the issues that plague the sector, nor does it promise a sustainable solution.

Donating money does not, for

instance, address the challenges faced by school leadership. The department of basic education has recognised that many, if not all, of the principals at underperforming schools have received insufficient preparation to lead complex and troubled organisations.

Imagine the mammoth task faced by principals in these under-resourced schools, which includes finding and retaining teachers, dealing with the many social ills faced by the children and addressing issues in the community. On top of that, principals are expected to fulfil expected roles as financial and administrative managers of the school. Bear in mind that in most under-resourced schools the principal performs these tasks alone, with little support.

Contrast the challenges of school leadership with the abundant leadership capacity in corporate South Africa. On average a business leader has received many hours of targeted leadership and management training, and has had many more hours

exposed to leadership practices in the business environment.

Many business leaders also display finely tuned skills in managing complex changes and large projects, and they usually have a wide and active network of staff, resources and other leaders whom they can draw upon.

If one views corporate South Africa's strong leadership capacity as a resource, then the next step becomes clear. Merely donating funds is a blunt instrument in comparison with donating leadership and management skills; and supporting school leadership surely offers far greater leverage for any subsequent donations of capital or equipment.

In our experience at Partners for Possibility (PFP), for an organisation that pairs business leaders with school principals at under-resourced schools, the positive effect of business leaders becoming actively involved in these schools is almost immediate and often dramatic, provided that it is considered

as a partnership where both parties contribute and learn.

School principals on the programme report less stress from having a thinking partner and from learning some, often seemingly basic, administrative and management skills. In contrast business leaders come away transformed, with a newfound cultural sensitivity and powerful skills in leading without positional power or coercion.

Business leaders also report that the process of donating their time and expertise are never as time-consuming as they thought, and that a programme such as PFP widens their network of similarly minded executives and inspiring teachers and school principals.

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Investing In The Future Awards: Is your organisation a force for good?

The *Mail & Guardian* presents the 2016 Investing in the Future awards, with a focus on business as a force for good.

As a result of tough economic conditions, corporate social investment has seen the rise of the concept of business as a force for good. This recognises that business has so much more to give than just money.

The business sector takes responsibility not just for providing some form of capital in support of a worthy cause, but takes the lead in the development and, importantly, in the implementa-

tion of interventions.

Business as a force for good emphasises the need to apply sound business principles in making any form of donation. It also supports the notion that investment has to create capacity to be sustainable, and understands that a well-planned and -directed investment is an investment in future social capital.

This approach is evident in job creation programmes, involvement in enterprise, SMME and skills development, and of course corporate support for education-related development.

The *M&G* Investing in the Future Awards publicise the often unsung contributions by business to the future of South Africa and its citizens. The awards are designed to heighten public, government and business awareness about meaningful social investment.

Every year, we receive hundreds of entries from projects around the country that are judged by an independent, respected panel of judges.

We invite you and your company/organisation to be part of our annual celebration of business as a force for good.

Who can enter:

- Corporations with corporate social investment (CSI) programmes, or corporate foundations attached to a company, or where the grant-making programme is run by a self-governing foundation separate from the founding corporation;

- Independent foundations and trusts, community foundations, grantmaking NGOs and trusts, family foundations and grantmaking trusts and private foundations;

- Individuals from any sector across business, civil society or government who have played a significant role in developing new, innovative and inclusive approaches to anti-poverty and development work;

- Government or intergovernmental agencies, programmes or initiatives that create new possibilities and develop new models for policy engagement in the national and regional policy spheres. Ministries, government departments, parliaments or parliamentary forums are included.