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### **Value shift needed to create high-performance organisations in SA, USB hears**

The creation of a high performance organisation requires a value shift from an old economy with negative patterns of leadership to positive leadership and high performance cultures, said Christo Nel, director of The Village of Leadership Consultancy and senior lecturer extraordinaire at the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB).

He was speaking at the USB's Leader's Angle event to a large audience of business people, MBA students and academics on the topic *Creating a high-performance organisation, The foundations of sustainable competitiveness* on Friday (27 March 2009).

Nel said various research studies done at the USB and by other organisations in the period between 1985 and 2008 show 'no discernable progress' in the capacity of South African organisations to implement significant change that will lead to high performance. However, he said there are some companies that managed to transform into high performance organisations, bringing them great success compared to other companies in the same market.

"There is no holy grail to high performance organisations, but in our research I've seen key patterns that drive this performance.

"An overwhelming number of people express the desire for a transformation from the "old to new economy" cultures and the creation of a high performance organisation that is fit and friendly for human life. Yet the research, both global and local, proves that this transformation remains the exception to the rule. Even in the face of great desire and evidence of the superiority of high performance organisation cultures, why is the progress so slow?" asked Nel.

He says in comprehending why the progress is so slow many valuable clues on how to "overcome the inertia and fuel the flywheel of the high performance organisation" can be obtained.

A factor Nel mentioned that slows the progress of attaining high performance organisations in South Africa is that all stakeholders in organisations have not adequately overcome the culture of pre-1994. "One thing unites us... we don't comprehend democracy!"

Another is a pervasive "Afro-pessimism" and leadership inertia from both black and white managers. "Last year 62% of all managerial appointments were white, which is totally skewed," said Nel, proving that such pessimism is often unfounded.

"If black economic empowerment does not succeed we cannot move into the next stage of our democracy. Black economic empowerment has to lead to increased competitiveness, but there is currently too much focus on shareholding."

Nel said the drivers of entrenching a high performance organisation culture are to have a values shift, which requires crossing a personal transformation threshold where a person moves from an independent silo approach to an interdependent and inclusive approach.

Another driver is to leverage powerful communication to energise the system. "The executive team must develop 10 slides which everyone uses to communicate the same message to the next level. In this way they, together with line managers, reach the rest of the organisation."

"The executive team must develop a capacity to cascade competence and accountability until they eventually involve the entire workforce to develop a common understanding and competence of the high performance organisation drivers to create an inclusive culture that is energising and reinforces sustainable competitiveness," explained Nel.

The USB's Leader's Angle talks on all aspects of leadership, presented in association with *Finweek*, are an outflow of its strong focus on leadership development in its MBA, its executive education programmes, and its research on leadership.

To attend the USB's Leader's Angle free monthly talks, contact Annemarie Olivier on [usbcom@usb.ac.za](mailto:usbcom@usb.ac.za). Visit [www.usb.ac.za](http://www.usb.ac.za).

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### **Photo caption**

At the USB Leader's Angle: Prof Laetitia van Dyk, head of the USB Centre for Leadership Studies, Nontobeko Mehlomakulu from Petro-SA, speaker Christo Nel from The Village of Leadership Consultancy, and Nomfusi Jwaai from Petro-SA.

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