

# Look beyond MBAs for leadership skills

Jack Hammer's 2016 Executive Report, an independently researched publication now in its third year, shows that while higher degrees definitely improve a candidate's attractiveness, an MBA is no longer a 'magic ticket'.



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“Ambitious executives, considering furthering their education, should carefully consider their options and not automatically gun for an MBA as many have done in the past two decades,” says Debbie Goodman-Bhyat, CEO of Jack Hammer.

“In the past, an MBA was a rare qualification and its presence on a candidate’s CV made it a significant and prestigious addition. These days, MBAs are in abundance and no longer make the same impact.”

According to the report’s findings, 90% of South Africa’s CEOs of Top 40 companies have a technical degree, whether it is finance, sciences, business or engineering. Further, more than 90% of them have at least an Honours or other postgraduate degree. Interestingly however, only eight of these higher degrees were of the MBA variety.

“The role of MBAs, as the research shows, is possibly over-estimated, with most leaders having higher degrees in other

fields. What is more critical, when aiming for the top, is to ensure a strong financial, business or technical qualification and secondly, a post-graduate degree.

“Where previously a higher degree or MBA boosted a candidate’s chances above his peers, these days such qualifications are required simply to stay in the game. Moreover, the perception that an MBA is superior to other Master’s degrees in a technical discipline is incorrect. There is certainly a case for a Master’s level qualification, as the research shows that 45% of South Africa’s Top 40 CEOs have obtained these. However, the data confirms that there is no particular preference for the type of M degree.

“The MBA as a postgraduate Master’s level qualification has had the benefit of fantastic marketing, but another Master’s – provided it is from a reputable institution and particularly if it is in a sought-after focus area - will do you just as well, if not better.

“So before jumping on the MBA bandwagon, those considering further education and advanced degrees should carefully assess all their options before making the time and financial commitments required.”

## **Leadership transformation needs to start at school**

Meanwhile, another key insight from the research on the education of top leaders was that much more work was required at school level to ensure transformation in the corporate sector and that the basic education system was one of the key challenges in the country’s transformation journey.

“If maths and science are not mastered at school, there is little hope that a candidate will be able to overcome the initial hurdles of acquiring a financial, technical or business degree, and ultimately claim a top leadership position.

“So while we should continue to push at the top to ensure substantial transformation, there is crucial change that needs to be effected at the foundations, which currently do not support long-term and sustainable transformation efforts,” concludes Goodman-Bhyat.

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