

How to reduce the brain drain

Following the country's downgrade to junk status by the ratings agencies, South Africa may still experience a significant brain drain and an exodus of talent, according to [Leon Ayo](#), chief executive officer of Odgers Berndtson Sub-Saharan Africa.



Leon Ayo

“Emerging markets are most in need of skills and expertise to grow their economies. Their post-conflict and post-colonial environments, coupled with political uncertainty, make them more risky from an investment perspective, but the right human talent can change this significantly,” says Ayo.

“Talent sourcing isn’t only about remuneration, there are many factors that inform whether talent will stay or flee. The variables include availability of a good education, good healthcare, a stable political environment, stimulating work, and a comfortable social existence,” says Ayo.

Investment

South Africa must invest in quality education and invest in talent. An educated workforce – people who understand how the economy functions and how to make it work well – will ensure the correct policies and regulations are in place to attract investors. Not only will the country become more attractive to investors, it will be more attractive to human talent within the borders and from abroad.

Former President Thabo Mbeki listed brain drain as [one of the dangers that Africa faces](#). “The number of skilled people and professionals our continent has lost over the decades is truly frightening. Since 1990, Africa lost 20,000 academic professionals who left their countries [and] 10% of highly skilled information technology and finance professionals have also left the continent in recent years,” Mbeki said in an address to a gathering in Johannesburg a few years ago. “It is estimated that more African scientists and engineers live and work in the USA and the UK than anywhere else in the world,” he added. More powerfully, he said it was impossible to realise the African dream of a thriving continent, without skilled professionals.

The latest [Career Junction Index](#), which lists the most sought after skills in South Africa according to employers, names the IT sector as most hungry for skills – talking to the growing requirement for digitisation. Released in early 2017, the report is based on over 25,000 posts listed across the Career Junction site from employers and recruiters nationwide, giving a broad overview of the labour demand market. It states that there is a strong lack of skills in the IT sector, with [software development](#) being top of the list, and followed by finance skills.

“These are the skills that South Africa needs to most retain. Downgrades don’t help but there is a place for CEOs to play their part in diminishing this brain drain,” says Ayo.

What can the CEO do?

- **Be adaptable** - The world today is moving at a rapid pace; key will be acquiring and retaining people with new age skills within an organisation to enable it to progress.
- **Have a clear plan** - which is realistic, flexible, and well-articulated so that each employee knows exactly where they fit in in these changing times, limiting any desire for them to want to flee.
- **Embrace change** - CEOs must have the ability to embrace change. It may mean looking to new markets/territories where there is more stability in order to grow a business - which may also mean new talent types within the business or the opportunity to upscale existing talent and retain them. A brain drain is minimised if people clearly understand and appreciate their role towards the bigger picture.
- **Keep an eye on talent** - Talent is business critical. CEOs must keep ahead of competitors by attracting the best talent. Transformation is an imperative in South Africa. People must be employed on merit, while knowledge transfer is just as important.

Ayo adds that South Africa is rich in resources and intellect, downgrade recovery is hard but achievable.

“CEOs must focus on that which is in their control: what they do best, having the best talent to help them achieve their goals, and remain positive. Good CEOs and leaders are also a rich resource that South Africa needs, working hard to stop the potential brain drain includes a leadership brain drain,” concludes Ayo.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>