An engaged workforce

Introduction
Pfizer South Africa was established in 1953. Since then, the company has been shaped by developments within the global Pfizer group, including the acquisition of Warner Lambert, Pharmacia and, most recently, Wyeth.

Brian Daniel, CEO & Country Manager for Pfizer South Africa’s Biopharmaceutical division, notes that the recent acquisition of Wyeth has proved particularly positive for the company, having broadened the spectrum of diseases Pfizer is able to address. Our offering now spans medication for pain, women’s health, cardiovascular health, neurosciences and vaccines, he enthuses. The addition of a vaccine offering is particularly important because it is in line with government’s aim to address infant mortality.

Top three priorities
An engaged workforce is one of Pfizer’s key priorities, and this company is focused on ensuring that staffers – who it recognises as its core asset – are both engaged and enjoying their jobs.

A second priority sees the company concentrating on establishing and maintaining alliances with external stakeholders. For example, Pfizer works closely with government departments to inform and advise on issues pertaining to policy. Our collaboration with government regarding the introduction of NHI is a case in point, says Daniel.

He notes that this partnership approach speaks directly to the company’s final priority: ensuring that as many South Africans as possible enjoy access to quality medicines.

Leadership profile
As part of its leadership focus in this edition, Pfizer South Africa’s Biopharmaceutical division wants to publicly showcase its achievements in gender empowerment by turning the spotlight on its women executives within the business, together with a focus on their CEO & Country Manager, Brian Daniel.

Daniel took over as CEO & Country Manager of Pfizer South Africa’s Biopharmaceutical division in 2008. ‘At the time our company is focused on ensuring that staffers – who it recognises as its core asset – are both engaged and enjoying their jobs. A second priority sees the company concentrating on establishing and maintaining alliances with external stakeholders. For example, Pfizer works closely with government departments to inform and advise on issues pertaining to policy. Our collaboration with government regarding the introduction of NHI is a case in point,’ says Daniel.

‘I believe in crucial conversations with appropriate colleagues, at relevant times in the business life-cycle.’

Name and surname: Brian Daniel
Company: Pfizer South Africa’s Biopharmaceutical division
Business title: CEO & Country Manager
Years of experience: 20
Academic qualifications: MBA, Macquarie Graduate School of Management, Sydney, Australia
Mentor: Father
Time-out activities: Hiking, mountain biking and swimming
The final part of the statement – ‘a healthier southern Africa’ – refers to the company’s desire to form partnerships with key stakeholders in the healthcare sector that will make it possible for all southern Africans to potentially have greater access to medicines.

This revised vision was introduced two years ago. Prior to this, the company had a fairly high employee turnover, averaging 10-15%, Daniel informs. This now stands at five percent; ‘a sign that we have met our goal of creating a great place to work’.

At the same time, the company has successfully built efficiencies by providing employees with tools to manage their time more effectively and increase productivity. Expenses have also been reduced.

Nonetheless, Daniel takes a pragmatic view of the challenges still in vision was to become the number one pharmaceutical company in South Africa by 2010,’ he recalls. However, after engaging with the leadership team, he found that there was little passion for this vision. The team therefore brainstormed to find an objective that had resonance throughout the organisation, and through this process established the vision of ‘Living our full potential in striving for a healthier southern Africa’.

We want to make this a great place to work,’ Daniel says, unpacking this statement. ‘It’s not just about reaching our full potential; it’s about giving Pfizer employees the tools to do their job while maintaining work-life balance.

The company’s commitment to ‘rethinking’ indicates its determination to never give up, and to find solutions through collaborating with colleagues, all the while maintaining and demonstrating respect for other people.

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The company is also affected by the skills shortage, which not only impacts on its ability to find quality candidates but also has implications for relations with external stakeholders. “Simply put, there isn’t a broad range of expertise,” Daniel says.

How does his leadership style equip him to manage these delicate dynamics? “I have the privilege of working at Pfizer offices around the world, and in this way have gained exposure to many cultures. This is a tremendous advantage in the South African setting.

It is Daniel’s habit to surround himself with experts who are able to offer guidance; after all, the rapid pace at which the pharmaceutical industry develops means that it is difficult for a single individual to remain intimately acquainted with all aspects thereof. “I don’t make decisions on my own,” Daniel says. “I consider the suggestions of my team. This helps to create an inclusive environment.”

Dr Kuku Appiah, Medical Director
Gunkel-Keuler believes in ‘the total empowerment of the team’. For her, this goes beyond delegating to ensure that each member of the team is actively participating. ‘I’m very hands-on and informal, and try to encourage coaching and mentorship. I’m comfortable with both leading from the front or supporting from the back as the situation demands, so my team knows that I am always in their corner.’

Zenon has learnt the value of maintaining a fluid approach to leadership. Because the regulatory environment is so diverse, there can be no ‘one-size-fits-all’. ‘Sometimes it’s best to be technical in my approach, and other times I need to be more people-centred. It depends on the situation.’

Informality works best for Grobbelaar. She, too, mentions the importance of diversity and collaboration, saying that the result is a workplace that makes room for fun while maintaining its focus on the objectives. ‘We have a good balance between caring for each other and making things happen,’ she says.

Hulett has learnt to vary her style between formal and informal, as the situation demands. She cites a practical example: ‘Where I know that structure and processes are firmly entrenched, I’m happy to let my reports take the lead. However, if I’ve assessed the situation and deemed that it needs a firmer hand, I will adjust the level of support required and be more formal if necessary. The point is to make sure that they know they can count on me.’

Each of these women recognises that Pfizer’s culture and environment has created a unique platform for them to exercise and hone their management style, and the enormous diversity that has resulted works to the company’s benefit. For example, Hill strives to recognise the different drivers including her team members and to empower them accordingly, placing an accent on collaboration. ‘This is a workplace that makes it possible to grow and develop because you are given the authority to take action, make decisions, and help others do the same.’

Meanwhile, Gunkel-Keuler believes in ‘the total empowerment of the team’. For her, this goes beyond delegating to ensure that each member of the team is actively participating. ‘I’m interested in how we can get value from their contribution. As part of this approach, Daniel employs a “management by walking around” style, taking the time to interact with employees and listen to their concerns. The insistence on building a circle of leaders has resulted in a strong leadership which, interestingly, comprises as significantly high number of women. (Total Leadership Team comprises 13 – nine males and seven females.) Public Affairs, Policy & Communications Director, Leigh Gunkel-Keuler, notes that it’s a decision taken by the company to have a gender-balanced leadership to ensure that the company views gender empowerment as a reality. ‘It’s also important to note that women in leadership roles have a significant role to play in the pharmaceutical industry.’

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For Nel, the aim is to leave behind a legacy of collaboration which will be able to fulfil a commercial need. We challenge the traditional way in which HR functions because we want to become true partners.

She is particularly proud of the work done by the HR team, when it comes to the traditional way in which HR functions because we want to become true partners.

Daniel enthuses. 'You really can go as far as you want to. In essence, the South African operation functions as a talent pool for the global group, so the opportunities are limitless.' Nel enthuses.

The introduction of the six-box grid is one example of how Pfizer continues to innovate. Indeed, this is a hallmark of the company: as a research and development company, innovation is highly valued at Pfizer and the company prides itself on introducing a steady stream of groundbreaking products. Daniel says that the company is well placed to continue in this vein. ‘We believe that, with the introduction of the grid, there will be a focus on developing the South African market. But that doesn’t mean there’s no room for innovative products: indeed, all our products and developments are based on drugs that have been developed through research.’

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Pfizer’s leadership is showing increased focus in the execution and leverage of opportunities. I see the same passion through strong committed leadership, under the auspices of Brian Daniel, both courageous and crucial conversations are promoted and that manifest by employees in how they do their work. Open discussions and crucial conversations are promoted and that is bearing fruit through the increased promotion of new ideas and innovation that ultimately drives the business.’

Thomka Megan, State Relations Manager, Customer Directorate Division

Employee quotes

‘Pfizer South Africa drives a strategy which is underpinned by colleagues living our values in order to achieve focused, quality outcomes. Being part of the executive leadership team requires that we collaborate, partner and support each other as we drive the business forward. This approach therefore allows each of us to contribute to a global business process which relies on our capabilities, skills and expertise in order to successfully generate this growth.’

Matthew Moodley, Legal Director