

**Barclays Bank Africa operates in Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.**

### **The Business Challenge**

Barclays Africa delivers a range of retail and corporate banking services, and in recent years the business has shifted from a system of autonomous local management to centralised control. The re-organisation took place against a rapidly changing economic and legal backdrop. The financial services market in the region was maturing rapidly and the business was facing growing competition. At the same time, employment practice was becoming more sophisticated and multi-nationals were under pressure to reduce their reliance on expatriate staff.

Barclays Africa recognised that although the move to central control had brought many benefits, the shift had perhaps been too intense. Managers were struggling to cope with the conflict of running a local business while at the same time responding to the demands for consistency from head office. In addition, there was increasing pressure from both employees and legislators to increase the numbers of local staff holding senior positions. There was a real desire to see the business doing more to identify and accelerate local talent into positions of responsibility.

### **The Solution**

The Human Resources team at Barclays Africa decided that tackling the talent issue should be their immediate priority. They decided they needed outside expertise and chose Hunter Roberts to provide a fresh perspective. Hunter Roberts' brief was to help the business pinpoint those who had potential for development into senior roles and develop a better understanding of their specific capabilities.

Barclays already had a sophisticated framework for nurturing and developing high potential people. What the business needed to understand was exactly who these people were. Hunter Roberts set about designing a sophisticated assessment and development centre that would help fill this knowledge gap. There was extensive consultation with the business, to ensure the team had a clear understanding of the critical leadership skills needed and the context within which managers were operating.

### **Development and Assessment Centre**

It was decided that the centre should not just aim to identify talented individuals – but to rank them according to their likely future potential. Three categories of talent were identified:

*Pan-African Talent* – those people with transferable leadership skills that could be groomed for positions of responsibility across Barclays Africa.

*Top National Talent* – high performing local managers with the potential to reach executive roles within their respective countries.

*National Talent* – employees with the capability to progress to regional roles within their specific country business.

In all, around 100 employees attended a series of eight assessment and development centres, which were held back-to-back, across the region. Delegates were faced with a variety of highly practical exercises, including role plays, group work and team activities. To ensure a level playing field, activities were based around generic situations and everyone had the opportunity to attend a development session on leadership skills and models.

Participants were closely observed by assessor/coaches throughout the process, with a ratio of two delegates to one assessor. People's performance was captured and recorded in detail to ensure that decisions could be made on sound, solid evidence. It was quite unlike anything that had been run before in Barclays Africa not just in terms of style, but also in terms of the depth of evidence Barclays required from the exercises. The process had to be really robust so that Barclays could justify why someone had been identified as Pan-African talent and would be accelerated through the business, with the corresponding investment in them, over the next five years.

After rigorous and lengthy debate between the team of assessor/coaches, a comprehensive, carefully ranked list of talent was drawn up for each country. Individual confidential reports, which included information on strengths and development needs, were also drawn up for each individual. These were not shared with the business, although participants were strongly encouraged to discuss the contents with their manager so that the findings could be fed into their personal development plans.

### **Measuring Success**

Since the exercise was completed, several high potential people have already embarked on their journey to the top. One senior manager from Gambia, who was identified as a superior Pan-African 'talent', was made MD of her country business. Two individuals from Kenya and Ghana, have moved to strategic roles within the retail function at head office in South Africa. Others have made smaller, but equally significant moves, and the balance of local staff versus expatriates is being redressed. A clear outcome of the exercise is that Barclays Africa now knows who the best people in the business are and has a clear understanding of their future potential.

### **Further Developments**

With the talent project successfully achieving its agreed targets, the Hunter Roberts team were asked to move onto the challenge of revitalising the leadership of each country business. Barclays were looking for a senior management intervention that could be consistent across the eleven countries, but also flexible enough to meet the demands of the local businesses. The aim was to help people understand how they could take the direction that came from the centre and implement it locally, without diluting the strategy.

A series of two-day workshops were put together for the ten-strong executive team from each country. The programme was an innovative mix of practical and experiential exercises, including a full-day business simulation led by an experienced business role player. Participants also had the opportunity to take part in role plays based on real-life scenarios to gain an insight into their personal management style and how they worked together as a team. One-to-one sessions were also held with the MD of each country business to review the performance of their teams during the workshop and pinpoint both opportunities and weaknesses.

### **Measuring Success**

The learning that came out of the workshops was so useful that several of the country MDs decided to run them for specialist divisions back in their own businesses. It is widely acknowledged across Barclays Africa that the local executive teams are now functioning more effectively – and there has been a corresponding impact on profitability. The business is much stronger overall thanks to sound local leadership. Financial performance has improved, countries which were struggling have been turned around and expansion plans are now moving forward. Hunter Roberts worked with Barclays Africa until they were taken over by an African bank.