

Leveraging African know-how within the Swiss corporate environment
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BREAKFAST BUZZ

post event report



About the SABC

The Swiss-African Business Circle (SABC), was created in 2010 and now counts 80 member companies as part of its network. It is a hands-on business association, providing its members with a unique platform for exchanging experiences, projects and ideas in fostering partnerships and opening new business perspectives.

Learn more about the Swiss-African Business Circle at www.sabc.ch

About Djembe Communications

Named after the West African drum, Djembe Communications is a unique communications consultancy committed to amplifying an African narrative founded on opportunity, growth and innovation. An old African proverb proclaims that when the drummers change the beat, the dancers must also change their steps—and Djembe Communications strives to help our clients change theirs.

Learn more about Djembe at www.djembecommunications.com

Business environments vary in different countries. Those who work across regions need to be more agile than ever in maintaining relationships with partners, clients and service providers.

Managers of African origin working in multinationals or Swiss companies, as well as African entrepreneurs who are building companies in Switzerland, are all contributing to the corporate landscape in Switzerland.



Held in Zurich on 23rd November 2017, this edition of the Breakfast Buzz brought together a number of leading industry figures to talk about their experiences as Africans working for Swiss and multinational companies from Switzerland.

African managers and entrepreneurs as well as Swiss-based managers with a focus on the African region came together in order to share their experiences within the corporate landscape in Switzerland.

During the discussion, best practices around how African know-how can be leveraged within companies were shared.

Yvonne Bettkober
Director,
Enterprise Specialist Sales
Microsoft Switzerland

"When you mix the two, you have the African craziness and the Swiss thoroughness."



Charles Thiemele
Head of Africa Trading Desk
AOT Energy

"Being on the ground lends credibility and enables you to grow a business in Africa."



Nurturing a 'growth mindset'

Yvonne Bettkober, Director Enterprise Specialist Sales at Microsoft Switzerland spoke about her experience as an African Executive in a multinational organization. She talked about how it matters less what a person's skills are but their ability to challenge themselves and have an adaptable mind: a growth mindset. She spoke about how growing up in Africa allowed her, like most of her fellow Africans to develop resilience, agility and a positive attitude in times of change and uncertainty. She shared observations of the differences between more successful and mature economies like Switzerland where changes often create major fears and an extensive need for alignment and dialog while "in Africa they just run with it but sometimes to the other extreme and the energy needs to be funneled towards impact."

Leveraging optionality

Making the most of the Swiss approach in an African context also means leveraging optionality, according to Charles Thiemele from AOT Energy. "By understanding what your company is doing and driving towards, you can bring your expertise to make that happen. But, you need to have a localized focus." Charles also spoke of the importance of working towards 'next generation' assets, which will be welcomed by the African people, add value and help to build a sustainable business.

Swiss-based companies or multinationals must be strategic when it comes to entering the African market.

Below are main takeaways from senior-level African executives around how African know-how can be leveraged within Swiss-based companies.

- Swiss-based companies or multinationals expanding across Africa should be selective and begin in the markets they know best.
- Managers with an African background are used to managing uncertainty which is an asset for every company dealing with a fast-changing corporate environment due to rapid technological advances.
- Role-modelling by senior-level African managers is critical for ensuring that companies understand the value of knowledge exchange between Switzerland and Africa and prepares the way for upcoming African managers within Swiss-based companies.
- Companies that recognize the importance of leveraging the perspectives of African team members will gain deeper insights into regional particularities and as a result make better decisions.
- African managers have a key role in facilitating contact between the two regions beyond their professional role which includes transferring their skills to African countries.

