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Tiger Brands & Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS)

Re-Imagine Tiger: Creating a Pipeline of Strategic Leadership and Cultural Change

Cultural Change

Tiger Brands needed a fundamental reset of leadership and culture to take the organisation into the future.

Tiger Brands is one of Africa's largest listed fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) manufacturers. Founded in 1921 as Tiger Oats Ltd, the South African company produces affordable food products across milling and baking, culinary foods, snacks and treats, and beverages. With 34 manufacturing plants in South Africa, its products reach 88% of South African households, and are exported to 22 countries, predominantly in Africa.

Following the appointment of a new CEO in 2016, Tiger Brands overhauled its strategy, operating model and organisational structure. The organisation subsequently co-created a new cultural aspiration, values and winning behaviours through extensive engagement across its businesses and value chain. These were launched in 2019.

The Tiger Brands-GIBS Partnership

To embed the new culture and to support strategy execution, Tiger Brands recognised the need for a new approach to leadership development. It partnered with the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) to co-create a customised leadership programme focused on strategic thinking, consumer-centricity, innovation and people-first leadership.

The Tiger Brands-GIBS partnership resulted in the development of *The Tiger Brands: Re-Imagine Leadership Development Programme*, which accelerates value creation by addressing the current needs of the organisation. In 2025, for example, in addition to strengthening strategic leadership and developing a consumer-centric and innovative mindset, it also focused on building digital and AI fluency.

"Tiger Brands was reviewing its strategy, overhauling its culture, and it wanted to drive the execution of that strategy. We needed leaders that would drive not only the execution of business strategy and results, but also embed and inspire the culture that we wanted."

- S'ne Magagula -
CPO Tiger Brands

GIBS

GIBS is a proudly African business school committed to advancing world-class business practices through decisive leadership, long-term strategic thinking and human-centred, sustainable business practices. Since its founding in 2000, it has developed a strong reputation for experiential learning and executive education.

The Challenge – Re-Imagining the Tiger

Tiger Brands was undergoing significant transformation while operating in a highly regulated and cost-pressured FMCG environment. Leaders needed to translate strategy into disciplined execution while rebuilding consumer trust, strengthening collaboration and developing strategic agility.

While Tiger Brands already had tiered leadership programmes for Shop Floor, Young, Mid-Career and Seasoned employees, a gap existed at the Exco-minus-one level. As such, Re-Imagine Tiger was created to strengthen this level of leadership and build a succession pipeline for the Executive Team.

Diagnostics identified several challenges: siloed operations, internal firefighting, limited cross-functional collaboration and uneven digital readiness. As Tiger Brands Chief People's Officer, S'ne Magagula, explained, "We needed leaders that would drive, not only the execution of business strategy and results, but also embed and inspire the culture that we wanted."

> "We needed forward-thinking leaders, innovative leaders, and we needed to help them develop these very different ways of thinking about the world around us, thinking about Tiger. We wanted them to develop the capability to influence and co-shape the future of Tiger."
>
> **- S'ne Magagula -**
> CPO Tiger Brands

Creating Agile Leaders:

A refreshed leadership capability framework identified five requirements for the Agile Tiger Leader of the Future:

1. Leads People
2. Leads Performance
3. Leads Innovation
4. Leads Partnerships
5. Leads Self

Therefore, the programme needed to focus on humane leadership, consumer obsession, impactful action, new thinking and technology, contextual intelligence and brand ambassadorship.

Developing Commercial Acumen:

Participants also needed stronger commercial acumen, cross-functional understanding and the agility to navigate a rapidly changing environment. The key strategic gaps that were identified within the organisation included:

- Simplifying processes and strengthening operational fundamentals before scaling digital solutions
- Moving from linear planning towards agile experimentation and piloting
- Transitioning teams from manual workflows towards AI-enabled systems
- Aligning leadership behaviour with the Tiger Brands Leadership Compass
- Creating sustainable organisational transformation through self-transformation

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The Double Helix

Therefore, the programme had to create leaders who could combine strategic and humane leadership: a "double helix" connecting business performance with people-centred leadership, see figure 2.

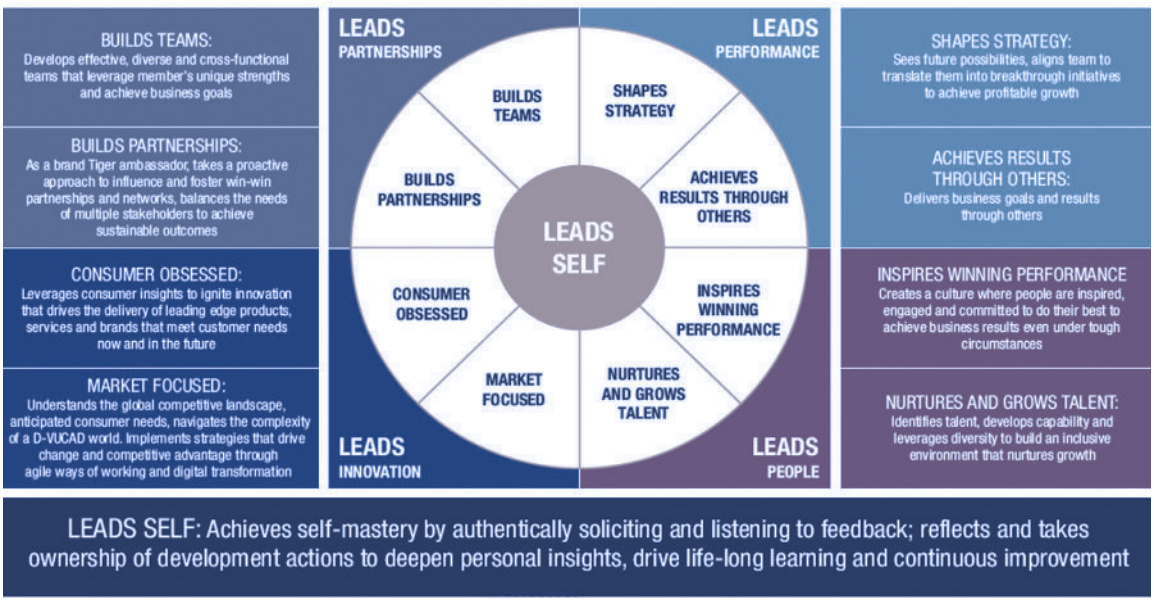

Figure 2: Tiger Brands Leadership Competencies

Committed Focus

For Re-Imagine Tiger to work, it needed commitment and focus from all parties involved.

Firstly, it received strong support from the Tiger Brands Executive Team, who were also the delegates' direct-line leaders. This ensured that the programme was closely connected to the company's strategy, culture and business priorities.

Then, GIBS Programme Designer, Manager and Integrator, Prof Jefferson Yu-Jen Chen, worked closely with Magagula to co-create a highly customised intervention rather than a generic business programme.

> "Tiger Brands was very intentional on where they wanted to go. They shared their strategy and where they wanted their leaders to be. They articulated that well to us. It makes our job easier because it enables us to design a programme that is fit for purpose and not just a tick-box exercise."
>
> **- Zintle Dube -**
> GIBS Programme Manager

GIBS ensured that the faculty combined academic expertise, practical experience and cultural relevance. In 2025, for example:

- Prof Jefferson Yu-Jen Chen brought expertise in team intelligence, digital transformation and innovation leadership.
- Dr Udo Osuigwe contributed expertise in entrepreneurship, organisational learning, critical thinking and leading change.
- Alef Meulenberg and Ashley Willemse added practical insights into innovation, agile leadership, team dynamics and high-performance decision-making.

This combination ensured that delegates received both theoretical foundations and practical tools that could be applied directly within Tiger Brands.

Finally, GIBS ensured that the core design principle, of Situation Response Effectiveness, ensured that programme content remained directly relevant to Tiger Brands' strategy and culture. Each module was evaluated through Evasys feedback, allowing GIBS to adapt delivery rapidly to participant and business needs.

Customised Education Solution to Re-Imagine Tiger

Re-Imagine Tiger was designed as a programme that evolves every two years in response to changing business and market conditions.

Built on the GIBS Education Stack and the 6Ds: Discover, Define, Design, Develop, Deliver and Demonstrate/Data, the programme used a multi-modal and experiential approach. It aimed to move leaders beyond conceptual knowledge towards contextual intelligence, learning agility and practical wisdom.

Five core learning tools supported this approach, see Figure 3:

- Academic frameworks.
- Local and international immersions.
- Leadership scenarios and simulations.
- Action learning projects.
- Peer coaching circles.

"The golden thread is the integration between the personal leadership journey, personal leadership identity, organisational impact, while building contextual intelligence through understanding the socio-economic context, the broader political context and the broader context of the African continent."

- Refilwe Ditodi -
People Experience Director

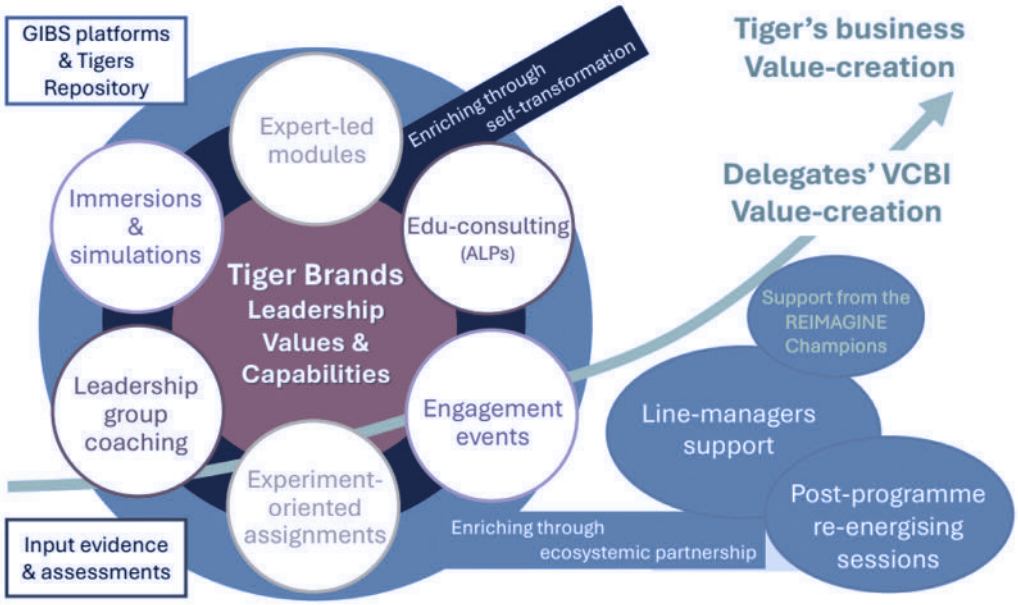

Figure 3: *Re-Imaging Tiger* multi-modal design

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The programme was deliberately dynamic. The 2023 cohort focused strongly on organisational structural change, speed and innovation, addressing concerns that Tiger Brands was ineffective in execution. The 2025 programme placed greater emphasis on technology and AI, supporting the organisation's need to close its digital gap, improve efficiency and remain competitive.

Re-Imagine Tiger was designed to be intrapreneurial, applying entrepreneurial thinking within Tiger Brands. Learning followed four stages:

- **Concrete Experience:** immersions, simulations and field exposure.
- **Reflective Observation:** journaling, coaching and peer dialogue.
- **Abstract Conceptualisation:** converting insights into transferable principles.
- **Active Experimentation:** applying learning within the business.

Refilwe Ditodi, People Experience Director, summed up the programme, "The golden thread is the integration between the personal leadership journey, personal leadership identity, organisational impact, while building contextual intelligence through understanding the socio-economic context, the broader political context and the broader context of the African continent."

> **"Changing a large organisation's operating model is significant and shows profound impact. Not only did the ALP talk about how to regroup them, but also how to change to make sure there is low resistance to the change."**

Tangible Impact on All Key Metrics

The 2025 Re-Imagine Leadership Development Programme was evaluated through a multi-dimensional data framework combining:

- Quantitative data from GIBS Evasys satisfaction surveys.
- Qualitative insights from facilitators and programme integrators.
- Diagnostic assessments of digital and AI maturity.
- Evidence generated through action learning projects.

"The Chief Manufacturing Officer had a big debate, argument, about empathy in my class. Now he is using empathy as one of the tools that empower his leadership." This displays that those types of leadership mindset shifts and stretching the mind have occurred."

- Jeff Chen -
GIBS Programme Director

The impact was felt across all desired programme outcomes:

- **Leadership pipeline** with three delegates promoted to the c-suite and others to more senior and expanded roles.
- **Action learning** projects bringing innovative solutions and significant return on investment through cost and time savings.
- **Increased commercial acumen** and agility as a capability, with AI-first operating models being enabled.
- **Enabling innovation**, facilitating the movement from linear planning to agile experimentation of growth opportunities.

- **Identifying new growth opportunities** within a competitive South African and African market.
- **Profound cultural shift** amongst delegates including greater empathy, innovation thinking, increased purpose, and cultural resilience.
- **Personal growth** stories showed an improvement in individual performance and leadership styles, leading to greater efficiencies and greater team engagement.

Success – Cultural and Leadership Transformation Being Achieved

Overall, Re-Imagine Tiger represents a sustained approach to cultural and leadership transformation. By aligning leadership development directly with strategy, culture, technology and business priorities, Tiger Brands and GIBS created a programme designed to build leaders capable of delivering results while shaping the organisation's future. The impact of the programme shows that it is achieving its desired results.

"One of the key changes I made in terms of my leadership style was to define what the framework is that we operate under, how to communicate, a structured approach of engagement, and then empower the teams with accountability to start delivering against that. That has driven results and engagement."

- Kobus Fourie -
Operations Director: Grains