

Leading through disruption

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Leadership trends are changing as fast as the environment in which these managers operate. In this interview, Emeka Okeke, founder, group chief executive officer of Media Fuse Dentsu Aegis Network, Nigeria, and director of Dentsu Aegis Ghana Group, shares his approach to change.



Okeke is responsible for the development of [Dentsu Aegis Network's](#) global and local service brands in Nigeria. His 27-year experience spans print, full-service creative and media agencies, and he is a pioneer in the development of professional media planning and communications practice in Nigeria and Ghana.

Q: Everyone approaches change management in a different way. What is your strategy?

Emeka Okeke (EO): Change is constant in the world of business. Every day, we deal with evolving and dynamic consumer preferences, more demanding clients and new competitors. As a result, change management has become a critical strategic capability.

I manage change by doing the following:

- Clearly defining the change and aligning it with business goals
- Determining the impact and who will be directly affected
- Identifying skill gaps and training accordingly
- Developing an engagement strategy
- Implementing a support structure
- Measuring success and identifying areas of improvement

Q: What is the biggest challenge you think you will face in 2020?

EO: Maintaining the present growth trajectory in a depressed economy – which is dogged by low purchasing power, government-policy inconsistencies and declining consumer confidence – is the biggest challenge I foresee in 2020.

Q: How important is it going to be to create new business models because of disruptive technologies?

EO: Technology cannot remain the only source of competitive advantage. Human needs and challenges should determine the role technology plays. While platforms like artificial intelligence (AI), 5G, mobility and the internet of things (IoT) will

become more intrusive, our challenge as marketers is to differentiate our business offering via an innovative and client-centric business model. Unique business models are the engine that fuels growth in most service industries such as marketing communications.

Q: What is the secret to thriving in the present, preparing for the future and capitalising on opportunities in the present?

EO: I believe we can stay ahead of the competition by spending more time on what the existing and prospective client problems are and by putting in place integrated solutions to address them. I am a proponent of updating business continuity practice and controls while staying nimble and agile to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the marketplace.

Q: How do you manage your energy – not just physical energy, but also the emotional fortitude and passion for what you are doing?

EO: I live an active lifestyle with a healthy appetite for growth and continuous improvement. I exercise frequently and participate in competitive sporting activities like cycling. This helps me stay fit, sharp and alert. This competitive attribute also helps in my professional life, as I enjoy the rush of competition, which is inextricably part of the business of media and advertising.

Q: Finding and retaining talent is a key consideration for many managers, business owners and company executives. What is your philosophy on hiring staff that will support you and your organisation?

EO: Talent is a key success factor for our business; hence we spend time recruiting, training, mentoring and grooming our workforce. It's also important to keep high performers involved, give them visibility, provide them with mentors, make them responsible, provide a clear path for growth and advancement, and reward them appropriately. Thus, in an industry with very high employee turnover, we have very low turnover rates.

Q: How do global challenges like climate change factor into your overarching business strategy?

EO: The adverse effects of climate change in Nigeria are already evident in the different key sectors of the economy, including agriculture, water resources, health, energy and transportation (pollution), among others. These have a net negative effect on the economy and pose a threat to business continuity. As a business, we have developed different agile subprocesses to help mitigate these negative effects, both internally (staff) and externally (client).

Some of these processes include:

- Improved health insurance schemes for staff
- Reduction/elimination of excess transport and commute occasions through the installation of state-of-the-art remote meeting technology
- Ensure a best-in-class business continuity model to ensure little or zero downtime/disruption in running client businesses in the event of a natural disaster
- Professional indemnity insurance for our services protecting against unintended professional liability, which also protects our clients

Q: How does your company's future look?

EO: We have registered moderate relative growth since the birth of our network in Nigeria. I believe we are at the threshold of history by future-proofing our business through strengthening our processes for sustainable trust and confidence by our stakeholders – staff, clients, government, regulatory authorities, the Nigerian public and shareholders. Nigeria remains a strong and resilient economy despite the present challenges. We are positive about our mid- to long-term prospects in the market, hence we approach our future with a sense of optimism.

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