

# Business

# Sky is not the limit

For Richard Malikongwa, IDM regional director

A hardworking leader with a long-standing history in Human Resources, Richard Malikongwa has done an impeccable job of raising the IDM flag high; turning the brand into a household name. Having gained rich past work experience from blue chip corporations, he has easily transitioned to ably lead in the education provision space. He chats with **STAFF WRITER VICTORIA MARUMO.**

**YOU ARE THE LEADER OF AN institution that is a brainchild of the Governments of Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini, take us through IDM establishment.**

**MALIKONGWA:** IDM was conceived to meet the developmental needs of the citizens of the governments then as the three countries had just attained independence and needed to sharpen their work of skills. The institute has developed over a period of time from focusing on short-term needs to long terms service and also to accommodate the private sector.

**What do you mean when you say Short term and long-term needs, break it down to better define what the institute is about?**

**MALIKONGWA:** IDM is a development institute, which means we focus on short term required skills, in the form of four or five-day courses which are meant to capacitate the civil servants but over a period of time, as an institute, we identified the gap in various fields and decided to offer long term courses extending up to even master's programme which cater for specific needs. We are not a university but rather an institution that simply offers programmes in sync with these specific needs.

**One of IDM's strengths as a brand is its regionality; take us through this tripartite arrangement and how it has built the three Governments and their nations.**

**MALIKONGWA:** IDM is the only

institution that still ties the three countries that is Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini to one common agenda and we are able to share resources amongst the three institutions to the benefit of one another. It is interesting to note that we were even able to graduate our students under one roof through a joint ceremony. We are able to draw skills from one another as a tripartite and are now able to go beyond and collaborate with other countries beyond the tripartite; to share our experiences to the other territories and exchange knowledge.

**This year marks the end of IDM's 5-year strategy which was formulated In 2016, coinciding with your on-boarding as the Regional Director. Pleas reflect on this journey.**

**MALIKONGWA:** Well, IDM strategy was a rollercoaster for us; it's a strategy that took us from where we were then to where we are now. We crafted it around the time I assumed duty, to tackle various issues within the institution. We first had to look at our brand and its regionality, to say what else do we need to do to be more appealing as an institution. We had to bring in resources, we had to attract skills, more so, we had to ensure that we can manage ourselves as an institution to adjust to change and evolve accordingly. We also needed to define our culture, look into our performance as well as put in place interventions to capacitate our staff. This further involved



looking into our policies to see if they were fitting with the courses we have in place, a revamp of our internal processes and infrastructure optimisation, and also had a re-look at our image to see if it was suitable for our stakeholders, our students and our brand.

IDM is home to students of different backgrounds on an economic level and culturally. Some come in fresh from high school, others are working; a good number of them are long distance learners and so the strategy was designed to embrace all of our students. We have put in place block lessons during weekends and also enhanced our E-learning system for our students such that they are able to study flexible hours that fit into their schedules. We have our key stakeholders whom we had to take into consideration to make sure they are also satisfied with IDM as a brand. IDM has gone the extra mile to even conduct surveys to check brand affinity and also find out preferred options of learning, together with collaborations and consultations through the tripartite and beyond to ensure we continue to offer value to our clientele. It has been a really exciting journey with engagement as far as the United Kingdom and United States of America; we have collaborated with various institutions in the Free State in South Africa and have even engaged with Galilee Institution in Israel and a lot more entities which we will share in the near future. We have had our fair share of problems; although we managed to move from a point of financial deficit to surplus, there are other areas that we are working on, for instance, our infrastructure could do with more work. We are not where we want to be but nonetheless, but we are still able to deliver our services. We also face challenges in some of our faculties as well as the Covid

pandemic infringing badly on our service delivery. However, these are problems to which we have and are still coming up with solutions to.

**Delving a bit more into the institution's balanced score card since 2016, please highlight some of your greatest moments and achievements.**

**MALIKONGWA:** We have achieved a lot in the last five years, especially because we have been able to attract talent to IDM from Botswana and beyond the borders even in the diaspora. Again, we have managed to respond to the needs and requests of civil servants and provide programmes such as project management which is pivotal in-service delivery. In Eswatini and Lesotho we were able to craft and introduce a Regional Health Safety programme which led to us collaborating with entities in South Africa that offer the programme. Even in Botswana, there has been extensive research to find out what the needs are and respond to them accordingly, covering different spheres of government as well as catering for Non-Governmental Organisations and the private sector. We have gone the extra mile of responding to needs even in the tourism sector and managed to launch our Centre for Culinary Arts which should fill in the gap in skills required in the tourism and catering industry. That's not all; we have had to set up the Centre for Local Governance in Botswana, responding to the needs of government stakeholders and members who form part and parcel of these various organisations to equip them with the relevant skills that will allow them to do their work diligently.

**Being exceptional leader known for putting people at the centre of the success of an organisation, with a history**

**as an HR professional, share your IDM experience, its people and their contribution to the organisational growth.**

**MALIKONGWA:** People have been very fantastic and working together as a team has been very fruitful. My approach in dealing with issues is to respect and value the diversity and people's opinions, blending those experiences to help craft a future for all of us at IDM. Taking the institution to higher lengths requires development of people and making sure we have the right capacity to keep running as an institution and staying relevant to our clientele. It's also about the innovation of our institution and its people, such that one feels valued and proud to be a part of the IDM family, working hand in hand towards growth and sustainability.

**What is the significance of the Centre for Local Government that you mentioned earlier?**

**MALIKONGWA:** Our tagline at IDM is 'Growing Great Minds' in whatever we do and hence forth looking at out Centre for Local Government. We realised our government requires assistance as such we created this opportunity. After engaging with the relevant people, we came to the conclusion that offering programmes specific to their needs, they would be able to take their own organisations to greater heights. The reception has been of a positive note. I can attest to this as i recently went around the country to engage with the people until Covid-19 came about. The intention was to take note of suggestions and concerns and a lot of people were keen and kept insisting we start the programme ASAP, so yes it has been going well.

**Bringing it closer to you, as the recipient of the 2020 World HRD Congress's Chief**

**Executive Officer with Human Resource Orientation award; this being an accolade that recognizes an authentic Chief executive in the Global scene, who employs the right combination of interventions to drive business performance, share with us a little what this award means to you?**

**MALIKONGWA:** I was surprised but equally elated when I found out, but I take solace in knowing that this is award is truly dedicated to colleagues that I work with, who have made IDM what is today. As much as I was recognized as an individual the award was also recognizing everyone at IDM who have played their part in shouldering the institution, decision making and everything in between; the students and the staff alike. The Patriot has also recognized me as one of the top 10 CEOs in the country and this came at a time when I felt that IDM had grown as an institution as such, this recognition is deserving to all stakeholders of the institution.

**Speaking on the growth of IDM, please share your year-on-year growths, breaking it down in terms of Revenue; Gross profit, Net Surplus, Total Assets and run us through what contributes to this growth.**

**MALIKONGWA:** Five years ago, we were in difficult financial circumstances, and experiencing heavy financial deficits but that's when we sat down and came up with the strategies I alluded to earlier to figure how we were going to come out of the situation. We were able to introduce new programmes, to consult with different stakeholders and with the strategies in place; we managed to overcome the financial hurdle. Of course, Covid-19 came and a lot of things dropped, however we have seen a significant turnaround

from a deficit of P8 million to P30 million in surplus.

**How have you been able to combat Covid-19 and stay afloat as an institution?**

**MALIKONGWA:** The pandemic really disrupted a lot for us, affecting mostly long-distance learning students, but we managed to be agile and act swiftly to save the situation. We fast tracked our E-learning platforms, had to introduce blended learning which incorporates both physical and virtual lessons, to the benefit of our diverse student body. Of course, there were challenges that came about, such as internet connectivity and general adjustments, especially for full time students transitioning to online learning but I believe we are bouncing back and doing well. We could not have done this alone and recognize the different institutions that we are in partnership with like the University of Bolton, and can say we learnt a lot from Botswana open University to the betterment of our education system and service delivery.

**What advice can you give to other institutions, from your experiences and the lessons you have learnt in your journey with IDM?**

**MALIKONGWA:** For starters, I believe all learning institutions should know that online learning is not just an option but should be an investment. Secondly, as an institution, it is important to capacitate both staff and students, more so that it is a drastic change, from traditional teaching methods to the use of online platforms. We are living in an era where change is here, we cannot shy away from it and as such, it is only fitting that we adjust accordingly to better cater for our students' needs as institutions and keep up in the fast-paced world.