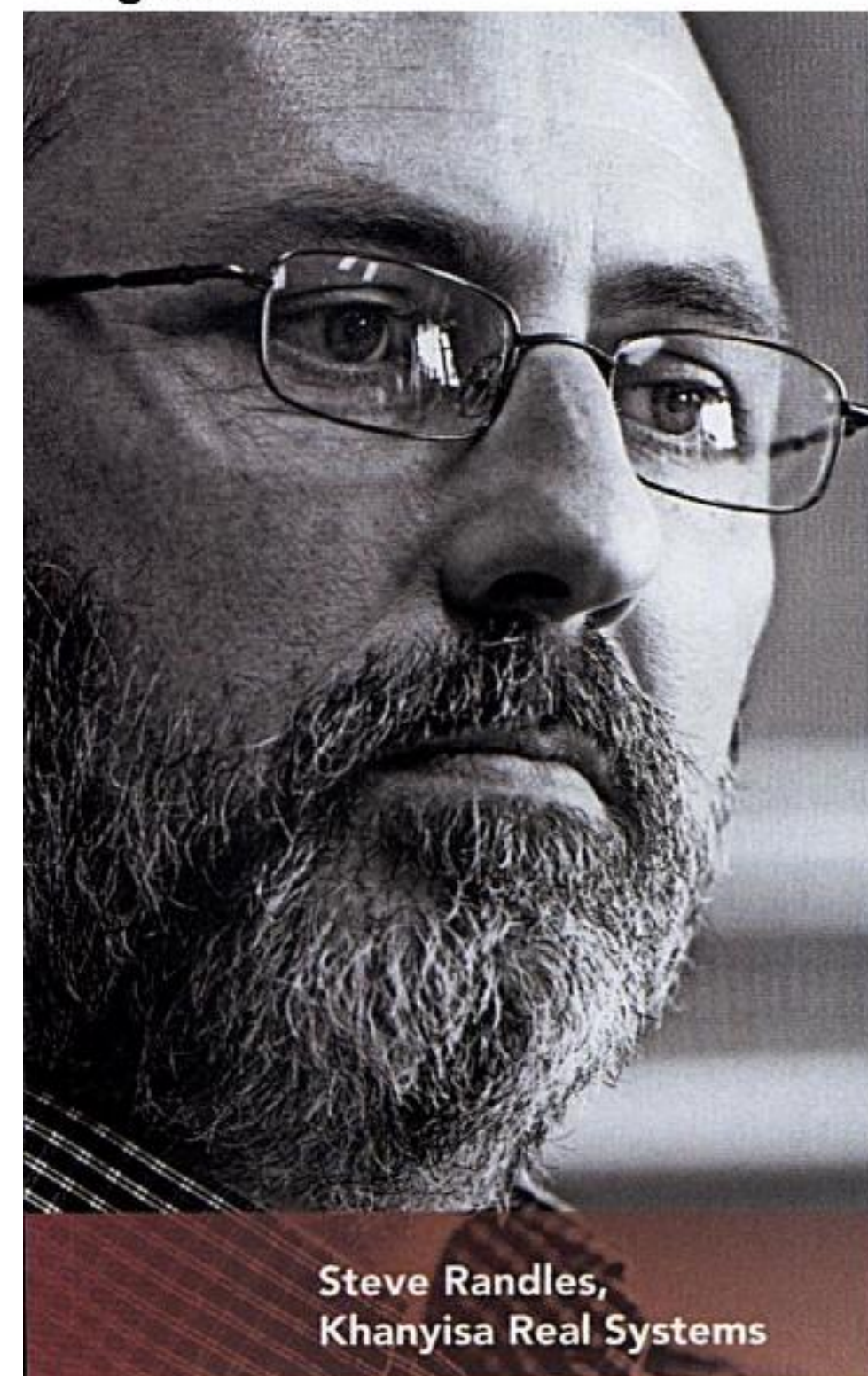


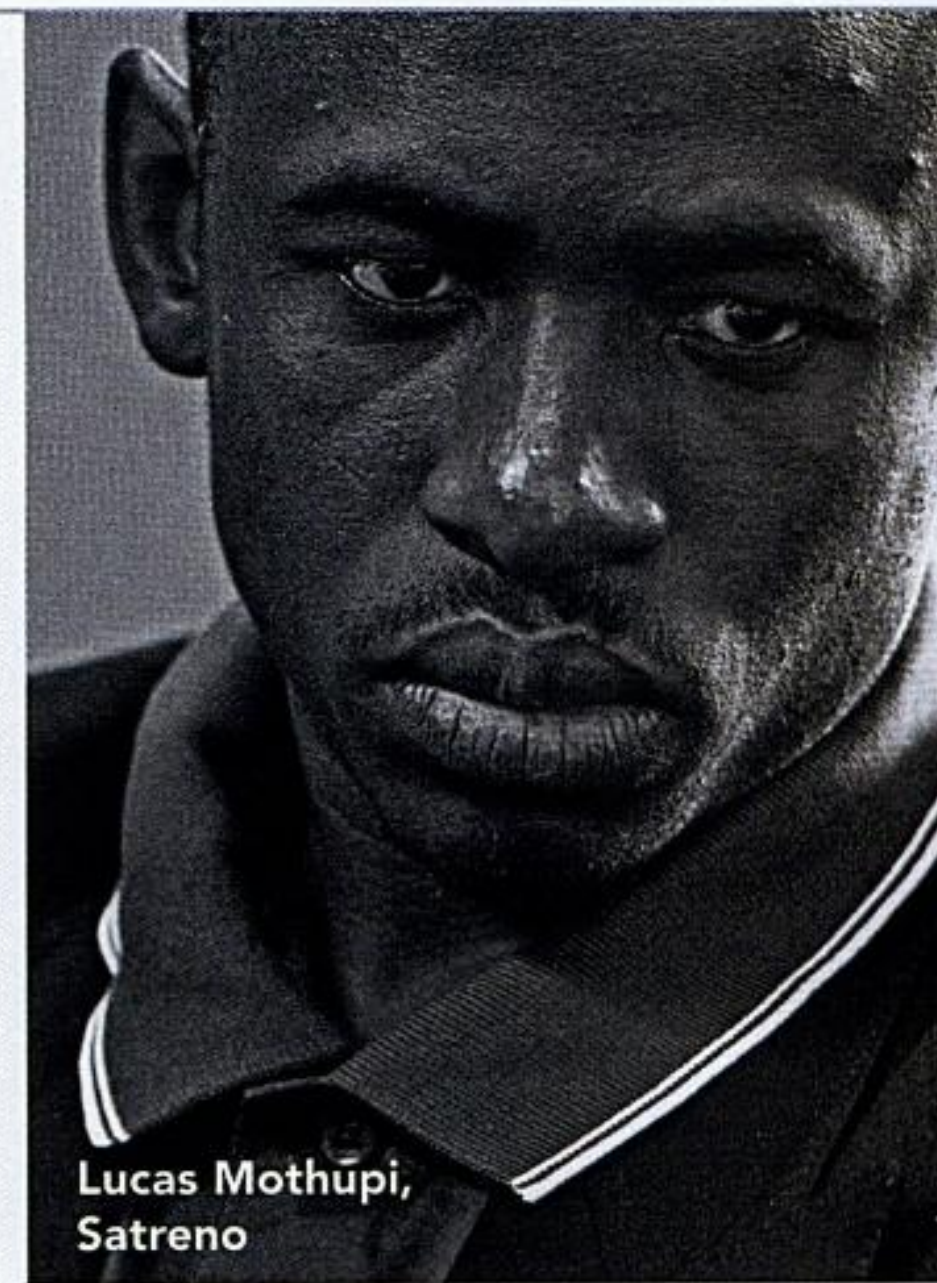
roundtable skills development



Steve Randles,
Khanyisa Real Systems



Sean Petersen,
M-IT Mthombo



Lucas Mothupi,
Satreno

► **McHugh:** Statistics from Dimension Data show the gap is from 22- to 34-year-olds. It's almost like a lost generation. DiData has tracked that it's when they are between those ages that people are most likely to emigrate.

Stephen Bracher, IQ Business Group: Pay is also a factor. A lot of young, single guys go off to work in the UK for two to three years. And the thing is, they never come back. They used to come back after earning a few pounds. Now it's rare. And when someone does come back, it's with an overseas company and they're earning dollars or pounds.

David Ives, Microsoft SA: Academia is very concerned about this. We churn out about 5 000 ICT graduates a year. Those who aren't sucked up get reskilled through some of our programmes. What a few international companies are doing is targeting the reverse situation: they're going to the UK and asking people whether they want to trade mud island for [South Africa] because you can buy security and the sun

“Cisco and Accenture are going on active recruitment programmes to get people from the UK.”

DAVID IVES, MICROSOFT

shines often. Companies like Cisco and Accenture are going on active recruitment programmes to get people from the UK.

Brainstorm: Who is investing in long-term training strategies? How bad is job-hopping?

Teryl Schroenn, Accsys: A lot of companies look at contracting people for some kind of payback for the training they've given; it's like a bursary, but an internal one. The problem is that contracts aren't worth the paper they're written on. You contract someone, train them for a period of time and they are supposed to

work for you for a year or two after that. But, unless you're prepared to spend your life in the reverse CCMA in terms of litigation, you just have to let them walk away. It's not worth the time and trouble to chase them. Our current legislation is against companies that do massive investment. Once you've hit your 60 percent, you can't get any more back anyway.

Sean Petersen, M-IT

Mthombo: We have that same problem. Because of the shortage, you spend time and effort skilling people up. Not even a month after the training, you find that the guy has another job. The company he goes to gets the benefit of your investment because they are willing to pay the money he was supposed to pay back.

Clark: We've tried to enforce that. We've got global lawyers involved to [develop] a proper contract. Once, we put trained guys into the field; within a month, three of them jumped ship and we received their resignations via SMS. The guy signed a contract to pay back R100 000 worth of training, but you can't enforce a restraint of trade.

Mothupi: The reality is that even if you invested R12 000, you will never get back [that money]. You don't get time back, for instance. If someone took six months to train, you will need to take another six months to train someone else.

McHugh: In the SAP world, particularly at the more mature clients, they will dictate they want more senior skills. If we go through a learnership programme, we will have to pay for that ourselves, especially in a professional services en-

vironment where you can't sell learners, even for admin functions. It's another angle of the problem: is it worth investing in skills that are going to sit on the bench or at a cost to us?

Petersen: It depends on the market you play in. In the telco industry, it's very small and the shortage of skills is great, so guys hop from one to another very quickly. What we need to start doing is say we've had enough. But the flip side is that those clients need skilled resources. The only ones available are already working in the industry, so it's a Catch 22 situation.

Schroenn: A lot of companies are offering sign-on and retention bonuses. That, again, makes it very hard for people who can't pay up. Companies are not going to look too deeply at restraint if they're desperate for skills. Even if you have a legal restraint, it's virtually impossible to enforce.

Haseena Parak, Staff IT: Where I am, we're getting companies offering sign-on bonuses only to get counter-offers from their current employers. So it's a vicious cycle. ►