



## THE C-SUITE

with  
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There is a funny heuristic in business, "your next quarter is often defined by how many dinners your CEO or CFO attended last week." And this really holds true in high context cultures.

One of the dilemmas of Kampala (as a city) is that we lack a business school par excellence. In the sense that our business schools have not fused with the corporate world. World over, in most business districts, the business schools are in tandem with the corporate world. In many business schools, you will find that top corporate organisations compete to sponsor facilities or even business programmes.

The corporate organisations also compete to have the business schools document and dissect their case studies. Executives from these corporate organisations often frequent the lecture halls of these business schools, and together they create a chain and sprocket mechanism that powers industry and the business ecosystem at large. But this will be a story for another day.

In 2025, there was a monumental photo moment that featured NVIDIA's CEO, Jensen Huang sharing Soju (a famous Korean drink) with the Samsung Chairman and Hyundai's Executive Chair. I considered it fit to revisit that moment, as I douse you with the social side of business.

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# The social side of business: The afterwork drink or dinner

CEO or CFO attended last week." And this really holds true in high context cultures. Most of Asia and Africa is high context culture and as such, more business tends to flow in the afterwork dinner than in the corporate boardroom.

The afterwork dinner becomes important because it is the one place where all the smokescreens are dropped and negotiations talk about what everyone really wants to talk about. In many East Asian cultures, business often starts with dinner, before the formal meeting the next day.

And future business leaders are trained in this social side of business right from business school. During my business sojourn in Makati, Philippines, it was common practice to catch a drink with a Professor at the Green Belt of Ayala Center. And while having this drink or dinner, your professor would casually bump into a CEO or CFO and introduce students to this wonderful connection. Over this same drink, boardroom stories would be dissected and a more nuanced understanding developed. It is this fusion, this social side of business that provided the structure to support future executives.

Business negotiations in East Asia will often feature a Soju toast (for Korea), a Sake (for Japan) or Baiju/Mao-tai (for China). In Japan, employees break down the hierarchical barriers with their Seniors at these drink sessions. But it also trains the Juniors

### GROWTH

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in the thin-lines of the social side of business. That one should know how to moderate their drink, and how to maintain composure or politely decline a drink offer. In most of these cultures, you never outrightly decline a drink. It is better you accept it, and take a light sip throughout the night.

The afterwork dinners also serve as the skip-level meetings. You may never get a slot on the calendar of the CEO, but you could always whisper something, aka catch their attention, over a work dinner. Better still, these dinners are the platform to read the minds of other senior executives or Industry leaders.

Over time, this social side of business in Kampala has been in decline or failed to take-off. There is a semblance to it, at the Kampala Club or the Golf Course. But most mainstream business has largely paid a deaf-ear to this. Yet, Uganda is a high context culture. The businesses more than ever need this active social side of business.

### Time for a quiet renaissance

It is high time, the corporate industry rediscovered its soul, and breathed new life into this social side of business. I suspect (some researcher ought to validate the hypothesis) that periods when there is activity with afterwork dinners and drinks have always resulted into growth for the organisations.

It could be the serendipity or the

free-flow of ideas during such moments, when everyone retreats from the concrete walls that surround most corporate offices. It is easier to think out of the box when cutting through the main course and washing it down with a Chataeu Mont-Perat.

It is also the platform for business intelligence. It is the old school Bloomberg terminal for monitoring the situation, enabling business leaders to acquire a foresight to making the right moves and decisions.

And for middle management, business dinners are how the promotions have always happened. There is more executive function to be displayed by how one handles themselves through a five-course dinner, cracks a good joke, and impresses without descending into the gutter. Nothing makes a more perfect interview for a future business leader than how they conduct themselves during a toast. In Sakazuki (Japan) or Geonbae (Korea), you don't pour your own drink, you pour someone else's drink. What better way to see a firm hand as you pour your CEO a drink without splashing it. And what better way to test one's ability to recognize boundaries even when informality has set in.

We are due for a quiet renaissance... at least for the late Kagusunda, aka Shem Ssemambo.

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