

PROFILE: Former Nestle Rising Star Set To Shake Up Unilever

ZURICH (Dow Jones)--Paul Polman, the future chief executive of Unilever Plc (UL), seems well-placed to shake up the Anglo-Dutch consumer goods giant.

Unilever Thursday disclosed a surprise change at the top, saying it has appointed Nestle S.A.'s (NESN.VX) Polman as the successor to Unilever chief executive Patrick Cescau.

Polman, aged 52, was widely considered to be a rising star when he joined Nestle as head of finance almost three years ago. He soon became a front-runner for the chief executive post but suffered a blow when the top job went to rival Paul Bulcke in April 2008. Ever since then, Polman was thought to be looking for greener pastures and seems to have found them in Unilever's job offer.

The Dutch citizen has been lauded for his professional and communication skills as well as a straightforward style. He is known to call a spade a spade: In one of the first presentations at Nestle, he admitted that Nestle needed to do a lot to improve, in a stark contrast to Nestle's line of communication.

From the day Polman took office, he looked a potential match to Nestle's powerful chairman Peter Brabeck. "He really measured up to Brabeck right from the start, which was very surprising," one analyst said after a company visit.

Despite his sharp business focus, Polman is an "extremely open, honest and likable personality," according to consultant *James Amoroso*.

During his tenure at Nestle, Polman was a driving force behind the Swiss company's new focus on share buybacks. He is also credited with speeding up changes in Nestle's product portfolio. Polman's commitment to eradicate underperforming items will serve him well at Unilever, Zuercher Kantonalbank analyst Patrik Schwendimann said.

Polman is described as a family man with a fondness of running marathons for charity purposes. He has raised funds for the Kilimanjaro Blind Trust, an organization supporting blind children in East Africa.

He is based in Geneva and may continue to live there even after joining Unilever, observers say.

Polman's professional stops have included positions at Procter & Gamble Co. (PG), where he was the head of European operations.

By Martin Gelnar, Dow Jones Newswires; +41 43 443 8042; martin.gelnar@dowjones.com
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