





A Stick in a Bundle Is Unbreakable

Building leadership skill proficiency in English-speaking Africa's Supreme Audit Institutions begins with an international partnership—and an assessment.

WHEN Nancy Guthungo, director of audit in the Office of the Auditor General, Kenya, moved into a new role and began leading a new team in late 2015, she faced many of the same challenges typical of leaders making transitions. Leaving a team she knew well, she now led a group she was unfamiliar with and had to determine their perspectives, motivations, and expectations of her as their manager.

But Guthungo recognized the importance of approaching her new role methodically instead of rushing to impose changes right away.

“When you are moved to a new department you immediately start working and moving things very fast. But this time, I stepped back and took time to think about the impact on my team of having a new person leading them. I also thought about the impact on myself of leaving a job where I was comfortable and knew I was capable.”

Guthungo attributes her approach to insights she gained as a participant in an executive leadership development and mentoring program. The program is a joint partnership between the [African Organization of English-Speaking Supreme Audit Institutions \(AFROSAI-E\)](#), and [The Swedish National Audit Office \(NAO\)](#), which serves as a strategic partner to AFROSAI-E. The program is designed to strengthen executive teams in English-speaking African Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) and help individual executives like Guthungo grow leadership proficiency.

One defining factor of the program is that Guthungo and her 23 co-participants, all of whom are senior leaders in their respective country's SAI, were selected into the program upon completion of an assessment. Including an assessment as part of the selection process not only helped to determine who was the best fit for the program but also provided data and insights that informed the program content and guided each individual executive's development.

A Need for Strength

The role of a SAI is to act independently to provide assurance that government activities are properly carried out and accounted for (the U.S. federal government equivalent is the Government Accountability Office). The regulatory, performance, information systems, and environmental audits that SAIs conduct are crucial to uncovering and preventing corruption and ensuring transparency. These are especially important priorities for developing nations seeking to build credibility in the international community. AFROSAI-E aids its member SAIs in enhancing their institutional capacity to fulfill their audit mandate mission successfully by promoting innovation, cooperation, and adherence to international auditing standards.

While the interventions AFROSAI-E and its institutional partners implemented have helped to increase audit skills in English-speaking African nations, the member SAIs recognized a need for stronger strategic and interpersonal leadership skills in the upper ranks of the SAIs.

Gorden Kandoro, senior manager, institutional strengthening and capacity building, AFROSAI-E, says that while efforts to develop managers within the SAIs have been underway since 2009 the development of executives was a critical missing link.

“To change the SAIs and lead the organization to a new level that will get the organization the results that we want—improved audit services that provide greater transparency—we need the top managers to lead their organizations to a new level. We know we have the capacity, but we need to turn that capacity into capability.”

In fact, “turning leadership from capacity to capability” was identified as one of the organization’s strategic imperatives in its five-year corporate plan spanning 2015 to 2019. The result was the launch in 2015 of a development and mentoring program that targets teams of executives.

As the program brochure explains, “The aim is to get participants from a cross section of disciplines, enabling the SAIs to create ambitious top executive teams to lead their organizations in attaining higher levels of proficiency and effectiveness.” Additionally, the program is intended to “support the establishment of professional, relevant, and competent executive teams ... to lead their organizations towards full compliance with international standards for public sector auditing.”

A document describing the program powerfully summarizes this focus on teams by invoking a Kenyan proverb: “A stick in a bundle is unbreakable.”

“Focus on Me, As a Leader”

The program targets teams of three to five participants from the same SAI who hold the rank of deputy auditor general or director. It runs about nine months and includes five workshops, with one workshop held in Sweden and rest in South Africa.

The 24 executives participating in the first year of the program hail from Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Sudan.

The program content aligns with the Institutional Capability Building Framework spelled out in AFROSAI-E’s five-year corporate plan. The framework identifies five domains across which the participants need to develop



Participants in the first year of the development and mentoring program.

capability—Independence and Legal Framework, Organization and Management, Human Resources, Audit Standards and Methodology, and Communication and Stakeholder Management. Participants develop through an action learning approach that covers the five domains through lectures, assignments, and mentoring.

“In the past we have had formal training on things like how to organize and build a SAI, and around structure and process, but not where the focus was on me, as a leader, focusing on interpersonal skills,” says Ingela Ekblom, international senior advisor, The Swedish NAO. “This was a new approach which attracted leaders to apply for this program.”

One of the program’s most important features is the opportunity for participants to develop their skills by working on a strategic project. They also get to draw on knowledge, expertise, and best practices from the international audit community, as each team is provided with a highly qualified mentor with recognized leadership skills. These mentors include auditors general or deputy auditors general from the Netherlands, Estonia, Lithuania, and Sweden.

The Swedish NAO not only partnered on the program design, but also is taking the lead in delivering the content together with a South African consultancy group specializing in emotional intelligence. The Swedish NAO has worked closely with AFROSAI-E for a decade, as part

of a 20-year initiative to support development work in other countries.

“We have been their closest partner when it comes to human resources and communication,” says Eklblom, pointing out that The Swedish NAO is well-positioned to help AFROSAI-E, given its international reputation as one of the pioneers in performance auditing and its long-term experience and willingness to support other countries.

Impartially Evaluating Candidates

Each SAI could nominate up to eight executives at the deputy auditor general level or equivalent. A maximum of five executives from each SAI are admitted to each program cohort. Those nominated needed to be at least six years away from retirement, as the program is intended to make an immediate impact on the leadership capability within each SAI (as opposed to addressing the leadership capability of the next generation of executives).

To be selected for the program, each executive had to write a letter of application, complete a self-assessment, and also have his or her country’s auditor general (their supervisor), assess the executive’s skills and ability. While the multifaceted process provided a significant amount of data on each executive, Eklblom says much of it “was maybe a bit on the positive side.” What was needed was a way to impartially evaluate each executive. DDI’s *Manager Ready*® assessment proved to be the right tool.

Manager Ready® is a half-day assessment that provides opportunities to observe participants in real-world situations. The online assessment consists of a series of managerial tasks, such as coaching a direct report on handling a new project or asking people questions to uncover a problem. The participants’ performance in the assessment provides data on their strengths and development needs relative to nine competencies: Coaching for Success, Coaching for Improvement, Managing Relationships, Guiding Interactions, Problem Analysis, Judgment, Delegation & Empowerment, Gaining Commitment, and Planning & Organizing. The data is evaluated by a DDI assessor and the results are provided in detailed feedback reports within days. A DDI assessor also conducts a follow-up discussion with the individual to explain the results and answer questions.

The competencies measured by *Manager Ready*® are typically those needed for success in a frontline leadership role. While many of the program participants had benefited from past training aimed at developing their proficiency in auditing procedures and processes, for many this was the first time they had taken part in a program that developed their own proficiency as leaders.

Eklblom also points out that the *Manager Ready* assessment proved valuable because it provided an efficient and uniform way to assess people in different countries.

AFROSAI-E and The Swedish NAO used the assessment results to help select the program participants. The *Manager Ready* assessment data also served as an individual and team baseline and provided a scorecard for enhancement of management/leadership skills. Among the group strengths the assessment identified were delegation and empowerment, problem/opportunity analysis, and judgment. It also identified development opportunities in the areas of managing relationships, influencing, and coaching for success.

“Through the assessment we identified the gaps and the program responded to those gaps.”

Sibongile Lubambo, an executive in the Auditor General of South Africa and a participant in the program, was impressed with how the *Manager Ready* results helped inform the program content. “It’s tailor-made from the assessment that we did initially,” she says. “Through the assessment we identified the gaps and the program responded to those gaps.”

A “Very Valuable” Program

Nancy Guthungo’s positive view of the program is echoed by others, who have benefited from both the greater self-awareness and insights provided by the assessment and the leadership skills gained through the development and mentoring program.

Abdalla Hamid, deputy auditor general, Sudan, says the program has been especially valuable to his development.

“The program was extremely useful as it afforded me the opportunity to critically look into my own behaviors as a leader and at the way I interact with my peers, subordinates, and superiors. It gave me valuable insight and guidance as to how I can adjust my behavior to become more effective.”

Tamba Momoh, deputy auditor general for Audit Service Sierra Leone, says that he and the two colleagues from his country’s SAI who have gone through the program together have benefited from the program’s focus on managing others.

“We have learned how to adapt to the situations we are managing. Also, there’s been a focus on developing emotional intelligence, which really helps in staff management.”

“Most of the topics that have been covered have been things that we needed,” says Sibongile Lubambo. “I’ve been in my role for three years and I’ve been doing okay, but there were leadership areas where I needed to develop, in terms of people management and finding a more effective way to get people to deliver results at the right quality and more efficiently.

“It’s not just a generic program for SAIs. It’s things that you need to know as a leader.”

To learn more about *Manager Ready*®, visit www.ddiworld.com/products/manager-ready.



HOW TO: Attain Buy-in for Development

The development and mentoring program that AFROSAI-E and The Swedish NAO launched for executives in English-speaking African SAIs required a major time commitment for participants, as they had to be away from their jobs for a significant amount of time during the program’s duration.

“There is a lot of time in the program,” says Ingela Ekblom. “The first session was 10 days, and the others are five days. For those at the very, very top of their organizations, that’s a long time to be away from the office.”

To attain the buy-in and support of the executives and their SAIs, AFROSAI-E and The Swedish NAO recognized that the program needed to be seen as an exclusive development opportunity that wouldn’t be available to all.

Using *Manager Ready*® as part of the selection process underscored the program’s exclusivity. Fifty-eight executives applied and went through the *Manager Ready* assessment, but fewer than half—24 executives—were accepted into the program.

“Because of the time involved, at first people were reluctant and then they think, ‘Wow, due to assessment I can say that I got into this program through a very hard qualifying process,’” says Ekblom. “I think that was really something for all of us.”