Standard Bank

Henley Business School

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Authentic African leadership requires ‘more than a programme’

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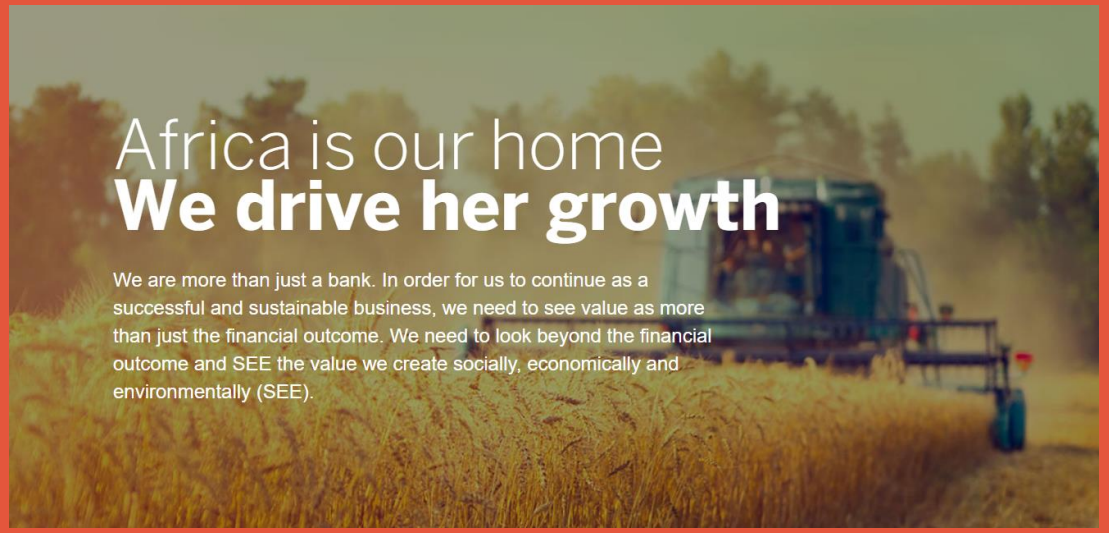
3 675 words

# Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

As a financial services institution rooted in Africa, but boasting an increasingly global footprint and clientele, South Africa's Standard Bank faced the same digital and skills disruptions as its peers. Furthermore the financial institution had to confront the challenges of operating in Africa, where historical issues of poverty, inequality and distrust demanded particularly responsive, creative and empathetic leaders. Leaders who took the bank's 'more than a bank' proposition to heart and who appreciated that operating in the complex African context had potential impacts on society, the economy and the environment.

With an extensive Pan-African footprint across 20 diverse African countries, including South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique, Africa's largest banking group by assets encouraged its leaders to look beyond business as usual, to operating mindfully about the choices the bank made as well as the human connections which underpinned its relationships.

'More than a bank' was an ongoing provocation to all employees to think mindfully about their actions and their purpose. It was an all-encompassing vision that needed to come through strongly in the design and focus of the bank's senior leadership development programmes, for which critical personal mastery and community mindedness were as important as business impact.

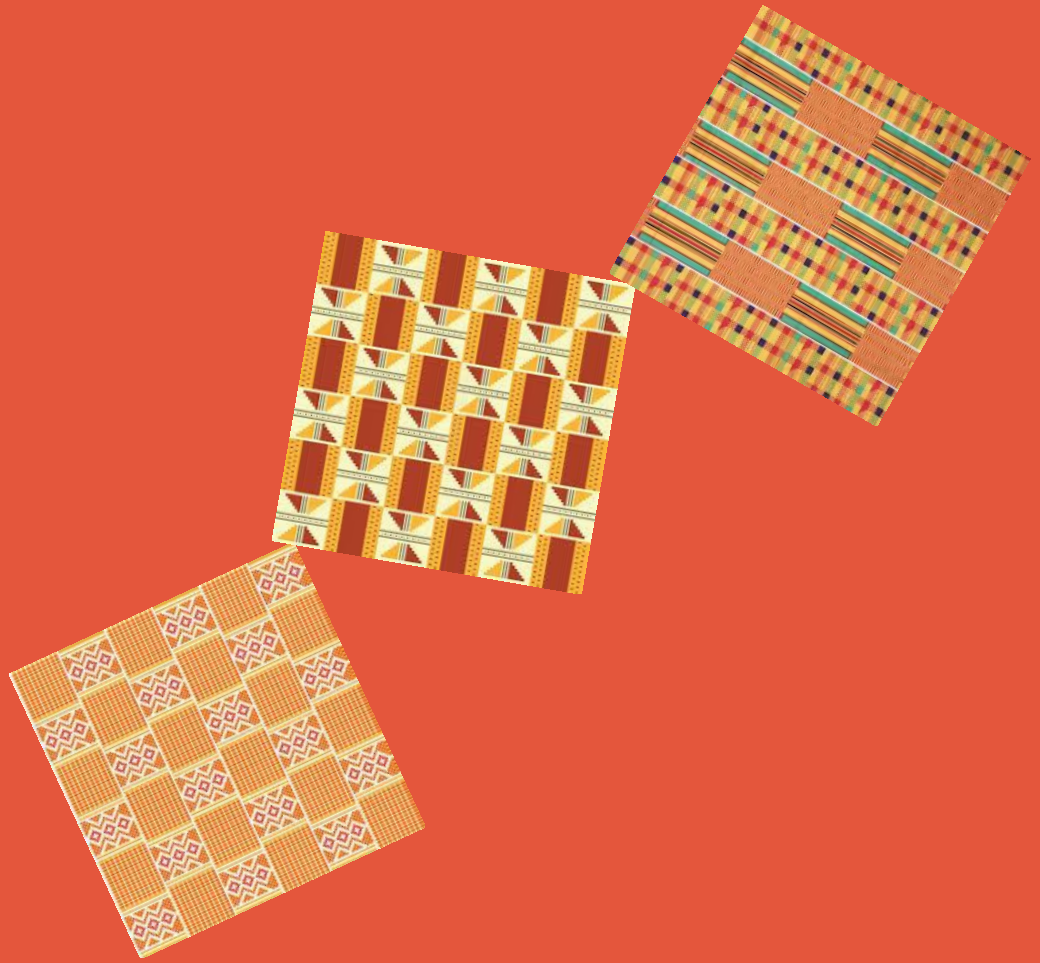
Not only did the approach have to be radically different from previous programmes run by Standard Bank's Leadership Centre of Excellence, how it was crafted and executed needed to stand apart from the run-of-the-mill leadership development intervention. To achieve this, Standard Bank approached two South African business schools with a proposal that they collaborate to create and run the programme together.

The Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) was a home-grown South African institution affiliated with the University of Pretoria and with a reputation for excellence in general management education. The Johannesburg campus of Europe's oldest business school, Henley Business School, was renowned for its creative and design-thinking perspective. Both had worked with Standard Bank on previous projects. Both understood the particular needs of the bank. Both were up for the challenge of stretching themselves, finding ways to collaborate with a close competitor and were driven by the goal of creating an effective solution for their shared client.

While most senior leadership programmes take place over six to nine months, Standard Bank, GIBS and Henley co-created a new brand of leadership and development programme. One which ran over three months, comprising three short study blocks with two weeks in between during which delegates were challenged to maintain the momentum.

#unTAP, as the programme was eventually dubbed, spoke to tapping into each leader's innate potential by using fresh and innovative methods. The programme has been running since 2017.

# Introduction



# Introduction

Since 2017 the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and Henley Business School have run the #unTAP strategic leadership programme for Standard Bank's Leadership Centre of Excellence. The programme aimed to instill a new confidence in the bank's high-potential senior leaders from across the African continent.

It was essential that the intervention tap into Standard Bank's 'more than a bank' internal proposition, which spoke to the mindfulness required in the African context and how each move had the potential to impact society, the economy and the environment. As Africa's largest banking group by assets, with a market capitalisation of approximately US$23 billion, Standard Bank has an extensive Pan-African footprint across 20 African countries, including South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique; diverse countries and communities which are underpinned by one thing: human connections.

'More than a bank' was an ongoing provocation to all employees to think mindfully about their actions and their purpose. It was an all-encompassing vision that had to come through strongly in the design and focus of the bank's senior leadership development programme. This called for the creation of 'more than a programme', one which looked beyond business impact and extended to critical personal mastery and community impacts.

For Shayne Weideman, Head of Leadership Effectiveness for Standard Bank Group, the programme had to help leaders explore what it meant to be 'more than a bank' by guiding them to find the personal, work-orientated and community embodiment of this spirit.

Not only did the approach have to be radically different from previous programmes run by Standard Bank's Leadership Centre of Excellence, how it was crafted and executed had to stand apart from the run-of-the-mill leadership development interventions. By its very nature, focus and intent, the programme had to be globally aligned yet still highly relevant to a Pan-African market.

The best way to meet these diverse and challenging requirements was to design a programme with passion and purpose intricately woven into its DNA, where key principles were infused at every touchpoint to create the alchemy needed for differentiation and exponential impact.

# The Challenge

Kashmeera Makan Patel (Head, Human Resources Private Clients and PBBI) & Shayne Weideman (Head Leadership Effectiveness, Standard Bank) at programme opt-in session.

Watch a video of our client outlining their business challenge:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dua_EEjyxadD3R4_vWS_1VlEI_njG7vE/view?ts=5e6f43b9

## In our client's words

In 2016 Standard Bank was faced with a challenge of how to grow and develop high-potential leaders from across Africa and all the areas of the bank, from business banking to retail and corporate and investment banking.

The leadership requirements of executives operating in an African context straddled the general management skills in demand around the world, as well as tapping into the global drive for innovative and creative leadership. In addition, a host of Africa-specific and emerging market realities had to be considered.

Through its Leadership Centre of Excellence, Standard Bank sought to equip its leaders with the skills required to navigate not only a global world, but also the specific dynamics of operating in an African context. The latter required a less formulaic approach to business, the ability to spot opportunities, to engage with diverse stakeholders across society, to incorporate creativity into strategic decision making and to remain, at all times, agile.

The problem, as the bank saw it, was that its people were exposed to a myriad leadership development programmes in the past, many of which lacked the dynamism and freshness required to reach this new breed of leaders. The bank wanted to boost confidence and guide delegates to embrace new ideas and approaches; this meant that everything about the new programme had to look different and be different. This extended to giving delegates the option to opt in or out of the programme, ensuring that participation was based on free will.

With delegates coming from as far-afield as Ghana, Nigeria and Mozambique, the programme had to ensure a Pan-African appeal. At the same time, it was important to help delegates find their unique and authentic self and corresponding leadership style within the bank's overarching ethos.

## Of Africa, for Africa

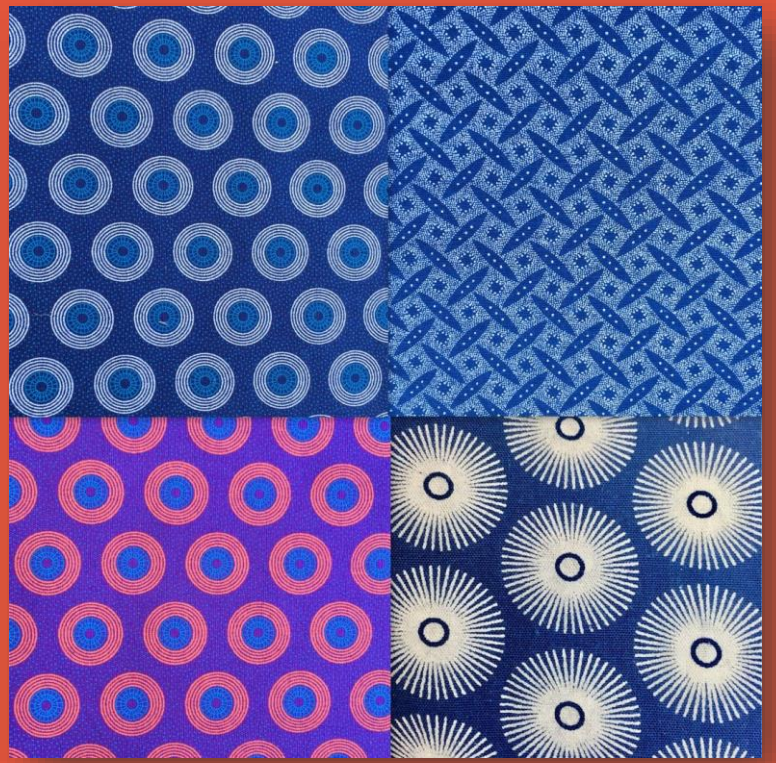
Embedded in Africa, the programme was underpinned by a deeply experiential and personal journey infused with innovative experiences.

A formulaic, homogenous approach which presupposed that all delegates spoke the same language and had the same shared life experience was not possible. Instead, the programme had to build on the shared humanity of the leaders on the programme, their experience within Standard Bank and the importance of embedding a customer-centric approach. The programme had to explore both personal passion and purpose as well as their alignment to organisation goals, bringing these to life through a robust and creative design-thinking process that equipped delegates with the tools to access higher-order thinking and creatively solve problems – critical skills required for the workplace of the future.

Individual growth and team support were critical success factors and rituals which ran through the programme from its co-creation design to its collaborative execution.

Puleng Makhoalibe, Faculty

# The Commitment



## A co-creation partnership

The notion of working with two competing business schools on a single leadership development project was certainly a novel approach, but Standard Bank was adamant that two competitors should work directly together to co-design and co-deliver the initiative.

The bank's rationale was to harness the best that both schools had to offer in terms of diversity: GIBS from a general management and a solid business perspective and Henley from a creativity and design-thinking perspective. The process of pooling talent and input from both schools was guided by Linda Buckley, Director of Executive Education at Henley Business School, and Gillian Cross, Head of Learning Innovation at GIBS. Prior to joining GIBS, Cross headed up learning design at Henley, and was able to play a pivotal bridging role.

Fortunately, both GIBS and Henley were both known quantities for the bank. Having worked on previous projects they understood the bank's needs, business challenges and touch points.

While this level of collaboration was highly unusual from a business school perspective, both schools recognised that this was very much the future of higher-education collaboration, as clients sought meaningful solutions from trusted partners. As Buckley said: "The bank provided competitor schools the chance to rise above insular practices and focus their collective expertise on a country and continent ripe with leadership potential."

For the business schools, the process involved sharing faculty, approaches and design as they worked together to co-create an impactful programme capable of synthesising both schools' understanding of the bank's reality.

Co-operation and co-creation underpinned the programme from the start, with Standard Bank taking part in the early design stage, after which the combined team created a meaningful plan of action.

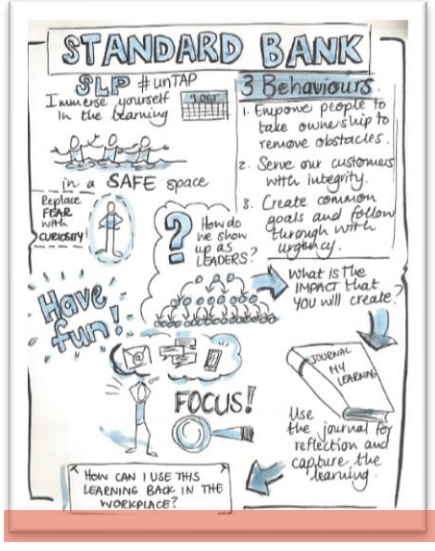
Design Sprint: 11 designers | 2 business schools | 1 client

## A co-creation partnership

Eleven designers from GIBS and Henley were co-opted to take part in the design process, coming together for sprints during which they got to grips with the Standard Bank ethos and principles of leadership, business challenges, the needs of delegates, as well as to synthesise and integrate Standard Bank's learnings from previous programmes. After pulling out the Post-its to enable Standard Bank to make final changes and observations, a final design emerged and the #unTAP programme was born.

The end result was a 10-day programme requiring delegates to complete a variety of tasks, from peer coaching to undertaking a 'passion project', reflecting on learnings using visual thinking tools and techniques, interacting with horses and plotting a self-development journey.

"In exactly the way we designed the 10-day programme, to how we visualised learnings being implemented in the business, we deployed agile methods such as three to four sprints per class, then sprints to implement in the business over two to three weeks, and then back into class again," explained Cross. "This accelerated the embedding of learning and kept up momentum and accountability."




The delivery model was relatively simple with GIBS programme managing one deliverable and then Henley the next, using joint reporting and governance structures. The bank enjoyed a single point of communication and all reports and feedback were delivered in one voice.

At all times the two faculty would debrief about how each aspect of the programme was received, what learnings were emerging and how delegates had responded to the content; thereby extending the natural work teams to embrace colleagues from another institution.

# The Initiative

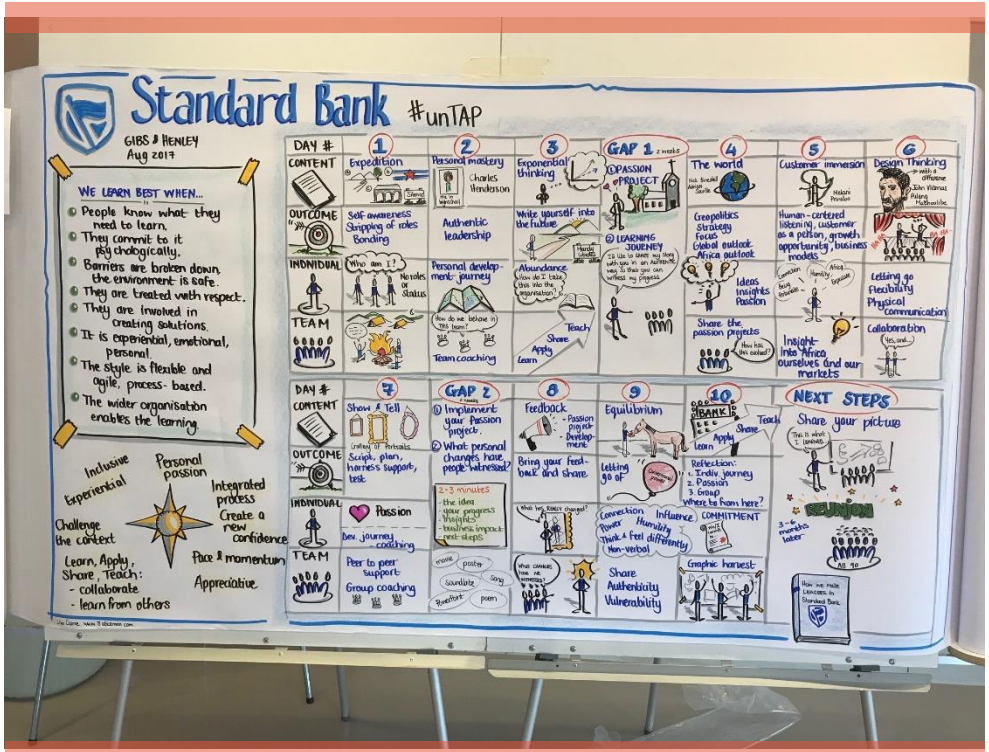
## Designing the #unTAP programme

The aim of the programme was to foster a new level of confidence in the delegates, making inclusivity an essential component. To achieve this the designers' credo became: "We can't talk at them, we have to talk with them." This self-organised and motivated approach was seen as vitally important to bringing pace, spirit and momentum to the process, in order to build an appreciation of what is possible.

Out went the spoon-fed approach to learning and instead Standard Bank's decision to offer an opt-in programme laid the foundation for a proactive, self-motivated, inclusive and invested learning intervention.

#unTAP served as a thinking partner for delegates, asking participants to ponder questions such as:

- Who am I, really?
- What really matters to me?
- What does Standard Bank stand for in a world in transition?
- What contribution do I want to make?
- How can I achieve these goals?
- How do I find congruence and expression for my goals at the bank?
- How does the bank need to evolve to ensure it remains an attractive option for leaders like me?




The final programme design, graphically harvested and used "as-is" as the programme schedule

## Designing the #unTAP programme

To achieve the degree of personal mastery and development required of the programme, it was essential that #unTAP took delegates out of the classroom, exposed them to unusual experiences through unconventional means and forced them to think. The focus was very much on the individual, on their passion and purpose, their humanity and in shifting mindsets through self-awareness. Therefore no assessments were incorporated, adding to the sense of freedom evident across the programme's design.

This intensive focus on creating heightened self-awareness in the delegates would, as hypothesised, introduce them to design-thinking principles in a practical and unique way. Immersions such as the 'army to ashram' experience, Equilibrium's working with horses, authentic storytelling and the Johannesburg (Jozi) inner-city immersion challenged delegates physically, emotionally and creatively, while the 'passion projects' gave delegates full rein to express themselves.

### Army to Ashram

The tone for the programme was set on day one when delegates experienced the contrast of an 'army to ashram'. They were taken to Pelindaba, South Africa's nuclear research centre approximately 90km (55 miles) north of Johannesburg. For half a day they trained and interacted with an elite special operations unit, the South African Special Forces Brigade, then spent the remainder of the day practising mindfulness and meditation.

The 'army to ashram' experience was designed to help individuals step out of their banking roles, to focus on the team and themselves, and drop the pretence. In contrast, donning white robes and meditating in the afternoon was highly inward focused and deeply personal, enabling delegates to better connect with their authentic selves. Delegates stayed over at the base where an evening fire-side chat focused on letting go and embracing the new.

Army to Ashram immersion (a day and overnight stay at Pelindaba)

## Designing the #unTAP programme

**The power of 'passion projects'**

Migrating entirely away from traditional business projects and focusing instead on passion projects was a radical departure by the bank and an effective way of connecting how individuals' purposes were aligned with the 'more than a bank' purpose.

The designers interrogated this aspect of the project with Standard Bank, asking how the institution would feel if someone's passion was not financial services and was in no way business related? Would the bank still support it? Their answer was an unequivocal yes. Fundamentally, the bank recognised that effective and happy leaders had lives outside work and beyond business.

This freedom to decide on their own passion project extended to how delegates chose to work on their project, either individually or in teams. Over the years, projects ranged from co-creating the bank of the future, to envisaging and planning corporate social responsibility interventions to upskilling colleagues, to an incubator directed at helping small and medium-sized businesses to gain funding and access to markets. The latter, a Ghana-based initiative and the brainchild of Patrick Quantson, was launched in 2017/2018 and continues to develop entrepreneurs in the West African country.

Notable social capital and currency was created among delegates as they pitched their passion projects to one another, employing creativity, self-reflection and design thinking. This created notable peer-to-peer and delegate-to-natural-support team linkages through the programme.

Delegates pitching passion projects to each other (iterative per study block), Africa-style

# Designing the #unTAP programme

### Storytelling

The importance of authenticity and authentic storytelling was a powerful thread through the programme, with the likes of Charles Henderson, an African American former addict-cum-Harvard and Wharton graduate, sharing his experiences on authentic storytelling and how to start exercising your unique voice. That set the stage for essential personal mastery and the development of identity beyond the workspace.

The methods used were highly experiential, so local comedians such as John Vlismas brought their unique brand of storytelling into play, as well as teaching delegates how to read a room.

### Humility

In order to build empathy and a deep understanding of client needs, the programme worked to strip down barriers by addressing critical human connections as part of an immersion into Johannesburg's city centre. In areas known as 'Little Nigeria' and 'Little Addis', delegates interacted with informal traders (hawkers), many of whom did not use the bank's products and services and had little experience of the formal banking sector. Without products and jargon to fall back on, the interactions became about people's lives, their children, their daily struggles and their ambitions.

Banking took a back seat to human connection and competition was redefined in the context of customer centricity and loyalty, where multiple stalls sold the same products side by side, yet everyone maintained a healthy revenue stream.

As one delegate observed: "Sometimes people just need to be heard, they need a voice. Not just what we think as individuals they need, but what they genuinely require. It has taught me to listen, to really listen."

Left: Storytelling using visual thinking | Right: Faculty Puleng Makhoalibe pairs up with comedian John Vlismas for creative strategy

## Designing the #unTAP programme

### Equilibrium

Another innovative immersion involved a day working with horses. Each delegate was paired with different horses during the day and was required to interact with the horses. Their style of interaction influenced the horse's reactions and willingness to collaborate. This provided deep insights into leadership style, personality attributes and influencing ability, and proved to be invaluable feedback in shaping how they would communicate and influence as leaders going forward.

This was an important lesson in non-verbal cues and other ways of communicating, such as using your body and movements, tone of voice, attitude and confidence. It was an intense day with multiple learnings about the raft of tools available to an effective leader. And it highlighted the need to listen and absorb feedback.

### Visual thinking

On the final day, delegates were asked to illustrate their personal reflections of the journey using a metaphor that resonated with them. This exercise again asked them to harness aspects of their creativity which might, in their business roles, not be called upon. The neuroscience of anchoring learning through a visual image was extremely impactful and many delegates went on to continue this process of visualization with their own teams.

"One delegate came up with an image of a pomegranate and how there were these hidden seeds and insights inside," said Cross. "There were really interesting reflections on the summation of the journey from a learner's perspective, rather than just a traditional submission on a piece of paper."

Other metaphors were equally profound – from staircases and ladders, to journeys and mountains, caterpillars to butterflies, the mind's eye being opened to new possibilities and a phoenix that found strength through the programme to rise from the ashes. Another saw a wall being broken down to let enlightenment through.

Left: Jenny Lorenzo (learning integrator) & Liezl Owen (programme manager) receive leadership lessons from horses | Right: delegate final learning reflections in pictures

# The Impact

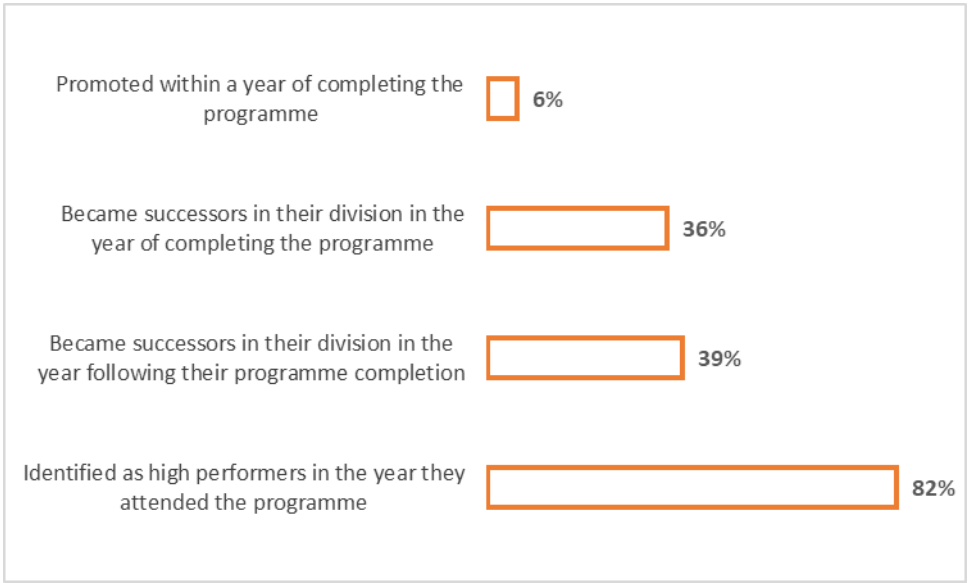
## Measuring impact

At a sentiment level, the success of this programme within Standard Bank has been highlighted by the fact that it remains the most popular and most learner-requested programme at the bank.

"Being process driven, rather than content driven was a critical choice," said Cross. "Being peer-to-peer supported also contributed, as did expanding the programme beyond work. This really tapped into a need for confidence in one's leadership abilities in all aspects of life."

Over the three years 328 high potential leaders completed the programme. Standard Bank tracked the impact via their internal systems, undertook a detailed feedback survey and conducted focused, individual interviews with the assistance of a research methodologist, which focused on determining the impact on both the business and its leaders.

**4%** of delegates from 2017's cohort won the bank's Mark of Excellence awards.
**11%** of delegates from 2018's cohort won the bank's Mark of Excellence awards.



Watch a video of delegate testimonials
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mhavkYMs0RnzeeLLC4OZ0ztA-QYE0piX/view?ts=5e6f43cd

## Impact in action

Perhaps the finest example of impact lies not in the statistics but rather in the physical manifestation of learnings from the programme. Piloted in Maputo, Mozambique between August and December 2018, the Blu Academy set out to teach powerful leadership competencies to 21 selected Standard Bank employees. The aim was to drive an innovative and entrepreneurial internal culture and, in the process, contribute to future-proofing the company and its employees. Built around group-work sessions, the programme challenged participants to develop human-centred solutions which were presented at a final pitching event to Exco.

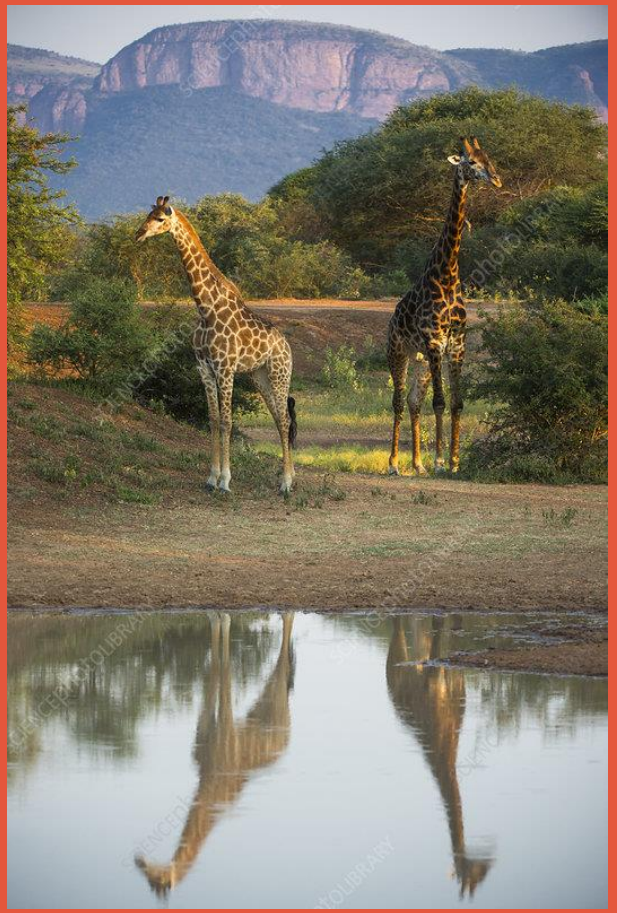
Inspired by the #unTAP passion project of Laércio Mondlane, Head of Client Experience at Standard Bank Mozambique, Blu Academy aimed to spur on creativity, tap into digital transformation, build operational excellence and develop an innovative culture. Based on the Blu Academy's final pilot report, 91% of participants found the intervention to be useful and relevant and 89% "experienced the spirit of mutual help that is necessary for a collaborative innovation culture". All participants felt their experience would positively impact others in the bank and 90% said they felt more comfortable failing, experimenting and trying again – all key competencies for learning, for continuous improvement and for spurring on innovation.

## Personal insights

While Blu Academy stands as an example of how an inspired and motivated leader can affect immediate change, other comments received as part of the #unTAP feedback process proved equally instructive:

| Expectations | Workplace impact | Personal impact | Community impact |
|---|---|---|---|
| *"The programme was designed in a way that one was forced to do retrospection and apply the learnings at each session. There wasn't another way of doing it. For the first time I dealt with things I hadn't had the time to."* | *"Anytime I remember that I did not bath because of the cold water at the camp and sleeping in a hall with others, I remember others that are not as privileged."* | *"The course was holistic and internally focused, so the consciousness which was awakened is relevant, and cuts across both my professional and personal life."* | *"As part of the passion project we embarked on a life-long journey to bridge the gap between the have and have nots in our community and this work is ongoing!"* |
| *"The programme was fantastic - I learned more about leadership and myself from this intervention than I had in 15 years of work. The structure and content were completely different to a conventional training initiative."* | *"My leadership philosophy is now affirmed solely on helping my teams become the best version of themselves; a marked departure from prior, when I focused solely on the organisation."* | *"Wow, I've got to know myself better and I realise that I am able to produce so much more if I learn how to deal with my fears and set the instinctive behaviour aside."* | *"I wanted to do a passion project that involved my community and I did. More [than] 200 people had attended and it had great impact, especially youth."* |
| *"Totally different to what I expected. Not specifically bank focused. Real life experiences that all and anyone can go though."* | *"Telling my personal story to my teams creates a level of trust which is deep. People are able to see you as a human being."* | *"Perfect match, the story telling, the meditation, the self-awareness, the coaching are tools forever."* | *"Asides from managing my emotions better and thus improving how I relate to people in my community, the insights around how we can impact our environment has also made me more responsible and aware."* |
| *"The training was nothing compared to what I first expected. The training was over the top, it was a different level of learning and not just about the work environment but focused on 'self'. It was the best training by far."* | *"It was practical, it was real, it was not sugar coated. The realness around it was there."* | *"I have a completely different perspective on life, the way I approach my challenges and the way that I engage with my family and friends."* | |

# Reflections



While the community impact of the #unTAP programme was not as significant as the personal mastery aspect (98% of past delegates saw impact) and the workplace leadership effect (99%), it was a notable aspect of the programme for 69% of delegates.

The shared-value influence was not apparent upfront in the initial design, but certainly evolved within the existing framework, broadening the discussion beyond personal and business change to effective leadership at a community level. This shared value model was particularly notable in that a community-focused approach is intrinsic to the process of doing business in Africa and the cultural notion of humanity, as exemplified by the words Ubuntu (South Africa), Unhu (Zimbabwe) and Obuntu (Uganda and Tanzania), all of which have a root in the concept 'I am because we are'.

Being closer to communities allowed leaders to more firmly grasp the needs of individuals, rather than operating in an echo chamber within the bank.

Ensuring that the design of the programme had this level of evolution built into the planning was visionary, as was the willingness of Standard Bank to look beyond its business to the individuals who make up its workforce and leadership pool, as well as the communities and countries from which they come.

"A significant aspect of the 'life' in this programme has been Shayne's [Weideman, Head: Leadership Effectiveness at Standard Bank] willingness to let go of tangibles and measurables such as return on investment, personal development plans and SMART [specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely] action plans," said GIBS's Cross. A mindset which embodies the 'more than a bank' philosophy which underpinned the #unTAP approach.

Having created a programme which meets not only the needs of future leaders but also the bank's long-term view of responsible and impactful business, the ongoing commitment to #unTAP and its focus on being 'more than just a programme' continues to permeate the development of talent and the future leadership of Standard Bank.

The programme continues to be offered by Standard Bank's Leadership Centre of Excellence in association with GIBS and Henley, drawing in high-potential leaders from around Africa and helping the bank meet its business challenges on the continent through effective, innovative and authentic leadership across borders and cultures.

Watch a video of delegate line manager reflections:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/18eeO14YaRhpLhixeTnaQg2-6HixQlBpm/view?ts=5e6f43dc

[ends]