

Top African execs choose an MBA

Top executives in South Africa and the rest of the world may no longer consider an MBA the postgraduate qualification of choice but research into the leadership landscape in key economic hubs in Africa shows that top African execs throughout the continent still choose to pursue an MBA.



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Research into the leadership landscape in key economic hubs in Africa, conducted by Jack Hammer's Africa Desk for its latest Executive Report (Volume IV - The Africa Report: Leadership Strategies for Sustainable Growth), researched the makeup of the 259 leaders from the executive teams of 36 multinational companies which successfully navigated expansion and growth in Africa. Companies researched included General Electric, Siemens, Unilever, Microsoft, Coca Cola and Procter & Gamble.

Findings into the leadership teams' qualifications showed that top African execs throughout the continent were exponentially more likely to hold an MBA compared to their expat peers.

Of all the leaders surveyed, only 26% held MBAs. Yet local nationals held 81% of these MBAs, compared to only 19% of expats.

Explaining this stark difference between the number of expats and local nationals holding an MBA, Debbie Goodman-Bhyat, CEO of Jack Hammer says that where the qualifications bar for African leaders to be noticed and stand out is high, an MBA continues to be seen as an effective way to differentiate oneself and prove grit, intellectual prowess and business savvy.

“Many African leaders who rise to the top have spent some years furthering their education abroad and multinationals will often invest in developing their top talent in this way, by financing and enabling a leader to pursue MBA studies.”

MBA applications rise

According to the Association of MBAs' 2015 Application and Enrolment Report, enrolments for global MBA programmes from African students have risen by 4% since 2011.

“With companies increasingly appointing local leaders, rather than expats, to key leadership roles and an increase in global business schools presenting MBA programmes in partnership with multinationals, this trend is set to continue for some time.”

Meanwhile, a general overview of the qualifications landscape of the sample pool of top leaders in Africa shows that 84% have a strong technical qualification, in either finance (35%), engineering (13%) or science (31%). Legal and humanities degrees make up the difference. Additionally, 52% of executives in this group hold an MBA, Masters or PhD.

“This is a statistically significant finding. In a move away from the historical trend, where the pool of local African executives with higher qualifications - particularly higher technical qualifications from respected institutions - was relatively limited and competition for these candidates fierce, our research shows that career-minded leaders have over the past decade invested heavily in their education.

“So in addition to now being able to source highly qualified candidates, companies are increasingly investing in their top talent by providing international study and partnership opportunities, which further strengthens top leadership teams not just within companies, but also at individual level.

“Strong academic credentials lead to increased executive and leadership opportunities, which ultimately bode well for the development and sustainability of strong leadership on the continent, concludes Goodman-Bhyat.

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