



**Communication and Marketing Department**  
**Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso**  
**Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement**

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa  
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town  
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

[www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)

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## **UCT trio excel in global CEO corporate contest**

A University of Cape Town radio jock, a Durban beach boy, and a hockey-cum-chess player may not be the obvious trio to take on a global corporate contest, but they did UCT and South Africa proud when they excelled at the recent [Procter & Gamble \(P&G\) CEO Challenge](#).

Although the team comprising Dimpho Thepa the radio jock, Blake Springate the beach boy, and Bontle Mahoda the hockey-cum-chess player finished second in the final round, Springate - who is studying finance and accounting - was told he was the best speaker of the competition.

Thepa, who also has an eye for fashion and can herd cattle, majors in politics and philosophy while Mahoda, the second youngest of four sons and who has dabbled in numerous sporting codes, is studying finance.

The annual challenge tests the participants' "aptitude for business strategy and real-life problem-solving" to determine who the best candidate is to become the next P&G chief executive officer. The four rounds include an individual assessment, the national round, regionals and then a final between regional winners. In the first round, participants undertook a 75-minute individual online assessment in which Springate, Thepa and Mahoda all excelled.

Springate and Mahoda met late last year in first year and decided to enter the challenge as a team. Their third teammate failed the first round of the assessment. Thepa had entered earlier in the year when P&G specifically targeted young female leaders. Her two teammates also failed to proceed past the gruelling first assessment.

A day before the national round deadline, P&G informed the three they were to join forces to represent UCT. While the two finance students had entered as a team, neither thought they knew Thepa until they realised she and Mahoda had attended primary and high school together in Limpopo.

With the stars apparently aligning, and less than 24 hours until the submission deadline, they needed to meet, but Mahoda was travelling and Thepa was in hospital. Thepa was adamant she'd participate from her hospital bed with permission from her doctor. The group set up a Google Hangout, shared screens, laid the ground rules for working together and began their virtual meeting.

“Initially, everything was everywhere, but we managed to put it all together in one place,” says Mahoda.

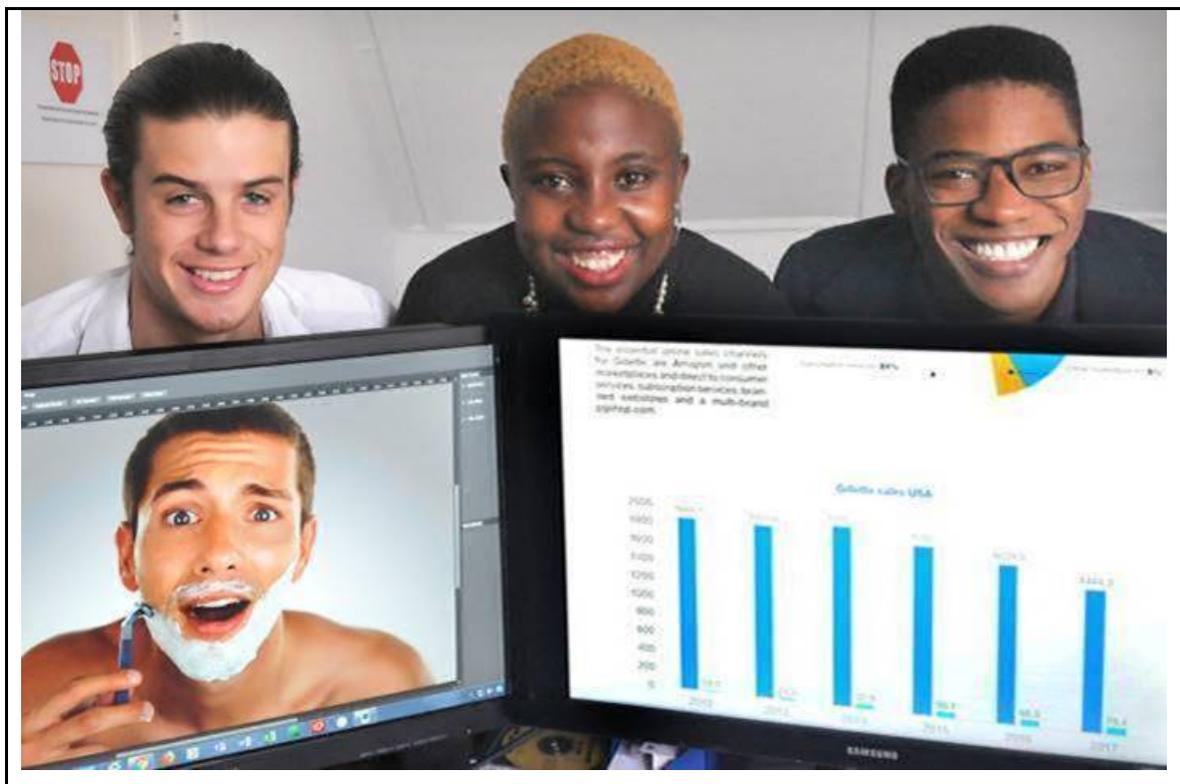
They pooled their skills: Springate and Mahoda had experience in start-ups and what they had learnt at UCT while Thepa had honed her critical thinking, speed reading and training courtesy of the [Allan Gray Orbis Foundation fellowship programme](#). “We already had this well of knowledge to draw from, so we didn’t have to start from scratch,” says Thepa.

Three days after submitting their first group project, they learnt they were South Africa’s winning team. “I had my coffee, was on the way to catch a Jammie, got the email and I was like, what is going on?” Mahoda recalls. Thepa started screaming in the back of a cab when she read the email, while Springate managed a surprise “yoh” when he found out. With less than a day to prepare, the three were booked on flights to Johannesburg to compete against the winning teams from India and the Middle East.

The team officially met for the first time in Johannesburg. It was only on the morning of the presentation that the team had their final chance to strategise. The plan was to keep the solution as simple as possible. Again, drawing on their individual past experiences and using the ground rules they’d previously laid for working together, they completed their presentation by the afternoon deadline and emailed it to P&G.

India emerged tops, with the South Africans getting a special mention from a senior P&G executive, who said the race was a close one and that Springate was the best speaker of the competition. The three are now using the experience to map out their careers. “We need to broaden our view of what’s possible with our degrees,” says Thepa.

[Download high resolution photo](#)



SA's Procter & Gamble CEO Challenge winning team members from left: Blake Springate, Dimpho Thepa and Bontle Mahoda. Photo: Brenton Geach

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***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

**Thami Nkwanyane**

**Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer**

Communication and Marketing Department

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch

Tel: (021) 650 5672

Cell: (072) 563 9500

Email: [thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za](mailto:thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za)

Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)