

What skills, experience and background do we expect a Skills Venture consultant to have?

There are no set criteria for what a 'typical' consultant should be like. However, the approximate criteria below should give some idea of the background that we might expect.

**Nationality**

There is no nationality requirement for acceptance onto a Skills Venture assignment, whether determined by country of birth, citizenship or residence, or by immigration status. Consultants will however need a good working knowledge of both written and spoken English.

Diversity

There is no lower or upper age limit. We expect many of our consultants to be in either the 25-35 age range or the 45+ age range, but this is by no means a requirement. We also operate a strict gender equality policy, and stress that Kenyan businesses are very open to working with both male and female consultants. We also have a full diversity policy in terms of race, sexual orientation and disability.

Academic qualifications

Consultants should normally have a university degree or equivalent qualification. We may waive this requirement in some circumstances. There is no requirement for specific business or vocational qualifications beyond this.

Work experience

We expect consultants to have at least five years of experience in a business environment. Depending on sector, this may include time spent acquiring a professional qualification while working, for example at an accountancy or law practice. Time spent on a full-time course is not included in this timeframe.

Other experience (desirable but not expected)

- Travelling, living and/or working overseas, especially in developing countries
- Working with people from different backgrounds and countries
- Providing consulting or mentoring support to others, or internal training and people development

Workplace skills

A Skills Venture assignment is a challenging undertaking. Consultants should be in the top quartile of performers in their peer group, and their core workplace skills should be sufficient to allow them to provide consultancy support to Kenyan businesses with a focus on their own business discipline. However, consultants will not be expected to have experience of, or training in, passing these skills onto others; this will be provided by Skills Venture. In addition, a great deal of the support needed will be in more generic areas that require little more than common sense and a reasonable education to deal with effectively.

Interpersonal skills

Soft skills are even more important than business skills in fostering a successful consulting relationship. We expect consultants to demonstrate leadership, adaptability, intercultural sensitivity, good listening skills, resourcefulness, a willingness to learn, and most importantly an open mind and a good sense of humour!

What will a typical Skills Venture consultant's day look like? How will they use their skills to help Kenyan entrepreneurs?

This example is based on the actual experience of a Skills Venture director with a small business in Kenya's capital, Nairobi.

**Preparations**

I first visited Muthoni at her premises a week before our full consultancy session. The aim of the visit was to get a feel for her business, see the facilities and meet her staff. I was prepared in advance with information on what the business did (catering), and the monthly turnover (the equivalent of £5,000 per month).

Two weeks earlier, I was sitting in a smart boardroom in my London office, presenting to senior management with the aid of my laptop and a plasma screen, not to mention the technical support to set everything up. Visiting Muthoni was a little different: her kitchens were in the back of a shopping centre in a disused garage.

The first meeting

Our first meeting was conducted outside, sitting on plastic garden chairs, while delivery vans came and went. We were brought plates of food and glasses of juice as we talked. Muthoni came straight to the point: she had been running her business for several years, and by trial and error had honed her formula for success to a sharp service and a focus on corporate and institutional clients.

Up to now she had been growing the business simply on the basis of word of mouth, but she wanted to accelerate things. Her challenge was not knowing either how to package the message to sell her service, or what was the best way to deliver it to the niche market that she had identified. I had seven years of experience in sales and marketing, and so we agreed to meet to discuss the challenge further.

Subsequent meetings

Muthoni is a straight talking and busy business owner, and it was clear that the best approach was a simple one. I put together a simple discussion guide that would allow us to break down her marketing challenge into digestible chunks. I used my formal training, but let the discussion flow rather than making it too formal.

The meeting was great fun, and four hours rapidly flew by. We sat at a simple table and talked through the business, her ideas and a few of mine. I used a lot of blank paper and hastily drawn diagrams, but this was much better than using formal training or text books, and most importantly everything we reviewed was about her business, not abstract marketing theory. She asked me hundreds of questions and made pages of notes. She was delighted to have the chance to run her ideas by someone to get a professional but objective view.

In her spare time Muthoni mentors young street children who are trying to start out in business. Helping her, knowing that she could also help them, was a completely fulfilling experience.