



[The book writes by Jeannot Ramambazafy](#)

Can an outstanding accountant become an effective president ?

He has been President of the Republic of Madagascar for more than eight months now. His government has outlined his principal priorities under the “ [General State Policy](#) ”: alleviating poverty and instability, strengthening rule of law, combatting corruption, increasing foreign direct investment, and developing the private sector. He has travelled all over the world to make the case and seek support for his regime and his program. Yet, Hery Rajaonarimampianina seems to be having a hard time getting the needed traction for getting things moving. To be fair, he has inherited a complex situation, including a toxic political environment and an almost bankrupt state. Still, almost nine months in office and he has yet to come up with a concrete meaningful achievement. The honeymoon period will soon be over, and he needs to start showing results.

Many questions are already starting to emerge. Does he really have what it takes to respond to the population’s aspirations? Does he have the required drive and ambition to change the way things are? [Does he have a clear vision for Madagascar](#) ? Does he have the right background and personality to be an effective president? Let me address that last one.

All over the world, [presidents have held a wild variety of jobs before becoming their countries' leaders](#) . Croatia's president, Ivo Josipovic, used to be a classical composer. Edi Rama, Albania's prime minister was a painter. Turkmenistan's president was a dentist. Slovenia's handsome president, Borut Pahor, was a male model. Australia's prime minister was a trainee priest. Ireland's president is a poet. President Rajaonarimampianina is a certified public accountant — as far as I know, the first CPA in the world to have been elected president. Could this background be at the root of the problem?

To be sure, he was an excellent accountant with [stellar credentials](#) . Well respected by his peers, he was elected President of the Professional Order of Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditors of Madagascar and appointed Vice-Président of the Superior Accounting Council. Alumni of the Institut National des Sciences Comptables de l'Administration d'Entreprises de Madagascar (INSCAE), where he used to be Dean of Studies, fondly remember him as a smart and outstanding professor. As the Finance Minister during the Rajoelina transitional regime (2009–2013), he was able to maintain some degree of fiscal discipline. No mean feat, considering the chaotic nature of the transition.

But can an outstanding accountant become an effective president? Great accountants generally have very analytical personalities. They keep track of every small detail and tend to focus on making sure that everything is accounted for. They have the urge to double-check everything. For every decision, they would thoroughly study all the possible results and outcomes. What are the pros? What are the cons? Great accountants are detail-oriented, deliberate, thorough, risk averse, and most importantly, patient in any endeavor they embark on. There is nothing wrong with that. Unless maybe if you are the president of a country where, as stated by President Rajaonarimampianina himself, “ [everything is urgent](#) !”

An effective president is a good leader. He (or she) needs to be a dreamer and a visionary. Dreams and visions are not and should not be constrained by general accounting practices or considerations of financial orthodoxy. A good leader is creative and thinks outside the box. He inspires people and is good at getting them fired up and excited about his dreams. He needs to be a charismatic salesman to get support and buy-in for his vision or his ambitions. A good accountant, with his analytical mind, would be too focused on the [minute details](#) to be a dynamic and effective leader. But a wise leader would always surround himself with smart people with the analytical personality of an accountant to worry about those details.

One could argue that, during the first nine months of his mandate, President

Rajaonarimampianina has acted more like an analytical accountant than a visionary leader. He has been rigorous, thorough and deliberate in his approach to policymaking. This might have been necessary given the general lack of discipline that he has inherited. He has so far taken very few bold decisions. He has shied away from any risky moves. He has not made any substantial effort in communicating, or in enlisting popular support for his vision.

Like a skillful [fanorona](#) player, he has patiently planned his every move. But Malagasy people may soon run out of patience. In order to start seeing some results, he needs to stop acting like a CFO and become the CEO. It is high time for him to stop acting like the great accountant he used to be and start acting like the President he was elected to be.

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