BIZCOMMUNITY

Come on SABC, give us a break!

By Chris Moerdyk

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At the risk of being utterly boring once again banging on about the SABC, I feel as though some sort of bizarre sense of duty requires me to comment on the completely predictable findings of a PriceWaterhouseCoopers audit on the national broadcaster that was succinctly summed up by yesterday's newspaper headlines as being run by a bunch of dummies.

Frankly, quite apart from possibly boring many of my readers, I am actually getting to the point where I am boring myself writing about the SABC's singularly pathetic attempts to be a broadcaster.

Just in case you missed the story in the media yesterday - probably because your brain has become attuned to tuning out every time you see or hear the words 'SABC', the PWC skills audit found incompetence was at its highest level at the top and in the broadcast technology division.

A breath-taking total 577 of 842 jobs sampled discovered qualifications were either incomplete or "not authentic".

Of all the executives, 60% were unable to meet the minimum requirements for strategic thinking and 56% were not able to demonstrate competency in solving problems or taking decisions.

And so it goes on and on and on.

But, it would be unfair to blame the whole SABC debacle on staff at any level in spite of dodgy qualifications and the inability to solve problems or take decisions.

Broadcasting [by] dummies

The problems at SABC start at the top.

After all someone at the top has hired people who have dodgy qualifications and can't solve problems or make decisions.

The rot, in my opinion, does not lie with incompetent staff but right up there at board level.

Getting things right at the SABC is actually not anything close to rocket science. It is pretty straightforward - starting with getting the right people in the right places. People who understand the broadcasting business and people who understand finance.

There are any number of extremely well qualified people in South Africa who can fit either of these essential job profiles.

The trouble is, they are not members of the ANC.

Because the SABC board and a lot of other top key positions are populated by ANC cadres. And one has to wonder just how cadre deployment works because there is a growing perception that those cadres who are not good enough to fill political positions end up being given board positions on the SABC and SAA.

Perhaps become some of the cadres in the pack?

All of which reminds me of the black politician who threw his lot in with the National Party during the apartheid years, saying that as the Nats did not listen to anyone from the outside maybe he could make changes if he were on the inside.

Perhaps now, those people like me, who are intensely frustrated by the continuing incompetence and abuse of our public broadcaster, should just join the ANC and lobby to be deployed to the SABC board.

The situation is indeed that desperate.

Annoyingly, there are still some very good people at the SABC. Outstanding presenters and DJs, very good programmers and advertising sales people. There are a lot of them who are forced to mind their own business and not get involved in trying to improve things because of the very real possibility of being caught up in the continuing internal power struggles and bloodletting politics.

For the first time South Africa has a communications minister who has, so far, spoken with logic and understanding. Hopefully he will have sufficient clout in cabinet to show that the SABC will not be rescued by deployed cadres, but rather by broadcast and business professionals.

The SABC does not have a permanent chief financial officer and now it doesn't even have a CEO.

It has been going through CEOs at the rate of one a year for the past five or six years and if that isn't a clue to the extent of the problem, nothing is.

I could go on and on about what is wrong with the SABC and what is needed to get things right. But until such time as the board is populated with people who actually know what they are doing and how to display some form of leadership, all that will happen is that I will continue to bore you and myself.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

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