

SABC hiring practices need to change

By [Kate Skinner](#)

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It is a matter of public knowledge that the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is crisis-ridden. It is weighed down by an investigation into board Chair Ellen Tshabalala's qualifications and the battles about the permanent appointment of Chief Operating Officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng. While these battles wax and wane, another crisis looms: the appointment of the SABC's new CEO. We are told this is imminent.



Kate Skinner has a simple solution to the on-going shambles surrounding SABC appointment process. (Image via Kate Skinner's LinkedIn profile)

Long-term SABC watchers always shudder when a new executive is about to be appointed. Let's cast our minds back. In 2007, the SABC wanted to appoint a new chief operating officer. Mvuzo Mbebe was put forward by the board. But then Communications Minister Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri rejected him. Mbebe complained and took the matter to the Labour Court, and the issue has still not been resolved. In fact, one of the many madnesses of Motsoeneng's appointment stems from the fact that, legally, no one can be appointed because this matter remains unresolved.

Roy vs Robin

The Mbebe matter was the first major crisis about appointments. The second ensued after the firing of CEO Solly Mokoetle for his lack of delivery of a turnaround strategy. The 2010 board then enlisted international consultants Spencer Stuart to find a suitably qualified CEO. There was speculation in the media that Ports Authority CEO Tau Morwe was the frontrunner, but then rumours swirled that then minister Roy Padayachie had intervened to insert a new name. However, where the crisis reached a critical point was when Padayachie intervened to ensure that Robin Nicholson was ousted as acting CEO. Padayachie called an urgent AGM and amended the SABC's articles of association to open up the path for Phil Molefe to be appointed as acting CEO. Board member Peter Harris resigned in disgust at this manipulation.

The issue of appointments only got worse under Minister Dina Pule, who directly intervened in the appointment of a new chief financial officer, Gugu Duda. This was the third crisis. According to investigations by the public protector, the process was highly irregular. After the appointment process had been closed by the board, Pule insisted that Duda be interviewed. Board members acquiesced and interviewed her. However, she was not their first choice because of her lack of experience. Nonetheless, Pule confirmed her appointment. Within a few months, Duda became embroiled in irregular spending on the Cape Town ICT Indaba. She was suspended and later fired.

Muthambi and Motsoeneng

The latest case of ministerial intervention is, of course, about the appointment of Motsoeneng. According to media reports, Communications Minister Faith Muthambi played a direct role. The post was not advertised. Muthambi called a board meeting to discuss and confirm his appointment. She then waited at the SABC until she got confirmation. The next day she made the public announcement. There was an immediate outcry from the unions and the Democratic Alliance.

So here we are again. We are faced with yet another executive appointment - the eighth CEO appointment since 2008 - and undoubtedly a crisis is in the offing. What is to be done?

A simple solution... but would it ever be implemented?

The SABC's articles of association state that the minister should have a final say/veto over executive appointments. According to the articles, the board advertises, interviews and short-lists for the post but the final decision



Hlaudi Motsoeneng... no Matric, but the best connections. (Image: SABC)

lies with the minister. At a practical level we have seen the chaos this creates. Someone not involved in the process takes the final decision. Also, the interventions have been clumsy and often the wrong (politically connected) people have been pushed forward.



Faith Muthambi... too much influence over appointments?
(Image: GCIS)

However, the matter goes deeper than this. It goes to the heart of public broadcasting and independence. These executive posts are directly involved in editorial issues. According to the SABC's editorial policies, the CEO is in fact the editor-in-chief. This makes it even more problematic for the minister to have a direct say as it means the minister has a direct say over editorial issues. This is unacceptable for a public (as opposed to a state) broadcaster.

The solution is simple. The non-executive members of the board - appointed by the president on the advice of the National Assembly - should appoint executives without any interference from the minister. That swiftly sorts out some key independence issues. And it also gives us the possibility of a crisis-free, professional appointment process. Wouldn't that make a wonderful change?

Source: *Business Day*, via I-Net Bridge

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Eye Witness News reports that the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) says COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng has not taken over the reins as acting CEO but simply has some of the responsibilities temporarily delegated to him.

Motsoeneng will oversee the running of the broadcaster while acting CEO Anton Heunis recovers from an illness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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