

Looking Beyond the Public Outcry:
A critical investigation into the training and assessment system of
media professionals at SAfm

by Sebolelo Taole

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Declaration

I declare that this journal article is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Coursework) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Natal, Durban. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

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Abstract

In March 1995, the radio station SAfm was launched to cater for South African English speaking listeners of all races in line with the political transformations taking place in the country. Some time after the launch there was public outcry over the fluency and general professionalism of some of the new stations' presenters. As a result the station rapidly lost its audience. Stenhouse(1995) in her thesis, notes that the stations listenership dropped from 400 000 to 230 000 by September 1995.

This outcry brings to light questions of the qualifications, selection criteria and training of both the presenters and journalists working at the station. In view of all this, this paper will investigate the professional training of **SAfm** media professionals, the part, if any, it played in the station's decline of listenership, and also the internal assessment system of the presenters and journalists.

Introduction

The public reaction that followed the launch of SAfm must have been the fiercest in South African media history. What followed were criticism from both the print media as well as listeners, there were comments from ordinary citizens young and old and from politicians. This reaction underscores the importance of radio to many listeners' lives. Their reliance on the medium goes beyond the timely dissemination of news and entertainment, it confirmed the fact that there is an emotional element in a person's relationship with radio and with the personalities presenting the programmes. Consequently this paper sets out to investigate the training of media professionals such as presenters and journalists at SAfm, and to discover whether there were any factors in that training that might have resulted in the station losing audience on a massive scale after its launch. The nature and power of radio as a mass medium are researched in the literature. This is followed by a discussion concerning the importance of training and an examination of training at the SABC based on discussions with personnel from the SABC's training and development department and SAfm.

Historical background

SAfm was launched in March 1995, the result of a redefinition of the national English station, **Radio South Africa (RSA)**. **Radio South Africa** began life as the **A Programme** and later became the **English Service**. It was the English component of the two white radio stations (the other being **Radio Suid Afrika**). This redefinition came about because the change in the political climate in the country called for the SABC to transform its role to that of a public service broadcaster. Although it is true that the SABC was modelled on the Reithian public service formula of broadcasting as exemplified by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Teer-Tomaselli (1989) writes that whereas when the ideal of public service broadcasting was introduced throughout the British Commonwealth, liberalism was the dominant ideological

construct, in South Africa this was not the case. Liberalism, which grew out of the Enlightenment period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, aimed to free man from all outside restrictions. This stand was justified by the assertion that man through possessing reason was capable of using it to solve all religious, political and social problems (Siebert et al:1956). Consequently, Siebert (1956) points out that liberalism in its broadest sense, seeks to protect individuals from arbitrary external restraint that prevent the full realisation of their potentialities.

Muller and Tomaselli (in Teer-Tomaselli:1989:6) suggest that in South Africa the dominant cultural theory in so far as it underpinned the material and institutional forms and enforcement of apartheid could be referred to as Afrikaner cultural theory. **Radio South Afrika**, targeted and addressed the needs and interests of the white English and Afrikaans speaking sections of the population. They served to legitimize the ruling classes' dominance within the social formation (Tomaselli et al:1989:104). In contrast, **Radio Bantu**, which was targeted at the black audiences mediated the same apartheid policy by accentuating ethnicity through a linguistic system intended to engender subservience in its audience (Tomaselli et al: 1989:103). SABC policy, although not explicitly stated in as many words, was aligned with that of the ruling National Party. "We all knew exactly where the line was. We have lived in South Africa long enough to know exactly who we are working for", so commented a SABC producer (Tomaselli et al 1989: 110).

The change from RSA to SAfm generated so much controversy that the SABC, through its Chief Executive: Radio, Govin Reddy, and the then SAfm station manager, Jack Mullen, had to justify the change in several forums. One of the reasons given for the change was that it was not demand-driven by the larger English speaking audience's needs. Although a commercial station, it was said to be running at a loss. As a new public service broadcaster, Zwelakhe Sisulu, SABC Chief Executive emphasised that the public service mandate would be geared to serving "citizens" and not delivering specific consumers to markets. (Leadership (14)1 1995:68). Stenhouse (1995) reports that one of the official reasons why RSA was changed into SAfm was because it was felt by Govin Reddy, the SABC's chief executive of radio, that RSA enjoyed a disproportionately high allocation of resources for its small listenership compared with other stations, particularly the black stations. Stenhouse quotes Reddy as saying that RSA was "an old fashioned radio station with a dwindling, ageing, predominantly white audience"

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(Stenhouse:1995:5). Reddy justified the change arguing that "no public broadcaster could justify running such an expensive and dying station that had little relevance to millions who used English as a first and second language" (Stenhouse:1995:5). As such, in conceptualising SAfm, the Corporation sought to attract a new mass audience of all races who understood and used English as a first, second or even a third language (Stenhouse:1995:v). According to the 1995/1996 SAfm **Marketing Plan**, the aim of the station was to strive to be a more representative and broad based public service broadcaster. This standpoint was reflected in the stations' mission statement which reads:

SAfm is a national public service radio station broadcasting to those who wish to be informed, educated and entertained in English. It is a station that embraces the concept of communality to which end it aims at developing and broadcasting quality programmes which will appeal to a wide audience with a particular emphasis on substantially including black listenership.

The revamping of the radio station entailed many changes, that of the target audience and almost everything else with the exception of the frequency band. Some of the old and established programmes had to be rescheduled or altogether discarded, new producers were brought in and some old presenters, some of whom may have had a personal though undoubtedly declining listenership were sidelined in favour of new ones. In line with the perception that its role as a public broadcaster includes a mission to change the way South Africans identify themselves, the promotion of the concept of unity and a sense of commonality among citizens which helps the process of nation-building, the SABC now included all ethnic groups in its employment of presenters, journalists and producers. The launch of SAfm however, led to a decrease in listenership on a massive scale. Some decrease in listenership had been anticipated, for one thing the station's audience was already in decline and the SABC was prepared to dump the remainder and pick up new listeners, but the magnitude of the actual decline went beyond expectation. Also of particular concern to the SABC was the loss of black listeners. Although they constituted a small percentage of the total listenership of the station, it was anticipated that the biggest increase in listenership would come from them. Stenhouse (1995) writes that by September 1995, six months after the stations' launch, its listenership had dwindled from 400 000 to 230 000.

The criticism which the new SAfin station encountered came from a broad spectrum of listeners and for a variety of reasons. Some of the criticism came because the new programming left the regular audience of listeners feeling isolated and insecure, they wanted what they had always had, liked and were used to. As one irate listener quoted by Andrew Unsworth wrote:

radio used to be a companion, but now do not switch it on any more. All the nice things are gone - *My Word, My Mimic*, Anthony Lejeune's *London Letter*, Ronald Charles, *Sunday at Home* with Roy Williams, even decent weather reports (**Sunday Times**, June 16, 1995)

There was criticism also from those to whom anything other than English as spoken by first language speakers could never be good enough. One such listener wrote:

What is needed is a radio service similar to that of Afrikaans, run by reporters, presenters and producers whose mother tongue is English. SAfm could continue to serve the broad spectrum of people with its "Rainbow English"

Arguably the most important factor that triggered the strongest negative reaction to the radio station from loyal listeners was the poor standard of language of the newly appointed presenters and newsreaders who came in following the launch of the station. This irritated not only first language speakers of English but others as well as illustrated by this letter from Joyce Tshabalala, yet another listener, quoted by Andrew Unsworth in the **Sunday Times**, June 16, 1995.

I am distressed to find that in the interests of the so-called affirmative action we have radio announcers on the new SAfin who, with all the goodwill in the world, are unable to speak English fluently and with the correct pronunciation and grammatical flow (June 16, 1996).

Listeners form a close relationship with radio stations, if they are satisfied that the station's style coincides with and is in harmony with their self image, they continue to listen to the station. The concept of a radio audience is seldom questioned, it is generally agreed that audiences can be educated, manipulated, enraged, lost nurtured and created. The problem for a new radio station entering the marketplace is identifying a niche to chase or to create. The options are likely to be determined by such factors as age, sex, ethnicity, taste in music and interest in current affairs or

sports (Wilby and Conroy:1994). In the case of **SAfm** the problem was compounded by the fact that market research carried out prior to the station's launch revealed that the target audience did not exist in South Africa. Two studies carried out by Marketing Research Agency (MRA) and by Kauffman & Levine into the national profile of listeners, taking both the qualitative and quantitative factors into account showed that there was not a lot of commonality in the life style, entertainment and information needs of black and white listeners between living standards measure (LSM) 6 and 8. As Teer-Tomaselli (1994:50) stated: 'apartheid, more than any other factor, prevented the development of an even minimally homogeneous audience in terms of media consumption'. An executive producer of **SAfm** echoed the same sentiment when he stated that: "we aim at the younger people who are living out the way our society is changing. Maybe our audience is not there yet, but it is growing," (**Sunday Times**, June 16, 1995)

The nature of radio

The initial fall in listening audience and many of the criticisms that followed the launch of SAfm can be understood when we look at the nature and characteristics of radio as a mass medium. One of these characteristics is style (Wilby and Conroy:1994). Every radio station has its style of presentation by which it becomes readily recognisable when locating it on the dial. Some aspects of the style may include things like the type of music played, the accent of the presenters the frequency and sound of the jingles, the choice of topics discussed, and the relevance of outputs to the listeners' needs and interests (Wilby and Conroy:1994). The development of a distinctive output style constitutes therefore a fundamental part of the process of 'branding' the station. It is the view of Wilby and Conroy (1994) that style policy should be determined even before presenters are recruited and transmission technology installed. In marketing terms, a station proves its viability by attracting and relating to a specific defined listener group. A station can only survive if the listeners take it into their hearts and feel that its output genuinely relates to their own experiences, values and self-image, **Radio South Africa** through its style had been targeted at a specific audience, consisting mainly of English speakers who, however vehemently they might declare themselves to be Africans, were more likely to be interested in news items and current affairs programmes about Britain and Europe rather than those about other parts of

Africa. This audience simply did not relate the output of the new station to their self-image, They switched off

According to Wilby and Conroy (1994) radio connects with the listener in two important ways. Firstly by establishing a connection between listeners and the "here and now" of the world in which they live and secondly by connecting with listeners own social and cultural experience so that listeners identify with the values inscribed in radio's text. Radio works by fostering a relationship with each listener, and the relationship is personal, positive and based on those values and perspectives that are relevant to the listener. Listening to radio is a personal experience, and radio works when one person relates to another but the relationship is easily broken when the listener is offended, feels isolated, bored, confused or simply believes that a better sound can be found elsewhere (Wilby and Conroy:1994). It can be argued therefore that the success of this depends finally on the performance of the presenter. It is through the human voice and how that voice is used that the link between the station and the listener becomes a communication event. It is essential to radio therefore, to establish and foster a particular relationship with each listener. The tools of broadcasting help to create this link by opening up the channels of communication but the success of the process depends finally on the performance of the presenter (Wilby and Conroy:1994). The presenter's delivery, his breathing, his understanding of the material presented, the interest he reveals in the story and the correct identification of which words to stress are all aspects which contribute to the station's identity and to the fostering of the link with the listener (Wilby and Conroy:1994). It is evident therefore that another contributing factor to SAfin's loss in listenership was that it introduced new people with different voices, intonations, pronunciations, stresses and pauses. The old listenership felt abandoned and were now confronted with strange and unfamiliar personalities with whom they could not identify. Andrew Unsworth (**Sunday Times**) writes that "new presenters, who created havoc with the old codes of "correct" pronunciation, came in for the most virulent flak as language purists battled with outright racists to get the knife in"

Another of the characteristics of radio is that it is an invisible medium. It makes use of speech, sound, music and silence to convey meaning and messages to its listeners. It is unlike television

and newspapers in that it rarely requires that listeners do anything but listen to the radio. It is through the use of sounds and silences as well as through the use of a particular language style and presentation style that a radio station's identity or "brand image" is established and reinforced (Wilby and Conroy:1994). Even though the output from a station may sound spontaneous, it is in reality the subject of careful planning to produce a "total sound". Stations often format their broadcasts by applying strict rules on structure and presentation, governing things like how long a presenter may talk between records (Wilby and Conroy:1994). The station's 'total sound' write Wilby and Conroy (1994), is articulated through guidelines on style issued by management, circulated to all who have access to a microphone and reinforced through training and refresher courses which are conducted in-house. By establishing its identity the station is thereby able to signify its relevance to listeners of a specific age group or socio-economic group, and in the case of South Africa one might add race as well.

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The power of radio

Radio is a medium that touches the lives of almost everyone (Wilby and Conroy:1994). In Africa where poverty and high illiteracy rates make television and newspapers inaccessible to many of the continent's inhabitants, radio provides an effective alternative means of receiving immediate information. Radio signals, unlike television signals, are received even in the most remote areas of the country. Therefore while radio is a long distance mode of communication, it is also an inward and intimate medium. (Stenhouse:1995:1 I). Radio is also portable and this flexibility means that a listener is left free to perform other activities while listening to the radio. What this means is that radio is a companion to many people. Crisell (1986:13) notes that although a radio's audience may be counted in millions, the medium addresses itself very much to the individual.

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In South Africa radio reaches an estimated ninety-five percent of all households while television in contrast reaches only thirty percent (Stenhouse:1995). This accessibility to the majority of the population immediately renders radio a most powerful mass medium. Social theorists have long

Radio and development

Boafo (1992) in his article, *Mass Media in Africa: Constraints and Possible Solutions*, writes that the mass media in African countries has an important role to play in maintaining democracy, development and encouraging public participation. This is largely because the media in any society are among the most powerful influences. This role however, can only be achieved if factors that constrain the performance of the mass media in Africa and blunt their effectiveness are eliminated. Boafo (1992) cites problems of human resources and training as such impediments.

The SABC in its new role has committed itself to supporting the process of democratization and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. It has pledged that "it will be affirmative in its approach to addressing historical imbalances and will consciously *address* itself to playing a positive healing role and develop a common South Africanness" (SABC Vision). Such a mammoth task can only be achieved if SABC personnel, particularly its journalists and presenters are well trained. Sommerlad (1965) argues that in a developmental context the role of journalists is not just to report events but to interpret them and put them into perspective as well. Hence the better the media personnel are trained, the better equipped they will be to carry out their duties. As stated by Chimutemgwende (1989:68) :

Since a speedy national development process depends on the motivation, mass mobilisation and training of a country's population, the better the performance of mass media personnel, the better the speed and quality of that development provided all other factors are in line.

All this points to the fact that the dearth of trained manpower will pose considerable impediments to the effective performance of the media (Boafo:1992).

Training: an organizational perspective

The SABC's group manager of training and development, Ron Morobe, argues in a SABC document entitled, *Training and Development*, that training forms the backbone of any specialised organization. In any organization training is a necessary and vital activity for it plays a major role in determining the organizations efficiency and effectiveness. Gerber et al (1992:142) assert that effective training is needed to achieve the required level of competence within an organization. The fundamental aim of training is to help the organization achieve its objectives by adding value to its key resource, namely the people it employs. Training means investing in the people who work in an organization to enable them to perform better in their work duties. Bramley (1991) writes that training should be concerned with equipping people with the necessary skills and should result in changed attitude. This does not mean however, that training should be done at random or just for its own sake, instead, as Bramley argues, training should be a planned and systematic process which aims at addressing specific needs.

The importance of training for radio

In radio the presenter projects the personality of the station.. The presenter can provide the listener with a range of audio sources, but it is the presenter's own voice that establishes the point of contact for the listener, a personality to relate to. The professional radio voice's training consists of practice, confidence building and listening. The voice is more than a tool of the trade and much of the confidence and authority communicated through the voice is generated within the presenter and his attitude to the listener. Trainee presenters are often advised to picture a listener sitting in the studio because it is so easy to forget that it is the listener and not the microphone that is being addressed. If this fact is borne in mind the voice is more likely to sound natural and unstilted. Presenters do read scripted material but any sounds giving evidence of a script, whether they are the rustling of papers or intonation, produce an effective barrier between the, presenter and the listener. Practice in voice work enables the presenter to remove this barrier and to transform written statements into conversational speech. For the skilled presenter, a

sustained narrative flow does not appear to be produced through a process driven by a style policy, instead the listener hears the performance as the presenter's natural way of behaving and interacting.

The qualities which a station seeks in its presenters vary according to the nature of the service and the brand image that the station sets out to achieve. Common to all of them however, is the establishment and maintenance of a rapport with the audience. Presentation is a performing art, one that is all the more convincing when presenters are able to give part of themselves in the performance, and the single most important tool that presenters use are their voices. According to Wilby and Convoy (1994), one quality that radio stations seek in presenters is a 'good voice' or a good microphone voice which can be developed through training. Radio broadcast training is a recent phenomenon in South Africa, and it has come about because it has been recognised that the need for journalistic training to keep pace with a fast-changing South Africa is crucial if one is to improve the quality of the flow of information. Adequate reporting requires not only the skill which facilitates a freer flow of information, but also a new responsibility.

The history of training at the SABC

Forbes in his 1995 article *S. *BC Training and Future Needs* gives a detailed study of training at the Corporation before major transformations took place. According to Forbes, the SABC had no extensive formal training scheme for professional broadcast journalism. Instead, it had what Forbes called a "rigid and limited hands-on training program for radio journalism and a weak program for training television journalism". Although radio training had been in existence since the 1960s it was entirely an on-the-job based learning. During that period a radio training component was set up, focusing on operations and presenters.

Following his appointment as chief executive of the SABC in September 1994, Zwelakhe Sisulu announced that training and development were to be used to increase productivity and skills levels (Forbes:1995:131). Attention was soon given to policy on financing and training. By June 1995 broadcasting training at the SABC had become centralised and placed under a new

executive manager (Forbes: 1995).

The structure of the SABC's in-house training department

The SABC's internal training and development department is fairly new and has been in existence for only two and a half years. The training is divided into two divisions, the television training division and the radio training division. The radio training division offers a variety of courses covering a wide range of topics such as basic radio journalism, interviewing techniques, specialised reporting, for example, economic reporting, sound production and production design.

Most of the training courses are conducted by external trainers, particularly the more advanced courses because as yet the SABC does not have the expertise. The SABC however, has embarked on a programme to increase its number of internal trainers which they have called "train the trainer". In this programme experienced journalists are trained to be trainers. Currently the radio training section is run by Manana Makhanya who is also the sole internal radio trainer. Radio journalists from outside the Gauteng region either go to Auckland Park for training courses, or Manana Makhanya goes to the various branches around the country to conduct courses. The training department has established close relations with the following institutions:

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

British Broadcasting Corporation

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

m Commonwealth Broadcasters Association

Institute for the Advancement of Journalism

Thompson Foundation

The SABC sends journalists for training to these institutions and also invites trainers from them

to come and conduct in-house courses in South Africa.

How in-house training operates

Training within the radio division is done solely on request. Regular meetings are held between radio trainer, Manana Makhanya with line managers who pinpoint areas of need. The training department then formulates courses to meet these needs. According to Joy Cameron Dow, a senior SAfrn newsreader, managers usually select people whom they feel may benefit from training and their names are then put forward to the training department.

When new journalists are recruited into the radio news division they are put through a basic radio journalism course which serves to introduce them to basic newsroom skills such as writing reports, interviewing, packaging, introducing them to the news studio and training them to use the machines and equipment used in the news production. The course is practical-oriented and involves sending the journalists to the radio studios so that they can obtain first-hand experience.

According to Hein Ungerer, the executive manager of the broadcasting training unit, this course is at the moment fairly basic and nowhere near where they would like it to be. He envisions the formulation of a formal structured and compulsory training programme for new journalists with strict evaluation and feedback on performance. It is intended that this training will build on the knowledge the journalists have acquired from their tertiary education.

In addition to the subjects mentioned earlier, **SAfrn** staff who undergo training are also taught SABC news style, news judgement and also how to be effective listeners. The ability to listen effectively is regarded as a highly esteemed skill. As Dow stated in an interview, " It is important that journalists listen to bulletins. You cannot do interviews without listening, they have to learn how to listen". It is interesting to note that while the course also covers SABC style it does not

include SAfin style. This is perhaps one of the weaknesses of the course and could be an indication that SAfm is still finding its feet and has yet to develop its own news style.

I Problems facing the training department.

I One of the problems facing the training department has to do with the lack of a formal performance appraisal system. Journalists attended training courses but there was no evaluation after they had attended the course. The training department does not evaluate journalists who undergo its training courses. Both Ungerer and Makhanya explained that they were reluctant for the training department to conduct evaluation because there was a danger that such evaluation would be misused by line managers. Ungerer complained that line managers used the training department as a scapegoat for dismissing staff members. He added that currently they were also faced with the problem of the training department being used as a disciplinary measure whereby line managers would send journalists on training courses as a form of punishment.

Muchinsky (1990) argues that performance appraisal is important because it generates feedback which reflects the employees' strengths and weaknesses thereby identifying areas which need improvement and possibly further training. In **spite** of the absence of a formal performance appraisal system within the SABC, SAfm can be commended for evaluating the performance of their staff nevertheless. According to Joy Cameron Dow, journalists and presenters, after having undergone training are evaluated when they return to the newsroom. This is done so that if necessary, journalists and presenters can brush up on areas which may need attention. Asked whether the recent public outcry about the station had any effect on their programmes, Ms Dow stated that public opinion had no bearing on staff evaluation. According to Dow, "people are very subjective and often complain when they are used to hearing a particular voice and then they do not hear it any more".

Lack of support from line management

Another problem is that the training department feels that line managers do not support it. It was felt by both Ungerer and Makhanya that it was the line management's responsibility to evaluate the performance of their staff. Makhanya explained that since it was the line managers who had requested the training in the first place, they had the obligation to see that their staff used the skills they had acquired, however, most often this did not occur. Line managers were slated for their reluctance and inability to take responsibility for seeing to it that their staff members' abilities improve by following up on their progress and providing support mechanisms. According to Ungerer "people go back to the work situation and the line managers don't really follow up and analyse the work that they are doing - there is no appraisal system at all," Makhanya added that journalists who come out from training receive no support when they go back to their division: "We teach people new skills but they are not allowed to think creatively, they are not allowed try out new ways."

Journalists dropping out of training

Training is also vitiated by journalists dropping out of courses before the courses' completion. Although line managers are the ones who recommend that their journalists undergo training, they (the journalists) were free to drop out even if it is in their best interest to complete a course. As Makhanya explains:

...the difficult thing with training especially with presenters, who are our front people, is that they feel that they are doing a good enough job, it is difficult to thrust the training down their throats. You can suggest it, gently say that there is room for improvement for all of us but they have to be open to it and once or twice we felt that people needed training, brought them on training courses, we have done one-on-one sessions with them but somewhere along the way the people just drop out. They have the choice to drop out. We of course follow them and ask them why etc but if the person says and actually writes it for you in black and white that he feels he is good enough from training, there is nothing we can do unless the manager has the courage to say that "friend you are not

performing"

The impact of recruitment

A problem that SAfm has faced particularly with regards to its Current Affairs programmes was that because they depended on the radio news division for live reports, they were unable to monitor the progress of the reporters. Bechan (1996) notes that Current Affairs producers complained about radio news reporters whom they accused of being too subjective in their reporting. Mazarakis (1995) in an article accused SAfm presenters of not knowing any background and context to the stories they present. These complaints raise questions of whether the problem at SAfm and the SABC lies in the recruitment of media personnel. Gerber et al (1992) argue that recruitment has an effect on any internal training done within an organization. This effect may be either positive or negative. If the right people are recruited then the training division will be better able to cope with and plan for those potential employees. The wrong recruits however can have a negative impact further down the human resources management process (Gerber et al :1992). Recruitment and selection therefore have an important role to play in an organization, providing suitable employees who have the aptitude, drive, abilities and experience to meet the requirements of the job. Gerber et al (1992) state that the appropriate employee inputs will be acquired if such a process of selection is followed. Becker et al (1987) also argue about the importance of the recruitment and selection process. In their view media organizations exercise their primary role at the time when newsroom personnel, particularly reporters are employed. This is because of the relative autonomy of reporters within the newsroom. Reporters gather much of the information which is put into news reports out of reach of media owners and their managers. The result is that reporters' superior usually does not know as much about a given story as reporters do and consequently reporters shape news stories according to what they feel is important and not what their superior would feel is important. Personnel decisions concerning whom to hire, write Becker et al (1997) are therefore among the most crucial decisions made by news organizations.

Critique

The question that this paper has tried to address is the following: Was the big fall in the listenership of **SAfrn** a direct result of the poor training that its journalists and presenters underwent? The answer is neither a categoric yes, nor is it a categoric no. One can argue that there is a sense in which SAfm did not lose its audience. If one considers the fact that audiences identify with and form a close relationship with a station, and that those who listened to RSA belonged to that station and not to SALin, then the demise of RSA left them without *their* station, SAfm was not *their* station but a different one - one with a totally different outlook and targeting an audience with a completely different profile. When the new station was conceived it had a target audience in mind, - a listenership of people in the 30 to 55 age group, people of all races, who earned R4000,00 a month and who shared something in common. Market research showed that such an audience did not exist. SAfm was created and went on the air with this knowledge in mind, By their own admission the aim of the station was to

take up the challenge of meeting the needs of a radio market where English is a common language and to take the risk of setting up a full spectrum programming schedule before any firm topical trends of commonality are plainly evident (SAfm 1995/96 marketing plan page 2).

Thus they did not lose what they never had. However, what had been in existence for RSA, namely the "dwindling, ageing white audience" as Govin Reddy put it, did not automatically belong to a station that used the same frequency band as their defunct station, even though they were available to be wooed by it. The fact that they heard the broadcasts on their frequency and chose not to continue listening was rather a failure to establish rapport by the new station than a loss of rapport. SAfm still had to establish its own loyal audience. The process is:- a listener who regularly tunes in to a particular station must first try something new, like it, then stay with it. From this perspective, training had no effect on the loss of listenership.

The reduction in the number of listeners who used to tuned into RSA frequencies and stopped is however, generally referred to as a loss for SAfm, In the first place, one component of the fall

in audience is that the station failed to retain the regular audience of the erstwhile RSA, and at the same time it failed to attract new listeners in sufficient numbers and quickly enough to off-set the loss. Analysis of radio as a mass medium has established that listeners stay with a station for a number of reasons. One of these is that they form a personal relation with presenters (Wilby and Conroy: 1994). It follows from this that the majority of listeners of RSA had formed such personal relations with their regular presenters. It also becomes understandable then that if a middle aged white lady who is used to being entertained by listening to someone like a Jeremy Dors in the middle of the morning and the quietness of her suburban home wakes up one morning only to be confronted by GTh8[OG8Dqa Dl hobekulu trying to do the same or something else, she immediately reaches for the off knob on the dial. The latter is a stranger, and she may be merely running for cover because she feels insecure and or she is expressing her annoyance at this intrusion into her home. The conclusion from this consideration also has to be that because no training could be geared so that personal rapport between a listener and one set of presenters is automatically transferred to another set, it had no role with regard to those who left for this reason.

Studies of radio audiences also show that they have a variety of shared traits and characteristics (Wilby and Conroy: [94). From this it follows that the small percentage of black listeners who patronised the old RSA and deserted it vvhelSAfm came in, could also have left for the same reasons as their white counter parts. The question that arises is this; given the fact that many of the complaints about the new station were centred around language, its usage and pronunciation, did the SABC train its new cadre of journalists and presenters in those areas? The answer here has to be that this must be one of the weaknesses of the SABC's training. The corporation did not have a section which ensured that there was standardisation in pronunciation. The result was that listeners were subjected to "a rainbow pronunciation" of common words.

While the absence of standardised pronunciation may be viewed as a shortcoming of the training department, the problem goes beyond that department and would not be entirely removed if the department introduced standard pronunciation. This is due to the fact that **Safni's** Current

Affairs programmes do not have their own reporters but rely on those from the news division for some of the items they air. This means that they cannot be brought in for training even if it was deemed necessary. These people, with their variety of accents, intonations and pronunciations could affect the cultivation of new listeners especially those who are used to particular presenters and their sounds.

Another related problem concerns recruitment. Ron Morobe, group manager of training complained that because of recruitment problems within the SABC not everyone went through training. He explained that as the SABC was a large organization with over 5000 full time employees and approximately 30000 part time and freelance employees, it was difficult to co-ordinate training, even if there was a training policy in existence. As Morobe explained; " There are so many individuals within the SABC making co-ordination very difficult even if you have a policy it can be sabotaged along the way." The implication here is that not all radio personnel undergo training. According to Morobe most of the corporation's part-time and freelances "walk in, do things and move out."

It was pointed out early in this paper that the style of a station is of such paramount importance that a decision on this must be taken at the earliest possible stage. This being so important that one expects that the SABC would have identified the presenters, given them appropriate instruction and training to enable them to project the style of SAfm. What has been found is that SAfm did not conduct its own training. The training for radio was done by the SABC training department so that even if the presenters and journalists had undergone pre-launch training they would still not have projected the supposedly unique style of SAfm. The argument being made here is that the training of journalists and in particular presenters, who are to project a unique style of a new radio station can only be effective if it is conducted by and within the station, itself, and this was not the case with SAfm. Although there was training, its inadequacy for this purpose can be regarded as a contributing factor to the loss in audience.

The SABC has in the past placed a great premium on experience in their recruitment. Many of the SAfm staff members had previous journalistic experience prior to joining SAfm, so much

A so that even in its 1995¹⁹⁶ marketing plan, SAfm wrote that one of its strengths was that it had experienced staff Manna Makhanya, SABC radio trainer, expressed the same sentiments when she said that "I do not believe that **in** journalists are as incompetent as the world wants us to believe. In fact that is where our best people are." While the journalists in the employ of the SABC including those in SAfm may be experienced and skilled in such areas as news reading, they will not immediately project the style of the new station without appropriate training .

One significant innovation brought in by **SAfin** is that for the first time journalists tell the stories they have covered on air unlike in the past when they were read by newsreaders. For **SAfrn** and the SABC this was a way forward as Franz Kruger , national editor of current affairs in radio, stated.

I think our current affairs programmes are streets ahead of what they used to be on radio South Africa. In the old days presenters read news which they had not written and as a result they often did not understand what they were reading and their lack of conviction came across on air. We live in a country where it is just as important to be able to say "Thamsanqa" as it is to say "Conventry".

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to find out whether the fall in listenership which SAfm experienced soon after its launch in early 1995 was in any way connected to the training. The criticisms that arose after the station's launch brought up questions of news reading and presentation. This made it necessary to look beyond the public outcry to the issue of training.

One of the problems with **SAfm** was that its intended target audience did not exist. SAfm was looking for an audience of both black and white listeners that shared something in common. Bearing in mind the separatist history of South Africa, this audience did not yet exist at the time of the launch. As such SAfin could not focus its training to attract this audience. It first had to exist and then it could be enticed to tune in to the station.

Personnel were trained in SABC style but not necessarily in SAfm style. It has been found that every station has its own identifiable style. The accent of presenters, their manner of presentation are all aspects of style that have a bearing on whether a radio station attracts listeners or not, It follows therefore that the performance of a presenter or a newsreader should reflect a station's style. Presentation is therefore very important in attracting listeners. As Wilby and Conroy note (1994) the manner of presentation is as important if not more important than programme content. SAfm personnel were not trained in its style and this is where the problem lay,

The most stringent dissatisfaction about SAfm found expression in outcries about accents, grammar and language. There were however, also hitches of a technical nature, sometimes without an apology thereafter. Since these are a direct consequence of inadequate training one can conclude that the blame for complaints of this kind, some of which may have resulted in old listeners deciding to go elsewhere, lay squarely on launching the station before sufficient training had taken place.

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