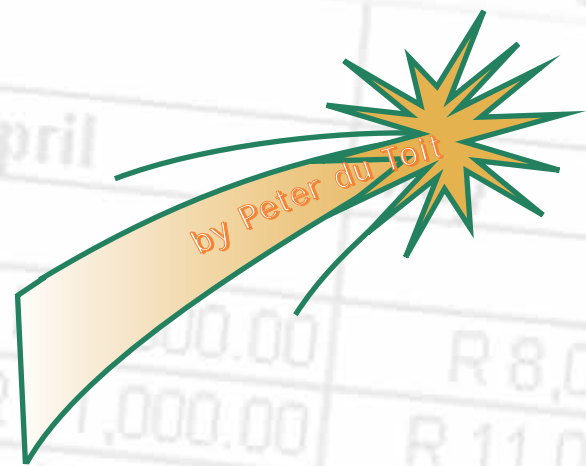
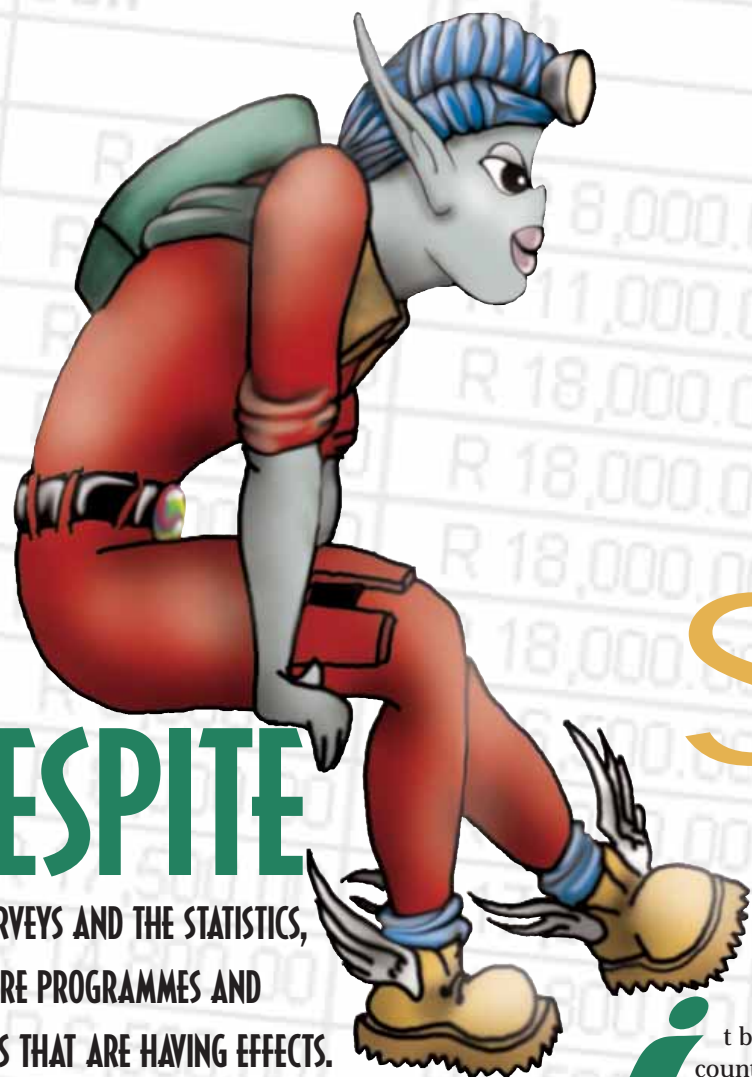


nd Expenditure for 2003



by Peter du Toit

DESPITE

THE SURVEYS AND THE STATISTICS, THERE ARE PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS THAT ARE HAVING EFFECTS. THERE ARE MANY SAVVY SOLUTIONS ALREADY BEING USED ALL OVER THE REGION WHICH, THOUGH LONG-TERM, ARE GRADUALLY MAKING THEIR IMPACT ON JOURNALISM.

IN THIS SECTION – **WAYS THAT WORK** – PETER DU TOIT OUTLINES INTERVENTIONS FOR MID-CAREER MEDIA MANAGERS; LOUISE FLANAGAN TALKS ABOUT HOW TO MAKE COACHING AND MENTORING REALLY USEFUL; AMINA FRENSE SHOWS HOW THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER SHOULDERS ITS RESPONSIBILITY; SALLY SHACKLETON FOCUSES ON THE PARTICULAR USES THE INTERNET CAN BE PUT TO FOR TRAINING; FANIE GROENEWALD, ANTHEA GARMAN AND ROD AMNER FOCUS ON STRATEGIES THEY USE TO TRAIN STUDENT JOURNALISTS.

a solution community

It begins in the Southern African country of Zambotswa in a place called Anytown. Population: 540 000. The owner-editor of the Anytown Farmers' Weekly (AFW) has died and the Big Media Company, with its substantial assets across the country, has bought out his struggling paper.

Now the new management team must develop a strategic plan to **turn the company around and win over a readership** that has long been reliant on competing papers from neighbouring cities.

The four-person team huddles around a table covered with maps and demographic data about the town, bar graphs showing the paper's ailing fortunes in graphic detail and reports dealing with staffing and management structure.

"No! This will never work," one member of the team exclaims. "We're excluding most of the market. **This paper needs a new title, a new editorial approach and a new image.** It will never make money unless we reposition ourselves. We must make big changes."

This outburst starts a debate among the group as they grapple with the difficulties of targeting a new market, while continuing to enjoy the support of existing subscribers.

Each team member has a story to tell about the consequences of repositioning an existing brand. Examples come from Swaziland, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa. **Some tell of success stories** where radical change has seen circulations skyrocket; others talk about papers that have barely survived.

The debate shifts to more thoughtful discussion as the group considers the reasons for failures and successes and apply these lessons to their planning for the AFW.

The team has **a wealth of diverse experience to draw on.** They are part of a group of 14 senior journalists taking part in a Print Media Management Course

sponsored by the Nordic-SADC Journalism Centre (NSJ) and facilitated by Rhodes University's Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute (SPI).

This course, which is now in its sixth year and has a parallel programme for broadcast managers, is probably the **longest running media management training initiative in the region.** The courses have attracted participants from 12 of 14 SADC countries.

Over this time it has become abundantly clear that despite the participants' different backgrounds, the problems confronting media managers **across the region are remarkably similar, often differing only in degree.**

Almost everyone tells the same story, encapsulated in this comment made by one editor of a private paper during the course introductions: "They promoted me because I was a good writer, not because I knew anything about management. **Now I'm dealing with staff problems, budgets and legal issues.** I must oversee everything that goes into our newspaper. Until now **I've had no training in any of these areas.** I have learned from my mistakes, but it's taken me a long time."

There is, without a doubt, a desperate need for more in-depth research into the training required by editorial managers, but, based on the observations of almost 200 editors, station managers and producers who have attended these courses, the Sol Plaatje Institute has identified the following common management issues which need to be addressed:

- In many instances media managers in Southern Africa **do not have a clear idea of their audiences**, who they are trying to target and why. Managers need to enhance their understanding of their markets and marketing principles.

- Editors are expected to draw up financial plans and departmental budgets, but **few have any prior financial management experience**. Few editors have even a basic knowledge of spreadsheets.

- Human resource management functions are left to the human resources departments with editors making little input into key issues of recruitment, performance management and discipline. This often **results in the wrong people being hired** and in organisations struggling to keep talented staff.

- Editors need to learn skills that equip them to develop their staff. Few have been exposed to concepts of coaching and mentoring and editors tend to **spend their time fixing mistakes** instead of building capacity.

- Editors need guidance in developing editorial policies and ensuring that these are realised in the daily practice of the newsroom. This includes questions of ethics and law.

Other issues that relate to structural problems within media organisations include:

- The lack of strategic planning and co-ordination that takes place in many organisations. Few of the participants have ever taken part in **strategic planning processes** and there is a need for managers to be exposed to processes that will assist them in setting and achieving long-term objectives.

- The fact that **women continue to be massively under-represented in management structures across the region**. Women have never made up more than a third of the participants attending any one of the management courses.

News managers recognise these needs and the impact training can have in preparing them to address some of these problems. However, while the majority of them **want to study further and enhance their knowledge of management theories and practices, few can afford the time** to participate in formal academic courses. Instead they must look for opportunities where they can acquire these skills on short courses where they can receive intensive training.

When participants are able to get onto short courses **they are impatient to learn**. They are not just looking to gain knowledge for its own sake, but want answers to specific questions impacting on them in their places of work. They value theory, but need to see its direct relevance in terms of explaining issues they are dealing with in their industries. For many the courses also provide a vital opportunity to escape from the daily pressures of the workplace, **to look for fresh ideas and to reflect** on what they have been doing.

In response to these needs, the Sol Plaatje Institute has developed a range of approaches, including the case study outlined above, designed specifically to ensure that participants are able to gain as much as possible from the short course experience. These approaches take into account principles of active learning to ensure that participants are given a chance to apply the theory in practical situations.

In these exercises participants are encouraged to **construct meaning for themselves and to make the connections** between the materials used and their own contexts.

The value of these techniques is evident in the comments of one participant after the Zambotswa case study: "It's a great exercise. While the example was fictional, the situation was real. I was able to thoroughly analyse the situation as the theoretical issues we discussed kept on coming through my mind. Without the theoretical issues I could have found this exercise confusing, but without the exercise I would not have understood the theory."

Training methodologies are also designed to ensure that participants share responsibility for their learning with the trainers and their colleagues. Participants are continually and actively involved in the learning process and encouraged to contribute ideas from their own workplaces. Each participant's prior experiences, understandings and values are viewed as **important resources in driving the training process** forward.

This was evident during the AFW case study, where participants brought their own experiences to the table, sharing examples from four different countries.

"My organisation is more or less going through the same scenario as

the AFW. The exercise will definitely help me, as I'm applying the same procedures so as to increase my readership. I enjoyed hearing from other people in the group and finding out how they have approached similar problems."

This dialogue is an integral part of the process and people are given as much time as possible to put their own problems on the table and to share success stories with colleagues.

Courses create a space where participants can benefit from being part of the **community of people looking for solutions** to similar problems. This process is ongoing and mechanisms are set in place to ensure participants continue to support each other long after the formal training course has ended.

The Zambotswa case study is only one example of how exercises involving active learning can contribute to effective media management training. Other techniques such as role-plays, simulations and debates are also being developed to address issues such as content generation, conflict management, and the application of HR principles in issues of discipline, performance management and recruitment.

The key to all of these exercises is to **create intellectual meeting places where theory and practice converge and where experience and innovative ideas blend** into innovative strategies participants can apply when they return to their workplaces.

Finally the group makes a decision. They will reposition the paper, but they will do so slowly. The paper will be re-launched as the Anytown Weekly and over the next six months it will shift from targeting local farmers to serving the broader Anytown population.

The group is satisfied with their efforts and eager to report back on their strategic planning to their board of directors, made up of fellow participants.

The team delivers its report and board members pepper them with questions, comments and feedback. Some are sceptical; **others think the plan might work**. Nobody is overly concerned about the results; it is the process that counts.

Peter du Toit is Deputy Director at the Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute. He has been involved in journalism training for the past eight years, running courses in journalism and conflict, media and democracy and election reporting across Africa and in South East Asia. He can be contacted on p.dutoit@ru.ac.za



Attached to the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, the Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute was established in mid-2002 with funding from Atlantic Philanthropies. Headed by former SABC Deputy Group Chief Executive and Mail & Guardian Chief Executive, Prof Govin Reddy, the Institute provides entry level and mid-career training to media managers across the region. Prior to the SPI's launch, the Department of Journalism and Media Studies facilitated the NSJ courses.



Da
Boss

believes in the school of hard knocks. He struggled his way up the ladder and so should you – without any help from him. That's the way to separate the real journalists from the rest. It's osmosis or nothing.