

It's time to champion women leaders for South African media organisations

By  Werner Lindemann

8 Mar 2018

South Africa's media and marketing industry attracts many women, with female employees making up well above 50% of the headcount in most of the country's leading agencies and publishers. Yet attending a recent agency event for media owner CEOs, I noticed nine out of 10 people in attendance were men.



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It's surprising to see so few women in leadership positions in an industry where they are better represented than they are in, for example, mining, information technology or banking. On the other hand, the lack of women CEOs in South Africa's media sector reflects a general lack of women in senior positions in large corporations in general.

For example, a study by PwC last year confirmed that the profile of an executive director on the JSE was a white man aged 55 years. There was only one female chief executive among the Top 40 JSE listed companies – Barclays Africa chief executive, Maria Ramos.

Not getting the diverse picture

We should be concerned about the lack of transformation in the media and marketing sector, with the low representation of women standing out as a concern. One reason we should be worried by the lack of female leaders in media is that companies are not getting a truly diverse view of the world.

Study after study shows that organisations that strive for a better gender balance in mid-and upper-management outperform the rest of the pack. Such companies are often more innovative than their peers and better aligned with the needs of their customers because they have a broader, more diverse view of the landscape. Diversity has a positive influence on risk management, decision making and board dynamics.

Another reason why it makes sense to have more women represented in leadership positions is that it signals to employees, customers and other stakeholders that the organisation is committed to inclusivity. Putting women into leadership positions often changes how the company thinks about its offering, as women bring a different angle on aspects like collaboration, 'being there' and listening, empathy, courage and self-confidence.

Creating an enabling environment

So why are women underrepresented in the C-suite of media owners? I suspect that structural issues explain a great deal of the disparity. One international survey by Womencorp found that 68% believed that lack of flexible options for work holds women back; another 52% say that lack of confidence is also a contributing factor.

Perhaps another issue is a lack of local role models and mentors for young women who aspire to be media entrepreneurs or CEOs. Consider the fact that research from 21st Century Fox partnered with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media shows that two-thirds of women in the study who work in Stem (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) saw Dana Scully from the *X-Files* served as a role model. What about Sheryl Sandberg from Facebook?

With other sectors such as accounting, IT and science looking to recruit the brightest and most ambitious young women, the media and marketing industry should also be looking at ways to change its profile and create a pipeline of future leaders. By thinking about how we can enable the next South African Oprah or Arianna Huffington to reach her full potential, we can not only empower women but build a better future for the industry as a whole.

Please look out for a follow-up article to be released soon, coined, "Transforming the soul of organisations."

ABOUT WERNER LINDEMANN

Werner leads Mediamark, South Africa's leading integrated, multichannel media sales house, as it continues its journey to create a converged sales capability that can help customers leverage mobile, video and content marketing, in combination with its exceptional traditional platforms...

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