

Transformation in the media industry needs a 'Transformation'

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What unhealthy prejudices and biases walk through the corridors of your media agency?

The state of our (un)transformed media industry

Unfortunately, many media agencies are untransformed not because they haven't successfully attained their BBEE Level 1 status, but because the unhealthy prejudices held by staff have never been discussed. These conversations are difficult to have but are incredibly important to ensure we are progressing as an industry. Why do we need these conversations? Because our biases are innate and deeply rooted in our subconscious. More importantly, as Anaïs Nin once said: "We don't see the world as it is, we see it as we are". Hard conversations like these, rooted in openness, transparency, and trust, help us see what others see (and haven't seen). If we invested as much time and effort into planning our transformation programmes for staff as we do in planning disciplinary hearings, we would do a lot more in terms of transforming our industry.

When we talk 'Transformation', we need to get back to the 'why'; the reasons it is much better for *all* if we understood and implemented transformation correctly. Keep in mind that a 'transformation' is a dramatic change, not a transition. More explicitly, it means changing completely! A caterpillar turning into a butterfly is a good example of true transformation. Using a more personal example, having children can be a true transformation for anyone up for the challenge. It is incredibly hard, demanding, taxing and stressful, but the rewards are invaluable and immeasurable. In many respects, it is a complete change in one's view of 'reality'. It is also one that never ends and is an ongoing journey each day. Transformation changes everything for the individual, in a good way.

And this is where true transformation starts... with the 'me'. At an individual, personal level.

Transformation of self

It could be argued that true societal and organisational transformation is almost impossible without some form of personal transformation first. Self-transformation is the key. Changing others or forcing others to change is hard to do. But there is the view that changing oneself is the fastest way to true transformation. The industry needs to provide the 'whys' as to why individual transformation is important. Unfortunately, starting at the individual level is in stark contrast to our current organisational priority of getting our BBEE scorecards in place. Ticking the BBEE scorecard is an easy goal to achieve, whilst true transformation is an ongoing journey companies should embark upon.

Are we encouraging each other in the media industry to begin this transformational journey as a personal growth pivot point? Why is this important? Because anyone can bend a knee but still be a racist. And any agency can be BBEE Level 1 compliant but still be untransformed. The industry needs ongoing, open conversations about 'completely changing' themselves, only then will culture flourish.

What we can do to start the transformation journey today

Are we perhaps viewing transformation with more fear than opportunity? When put in its proper context: True transformation is the process implemented to help the previously disadvantaged overcome obstacles (including in the workplace) to help these individuals live a life of value and in its fullness. Now that's something worth striving for and a value everyone in your organisation can rally around.

Transformation is about truly accepting people who are different to you despite their differences. It is about genuine acceptance. This means no prejudice or judgement because of these differences. It is important that we start to know, understand, and accept each other's differences through open dialogue in the workplace.

Looking at a more formal definition: 'Transformation is about the acceptance and representation of the transformational goal'. Acceptance is the first step. If there is acceptance that the transformation goal for your organisation is worth investing in, a good place to begin the journey is to open up your next leadership meeting with these reflective thought starters:

- Are we making a concerted effort to allow for two-way dialogue about transformation with all our staff?
- What conversations do we need to have with all staff regarding their views on transformation?
- Is our leadership transformed and are we committed to transformation?
- Is our leadership diverse, and if not, what measures are we taking to become more inclusive?
- How committed are we in terms of driving transformation through our:
 - Employment equity plan?
 - Transformation or employment equity committee?
 - Hiring practices?
- Has our organisation analysed salaries across the business – are our previously disadvantaged staff remunerated in the same way as their counterparts in the same positions?
- Does our organisation give previously disadvantaged individuals opportunities to grow?
- What experts have we consulted to help accelerate transformation within our organisation?
- What 'transformation policies' do we need to put in place to assist previously disadvantaged staff? Think out the box:
 - Impactful reward mechanisms for successful learning achievements?
 - Remote working options for staff who travel very far? ('Inborn' organisational biases often do not take into account the challenges their employees face in order to 'conform'.)
 - Free financial/tax/health/psychological consultations to help previously disadvantaged staff achieve incremental improvements in their personal life?

The time is now

Do you want to improve? Get better? Be better? It is innate in us to want this. And that is the reason we should all be pushing transformation in our agencies; first at the individual level and then at the organisational level. History has shown us the incredible benefits of 'transformation' of the individual, of society and of the world. Not so long ago, slavery was 'acceptable' and apartheid was 'law'. That never meant it was right. Many individuals had to make personal transformations in terms of their mindsets, values, attitudes, and beliefs so that we could progress to where we are today. But there is still work to do. The time is now for all leaders in the media industry to transform at an individual level and then cascade that down into their organisations.

Are you ready to transform?

About the AMF

The Advertising Media Forum (AMF) is a collective of media agencies and individuals including media strategists, planners, buyers and consultants through whom 95% of all media expenditure in South Africa is bought. The AMF advises and represents relevant organisations and aims to create open channels of communication and encourage and support transparent policies, strategies and transactions within the industry.

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