



Title The SABC8 "Eight Journalists, One Fight for Media Freedom"

Author Foeta Krige

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Review By Christelle Faul Marais (Founder and Director, Lucidum)

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Lessons For

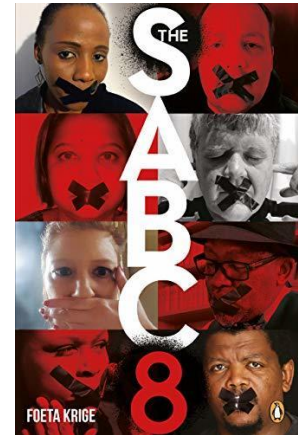
Directors, Prescribed Officers, Executives
Governance Officers, Company Secretaries
Ethics Officers, Risk Managers, Compliance Managers
Audit Professionals
Strategy and Sustainability Professionals
Line Managers

Relevance

9
10
10
8
7
8

Overall Rating

8.8



Synopsis

This is SABC radio journalist Foeta Krige's first-hand account of how eight very different journalists at South Africa's public broadcaster, brought together by coincidence rather than plan, joined forces in 2016 to fight censorship imposed by chief operating officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng, including a blanket ban on broadcasting footage of violent service-delivery protests. Krige traces how Motsoeneng rose through rapid, irregular promotions and a 66% salary increase within twelve months, purging dissenting staff and placing loyalists in key posts, despite a 2014 Public Protector report that found he had lied about his qualifications, unlawfully cost at least fourteen people their jobs, and abused his power. Communications Minister Faith Muthambi appointed him permanently as COO regardless, and the SABC went on to spend an estimated R22 million defending him across fifteen court cases, including a December 2015 disciplinary hearing at which charges were withdrawn and witnesses testified in secret. The SABC8's public stand earned them the Nat Nakasa Award for Courageous Journalism, but Krige's book is most striking in its account of the price they paid privately: death threats, break-ins, a car shot at, and brake sensors deliberately cut on colleague Suna Venter's vehicle. Venter died in 2017 of stress-induced heart failure, and Krige leaves open whether this was the sole cause. For governance and compliance professionals specifically, the key takeaway is that capture of a communications institution rarely announces itself as corruption; it arrives as unlawful human resource decisions, suppressed oversight findings, and a board and minister unwilling to act on them, well before it turns violent.

Key Concept: Wilful blindness

Deliberately avoiding knowledge of wrongdoing you could reasonably have discovered.

Quotes: "...eight very different journalists from within the public broadcaster, each one with their own unique background and motivation, were brought together by sheer coincidence to fight the mighty SABC." "I'm an intellectual strategist... No one can take that away from me except God." "I fund SABC because I go and raise funding for the SABC." "we will double what sbc8 backers are paying advice them to drop the case friday or the girl dies."

Practical Tips

- Consider whether your organisation's appointment and promotion processes could survive the scrutiny the SABC's could not: verify qualifications independently, flag unexplained rapid promotions or salary increases for review, and treat a regulator or ombud's adverse finding against an executive as something the board must act on, not litigate away.
- Consider how your organisation protects employees, particularly journalists, whistleblowers, or compliance staff, who resist an instruction they believe is unlawful or unethical. A grievance process built for workplace disputes is not built for death threats or physical intimidation; know in advance which authorities to escalate to and how to fund protection for staff under threat.

Think About

- Be conscious about wilful blindness: when nobody says a word when individuals or factions seize control of an organisation's decision-making, human resource, or oversight structures for personal or factional ends, hollowing out the checks meant to constrain them rather than only being pressured from outside.
- Wilful blindness cannot be defended in the face of official findings of dishonesty and abuse of power.
- Don't assume that institution capture will look like a financial scandal first. At the SABC it looked like editorial instructions, human resource appointments, and a compliant board, long before money became the visible issue.
- Understand that governing bodies and executive committees' silence in the face of official findings is itself a governance failure. Political principals shielding a captured institution from their own oversight bodies do not absolve governing body members from their fiduciary accountabilities. In the end, they will carry the personal risk, irrespective of where the wrongdoing originates from.
- Consider the true cost of defending a compromised executive rather than acting on adverse findings against them. The SABC's R22 million legal bill to keep Motsoeneng in place is a reminder that the financial cost of inaction is rarely smaller than the cost of acting early.

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