

Transformational leadership for an inclusive and diverse digital industry

 By [Musa Kalenga](#), issued by [IAB South Africa](#)

22 Jun 2016

We are called for such a time as this.

More people on the planet own mobile phones than toothbrushes. These levels of mobile technology adoption have created the ability for people that were previously “excluded” to be part and parcel of local and global business. This may range from accessing financial services to education and even broader opportunities in commerce. This inclusion has forced traditional businesses to re-think their business models and imagine them in a new context. The wholesale inclusion of people through mobile technology coupled with the disruptive spirit by which companies that are forward-thinking are surviving, makes for really exciting changes in the world today.

Our continent requires wholesale leadership changes. We now have seven of the fastest growing economies in the world on our continent. Our economies are undergoing severe accelerations and external pressures to produce and compete simultaneously. Global businesses are looking to African economies for opportunities and companies that they can partner with or acquire to realise the “Africa Opportunity”. We need leaders that will meet this opportunity head on with the interests of Africa at the centre of their thought process and decision-making.

The South African digital industry is no different and continues to face diversity challenges in building representative and inclusive workforces. The talent pool has been made that much smaller by the globalisation of the workforce and the mobility of the younger generations. Skills acquisition continues to hamper the talent pool that show promise and where the skill exists, we still have to master the sharing process that leads to scalable value sharing. I also believe that we need to materially enhance the quality of conversation between clients (brands), agencies and industry bodies. We are not exempt from external forces as the volatility in the foreign exchange rates and the downstream impact thereof impacts on ability to acquire sufficient inventory without material depreciation over time.

Although there are many things to consider, I think it is increasingly important to address the black elephant in the room when it comes to the South African digital industry. We are not in a position to skirt around the need for wholesale transformation and the reasons why this kind of transformation is vital to the industry.

Stating the obvious. But someone has to do it.

Let me start by telling you a few things that you know (or at least should know). Most black South Africans – and most Africans in particular – remain severely disadvantaged compared to white South Africans. The numbers tell us that 4% of adult Africans have a tertiary qualification; 25% of white South Africans do. We have seen this statistic lived out in the media and social spaces as young students fight for their right to education. When they take to the streets they do so to address this skew and crippling education scenario faced by most young South Africans.

Throughout the South African economy 70% of top managers and 59% of senior managers are white. White senior management structures will unintentionally preserve the status quo and while I choose to believe that this is not always intentional, it is a reality – it is human nature. The unemployment rate among Africans is 28.8%; among white people it is 5.9%. This, once again is a result of many years of disadvantage. White families can easily find employment for their children, nieces and nephews; the same doesn't apply for black kids of the same age.

In South Africa, 16% of Africans live in extreme poverty and regularly suffer hunger; 99.9% of white South Africans are better off than that. Even those in South Africa that may go on to become successful still have residual memory in their lived experience and the people close to them. This is nearly impossible to truly quantify, but is a material reality that compounds

the social status of most South Africans.

Diversity is the destination. Transformation is the journey.

So, my belief is that we are all in this together and the key question is much like I am challenging you, how would you challenge your colleagues in the industry to promote transformation? For one, I think we should stop spending time trying to figure out ways of crooking our way around the imperative and need to transform. All that energy needs to be repurposed and focused such that we spend time solving for diversity. Starting the journey is difficult, but if we begin with something simple and iterate as we gain in confidence and understanding, the probability of success is that much higher. A very practical way of uncovering some of our bias is to encourage external interaction as much as possible and engage contrarian conversations. Yes, go ahead and speak to some people who would benefit from transformation. Speak to their peers and understand their challenges. Then go ahead and engage in contrarian conversations, listen, learn and then start applying your mind to how you can affect transformation

The digital revolution has given every person on the planet the ability to change the world. What we do with that responsibility is up to us. My plea to every one of you today is that you absolutely have a responsibility to dream big and push generational boundaries. You need to endeavor to dream about a world of freedom, inclusion and prosperity. But in your quest to change the world – change Africa first, change South Africa first, change your business first and change yourself first.

Transformation absolutely does not mean that there is no place for white staff or that white South Africans cannot expect to enjoy the rewards due to hard work and to skill. What it means is that all of us – black and white – must do everything we can to create a demographically normal society in which everyone has a fair opportunity to succeed.

Masiye Phambili.

To build this better world for future generations of South Africans a little patience and a degree of sacrifice is required from all of us. This is not an extraordinary burden, however mature and responsible leadership is required to carefully plan for the future, in so doing exercise self-restraint and sure-footed leadership towards the common goal of a diverse and inclusive digital industry.

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The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) South Africa, formerly the DMMA, is an independent, voluntary, non-profit association focussed on growing and sustaining a vibrant and profitable digital industry in South Africa. The IAB South Africa represents the digital industry across all sectors including the media, the marketing community, government, and the public, and also acts as the channel through which international bodies can enter the South African digital market. The IAB South Africa currently represents over 200 members including online publishers, creative, media and digital agencies, brands, and educators, between them accounting for more than 28 million local unique browsers, and 887 206 168 page impressions. The IAB South Africa strives to provide members with a platform through which they can engage, interact, and address digital issues of common interest, thereby stimulating learning and commerce within the South African digital space. To find out more about the IAB South Africa, visit its [website](#), like its [Facebook](#) page and follow [@iab_sa](#) on Twitter.

ABOUT MUSA KALENGA

Musa Kalenga is a technologist, marketer, brand communicator, entrepreneur and author of *Ladders and Trampolines*. He is the Group CEO and shareholder of Brave Group and co-founder of Bridge Labs.

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