

Reflections ... they called it 'restructuring'^[1]



I write this on the eve of my second anniversary as Editor-in-Chief (E-in-C) of HMPG.

Within six months of my appointment, I was informed that there would be a restructuring of HMPG. There existed a clear imperative – 'a negative financial result stretching over the previous seven years'.^[2] The triumphant result was that 'since starting to implement their financial turnaround strategy with the appointment of a CEO to implement such strategy in September 2013, a negative financial result ... was turned into a net profit of approximately R1.5 million. Although the strategy implemented included drastic cuts in expenses, strategic imperatives implemented created innovative future solutions and a strengthened working relationship between the SAMA subsidiaries, to the benefit of all SAMA members.'^[2]

There being some parallels, I followed with interest coverage of events after the appointment in June 2011 of Jill Abramson (JA) as the first female E-in-C of the prestigious *New York Times* (*NYT*), especially as in 1962, the Assistant Managing Editor had declared that 'no woman will ever be an editor at the *NYT*'.^[3] Welcomed by women journalists, JA transformed the *NYT*'s masthead, elevating many women into editorship positions. Equally compelling was the story of her firing in mid-May of this year.^[4,5]

The foremost issue facing the *NYT* as JA took over (as with HMPG, and indeed publishing globally) was financial,^[4] reflecting tough economic times and declining revenues from advertising. JA found herself accepting so-called 'native' advertising (the practice of publishing an advert – say, for a make of car – in a story about a family travelling to holiday in one of America's national parks). Her perceived intrusion of the business side into the newsroom allegedly led to clashes with the company's CEO. The opinion of the legendary Richard Smith, Editor Emeritus of the *BMJ*, on editorial independence, defined as 'a space in editors' heads – a complex function of their personality, courage, power, and the pressures they feel from owners, business people, and others',^[6] comes to mind.

One of the reasons for JA's hiring was her impressive comfort with the digital age: as she put it, 'the digital present is here – digital first'.^[7] While acknowledging that the combination of online and print might prove challenging for her readership, JA's *NYT* succeeded in recruiting subscribers to its digital version. Depressingly, revenues continued to fall.^[3]

While the *SAMJ* and its sister journals are all open access and available free online, HMPG is currently stalled in the digital past. There is a risk that the research work we publish is overlooked owing to lack of smooth entry into cyberspace libraries such as PubMed Central. We are grateful for SciELO South Africa, established by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), which enhances the discoverability/visibility of the published research and through which *SAMJ* and *SAJS* (and imminently the sister HMPG titles) are hosted.^[8]

Plans are well in hand to move the HMPG titles properly into the digital space, as intimated in the Editor's Choice of September 2012^[9] and my editorial of February 2013.^[10] Significantly, the *SAMJ*'s readership (determined by Google Analytics (GA)^[11]) is young, with the majority in the 25 - 44-year age group and many under 24 years (which must mean that medical students are reading us). Impatient of print, young people belong to the TLDR (too long, don't read) generation, preferring to receive their reading 'lite' on mobile platforms. According to GA, 35% of readers use tablets and phones to access the journal. HMPG began to point the way with CPD (now exclusively available

online, a change that has been welcomed by CPD participants) and with *CME*. Merged with *SAMJ*, the print *CME* carries summaries of articles, with full versions available online. The same is envisaged for *SAMJ*, since 'readers of research articles rarely look in detail at the results and discussion and prefer to look at the abstract, then at the conclusions and illustrations ... the expected (r)evolution is that paper versions will become a by-product of online publication'.^[10] This will be implemented as soon as we achieve, to echo JA, digital first.

Some staff in the editorial room at the *NYT* found JA intimidating, tough and brusque.^[4] The head of the Harvard School of Journalism, formerly E-in-C of the *Chicago Tribune*, and three female journalists agreed that a woman as E-in-C or CEO must be 'assertive but not aggressive, strong but not too strong, empathic and caring but not motherly'. Would (speculation went) a man have been faulted for being 'tough'?^[12] The alleged official 'straw that broke the camel's back' was JA's contestation, through lawyers, that she was paid less than her male predecessors.^[3] It is acknowledged that female journalists are paid 20% less than males,^[12] but the question was asked ... why did the *NYT*, which had previously been sued by its female employees for discriminatory practices, run the risk of underpaying JA? Fortunately, I have no quarrel with my salary. Nor am I guilty of being intimidating or tough, but will own to sometimes being brusque.

So HMPG has turned 'a negative financial result ... into a net profit of R1.5 million'. All good, but belying the reality faced by my small team of academic/editorial staff and one journalist, who hung in there with the company – evidence of extraordinary commitment, to which I wish to pay tribute. They have emerged manifesting no signs

of the 'survivor syndrome' – decreased levels of morale, involvement, work productivity and trust towards management – that is recognised as a common aftermath of the restructuring process.^[13]

2015 beckons ...



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