

Do it once - and do it right

 By [Paddy Hartdegen](#)

4 Jul 2013

Anyone with half a brain and no mathematical training can follow this simple reasoning: it is cheaper to do a job properly the first time without taking shortcuts than to do it badly, using inferior methods and materials in the hope that it will save money. It should be obvious to everyone that this is never the case. Sadly it isn't.

So in almost every sphere of endeavour, work gets done again and again and again because it wasn't done properly in the first place.

I would expect teachers to drum the do it properly adage into every school pupil that walks through the gates of learning. Drum it in every day. And yet, throughout South Africa, the service levels, and proficiencies are so peppered with bad workmanship, bad service, bad materials and bad practices that time and again, people get summonsed back to redo a job because it was done so badly at the first attempt.

Clearly government officials are getting heartily sick and tired of this cavalier approach by contractors because now, all external contractors who are called back to redo work for the KwaZulu-Natal Roads Department will have to do the repair immediately and at their own costs.

Should they be recalled more than once, they will be monitored and may even be disbarred from doing all government work, whether at a national, provincial or local level. And it doesn't matter if they are big contractors or part of the bakkie brigade either.

Sick of the bad workmanship

Provincial spokesman Kwanele Ncalane went on to say that the province had given road users an undertaking that any potholes on the province's 13,000 roads would be repaired within 48 hours of being reported. But he says he is so sick of the bad workmanship that the Roads Department is considering barring contractors who are recalled to do work already done.

One of the reasons for this tough stance over potholes is that the province is currently facing 375 claims worth R3,2-million caused by pothole damage to vehicles. And KZN's provincial roads are probably in better shape than most of the other provinces' roads because the official estimates from the Automobile Association is that at least 10% of the 12,200 people killed on South Africa's roads last year lost their lives as a result of poor roads.

So the condition of the roads is not just infuriating because it wrecks tyres and damages wheels, but is really life threatening too.

Last week, KZN's Transport MEC, Willies Mchunu said that about R665-million of the provincial budget would go towards maintaining roads, equivalent to about 20% of the R3,3-billion earmarked for infrastructure maintenance.

So the sense of frustration for the authorities must be increasing because they have limited resources at their disposal and find that contractors who are contracted to do the work are recalled to fix their shoddy workmanship.

Start extrapolating this kind of wastage to the hundreds of maintenance projects around the country and you get some idea of the scale of the problem.

Wasted and fruitless expenditure

Here's a simple way to calculate it: if it costs R1,000 to repair one pothole and it has to be repaired five times in one year (because it wasn't fixed properly in the first place), then the R1,000 original cost translates into a direct cost of R5,000. Add to that the indirect costs - in terms of travelling, time, human effort and expertise - and suddenly the amount of money wasted is huge. Then multiply R1,000 by the 10,000 (or more) potholes around the country and R10-million very quickly rises to R50-million.

This really is wasted and fruitless expenditure of the first order and represents a major headache for the people who have to pay for it being done multiple times.

How many people have seen this in and around Johannesburg year after year? A pothole on, say, the R21 is repaired and within a couple of months - sometimes even weeks if there is sufficient rain- the pothole is back, only this time it's bigger and even more hazardous.

I've heard many excuses: "The surrounding road is weak and must be taken apart and redone..," or, "We can't get proper skills so we're doing the best we can..," or, "We're forced to use inferior materials because we can't get quality bitumen anymore..," and so on.

These are excuses - nothing more, nothing less.

There has to be a better way of doing things in a country that's one of the richest in Africa. It starts with enforcing proper standards, imposing proper conditions and paying a fair price for a proper job. How hard can it be to understand that?

Do it once and do it right. Nothing else will do.

ABOUT PADDY HARTDEGEN

Paddy Hartdegen has been working as a journalist and writer for the past 40 years since his first article was published in the *Sunday Tribune* when he was just 16-years-old. He has written 13 books, edited a plethora of business-to-business publications and written for most of the major newspapers in South Africa.
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