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## The last word: Clicking, or cracking at the seams?

A few weeks ago we were the fortunate recipients of *Clicking* by Faith Popcorn, proclaimed by Fortune Magazine to be “the Nostradamus of Marketing”. The subtitle of the book is “16 Trends to future fit your life, your work, and your business”. Nostradamus, here and now telling us about our future?

As part of our strategy consulting work, we also read through a variety of magazines, journals and e-zines covering a wide range of disciplines, such as business, economics, politics and technology. Perhaps being more attuned to the trends we picked up because of *Clicking*, it dawned on us that almost all of the articles illustrated in some form or another a real shift in social patterns. This awareness raised a concern that perhaps what *Clicking* was doing was simply illustrating the surface of a much more substantial “social revolution”. Could it be that these trends are nothing more than the symptoms of a much more profound change?

### A FRAME FOR UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL REVOLUTION

A number of years ago, we were introduced to some of the work of Yamshid Gharajedaghi. What follows is our interpretation of what he suggests. In particular, we would like to refer to some of his work in which he postulated that people aspired to expected returns in terms of five dimensions. Three first order obstructions to the achievement of these expected returns would then lead to different socio-emotional reactions. In addition, should these first order obstructions be intense enough and persevere for a long enough time, second order obstructions would occur in a particular order.

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The dimensions along which people have expected returns are:

Dimension	Expected return
Economic	Wealth
Scientific	Truth
Political	Freedom
Ethical/Moral	Good
Esthetical	Beauty

The three first order obstructions which could prevent achievement of the expected returns are:

- scarcity;
- maldistribution; and
- uncertainty.

In addition to creating their own dilemmas at the psycho-social level of individuals and groups, the presence of these first order obstructions may also lead to three second order obstructions, these being:

- alienation;
- polarisation; and
- corruption.

In our role as management and organisation consultants, we have often used this frame to explain to people some of the dynamics inherent in the relationship between management and labour, as well as the causes for the high emotion inherent in the implementation of employment equity strategies. It is, incidentally, also a very useful frame to explain why apartheid could never survive as a political system, and also why Marie-Antoinette lost her head!

It is precisely the latter type of analysis that came to mind when we read *Clicking*. Could it be that the Popcorn trends were nothing more than indicators of the global existence of first and second order obstructions as defined by Gharajedaghi?

**EVIDENCE OF CRACKING?**

Putting together the work of Gharajedaghi and Popcorn leads to the following table. Admittedly, it is based purely on the linking of theoretical constructs, but it does make for some interesting reading.

<b>Popcorn trend</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>First order obstruction</b>	<b>Second order obstruction</b>
Cocooning	The stay-at-home Trend, reflecting our strong desire to build soft and cozy nests in order to protect ourselves from the harsh, unpredictable realities of the outside world.		Alienation
Clanning	The inclination to join up, belong to, hang out with groups of like kinds, providing a secure feeling that our own belief systems will somehow be validated by consensus.		Polarisation
Fantasy Adventure	As a break from modern tensions, we actively seek excitement in basically risk-free adventures, whether it be via travel, food, or Virtual Reality.		Alienation
Pleasure Revenge	Consumers, tired of all the rules and regulations, want to cut loose and have secret bacchanals with a bevy of forbidden fruits.	Uncertainty (Economic)	
Small Indulgences	Stressed-out from ever-increasing expenses, consumers are finding ways to reward themselves with affordable luxuries.	Uncertainty (Economic)	

Popcorn trend	Description	First order obstruction	Second order obstruction
Anchoring	A new Trend that tracks the recent phenomenon of reaching back to our spiritual roots, taking what was comforting from the past in order to be securely anchored in the future.	Scarcity (Moral)	
Egonomics	In a direct reaction to the sterile computer era, we are looking for new ways to make more personal statements. Thus, businesses that market to the "I" and provide exceptional service should excel.	Uncertainty (Esthetical)	
FemaleThink	A Trend that reflects a new set of business and societal values, encouraging us to shift marketing consciousness from the traditional goal-oriented, hierarchical models to the more caring and sharing, familial ones.	Uncertainty (Political)	
Mancipation	A NewThink for men that goes beyond being "strictly business" and warmly embraces the freedom of being an individual.	Uncertainty (Esthetical)	
99 Lives	A new look at the modern motto of "Too Fast a Pace, Too Little Time," which forces us all to assume multiple roles in order to cope with busy, high-tech lives.		Alienation

Popcorn trend	Description	First order obstruction	Second order obstruction
Cashing Out	Working women and men, questioning the intrinsic value of a high-powered career, are opting for more fulfillment in a simpler way of living.		Alienation
Being Alive	There's a growing awareness that a new concept of "wellness" can add generous years of good health, giving us an overall better quality to our lives.	Maldistribution (Economic)	
Down-Aging	Nostalgia for a carefree childhood lets us introduce a new sense of lightness into our often-too-serious adult lives.	Scarcity (Esthetical)	
Vigilante Consumer	A scanning of the various ways the frustrated, often angry consumer can manipulate the marketplace through pressure, protest, and politics.		Polarisation
Icon Toppling	A new socioquake has transformed mainstream America and the world, forcing us to question and often reject our monuments of business/ government, the long-accepted "pillars of society."		Polarisation
S.O.S. (Save Our Society)	In order to protect our endangered planet, we must rediscover a social conscience based on a necessary blend of ethics, passion, and compassion.		Alienation

A couple of observations about this table are in order.

Firstly, it is interesting to note that first order obstructions vis-a-vis the Truth (Scientific) dimension does not appear. This could be due to misinterpretation of the Popcorn trends on our part, or could be a reflection of a move away from the “hard scientific proof” approach to a more holistic view of what makes us human.

Secondly, it would seem that at least half the trends identified by Popcorn are indicators of possible second order obstructions. In principle, we are therefore already well along the way to experiencing full scale corruption. Of course, most South Africans would immediately point out that is already so for large parts of our country, with gang warfare in the Western Cape, general crime in Gauteng, deterioration of services such as health and education, large scale unemployment, the incidence of white collar crime, etcetera. Whether one agrees with these views or not is in fact immaterial. The simple truth is that if sufficient numbers of people perceive and believe there to be institutional erosion, alienation, polarisation and corruption, then it is so.

**ORGANISATION AND COMMUNICATION**

Taking some of the trends for which there is some (conceptual) evidence of second order obstruction, and considering very briefly some organisational and communication issues, leads to the following table.

<b>Popcorn trend</b>	<b>Organisational Evidence</b>	<b>Communication Issue</b>	<b>Second order obstruction</b>
Cocooning	Large scale retrenchments and increasing emotional distance between management and workers	The purpose here is largely damage control	Alienation
Clanning	Programs designed to improve “emotional buy-in” or loyalty/commitment (whether from employees or customers)	The need to put in place two-way communication processes aimed at improving the sense of inclusion	Polarisation

Popcorn trend	Organisational Evidence	Communication Issue	Second order obstruction
99 Lives	Multiskilling, increasing use of independent contractors and teleworking	How to keep people aligned and mobilised to the organisational vision and mission	Alienation
Cashing Out	Voluntary early retirement and the increase of provident over pension funds	The purpose here is largely damage control	Alienation
Icon Toppling	Selfdirected workteams	Using communication in a manner such that it cannot form the basis for power	Polarisation
S.O.S. (Save Our Society)	Measuring organisational performance in terms of a balanced scorecard approach rather than just financial measures	Using communication to manage and influence all stakeholder perceptions	Alienation

One of the key issues, is to understand that communication cannot solve perceived organisational issues and/or problems. In the first place, communication is not the problem. Secondly, the "symptom" being addressed through communication is not the problem either. There are much more fundamental issues occurring at the level of individuals, organisations and communities. An inability to understand these "root causes" will lead to superficial efforts which will do little more than keep busy the human resources and communication functions of organisations.

## FINAL REMARKS

It is the contention of this article that at the levels of individuals, organisations and wider society there is possibly some evidence of a world wide social revolution. This revolution is based on a redefinition of social values, beliefs and ethics. This revolution is not a new and sudden occurrence either. The evidence has been there for many

years. Consider the social revolution that changed the face of business in the USA in the 60's, the socio-economic revolution that has led to a redefinition of international relations across the entire eastern Europe, and the collapse of the cold war which has forced Africa to (amongst other things) talk of a "Renaissance". What is not clear, is the extent to which the patterns highlighted here are similar for the worlds' have's and have-not's.

The fact is that communication, although not causing them, has made this revolution possible. Mass communication has not only led to the disappearance of time and space as boundaries to trade, but made it possible for people to see and hear that their own concerns are shared by people at the opposite end of the world. The critical mass of people with shared perceptions of concerns and a belief that alternative ways of dealing with them are required, has been achieved in a much shorter timespan over a significantly larger area than would previously have been possible.

From the perspective of communications sciences, it is our sincere belief that the level of debate and research needs to be raised to a level where substantive issues are addressed rather than techniques and methodologies. Particularly in the discipline of organisational communication practitioners should begin to concern themselves more with the fundamental issues they are addressing through communication, than with issues relating to program and content strategies, communication techniques and technologies.

## REFERENCES

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