

EDITORIAL

In previous editorials, reference was made to the role of communications in the broader context of transformation. Given the central role that communication has in human interaction, it is however also necessary to consider the possibility that our pre-occupation with transformation is a reflection of a much more fundamental shift in our social paradigms.

In considering communication in organisations, I was struck for example by two fairly recent developments in the definition of organisational success.

The notion of 'Economic Value Added', or EVA as it is known, has been superseded by the so-called 'Balanced Scorecard'. Whereas EVA tried to relate all human activity in organisations to the contribution it makes to shareholder value, the balanced scorecard attempts to integrate learning and growth with measures of customer value and internal efficiencies as a contributor to sustainable financial performance.

The second major shift in definition of organisational success has been the advent of the so-called 'Triple Bottom-line' in which financial and human measures of organisational success are integrated with environmental measures. Clearly, the expectation we have not only of the role of organisations in society, but also of the manner in which the role is executed, has undergone some drastic shifts from our original paradigm of 'the business of business is business', and 'the purpose of business is to enhance shareholder wealth'.

Seen from the perspective of individuals, a recent survey conducted by a major consulting organisation in thirteen different countries, found that what motivates people within the context of work is neither money nor self-actualisation, but indeed the degree to which organisational expectations allow them to balance work, family, social and other aspects of their lives. In essence, this can be seen as a need for what one may call 'life balance'. This research confirms what can increasingly be read in journals from divergent disciplines such as engineering, information technology, business management and social studies, to mention a few.

Seen from the combined perspective offered by these two trends, it would seem, therefore, that we are living in a transformation of organisational roles and the roles of individuals within them. If this is indeed true, we are all part of a social revolution within a social revolution. What we as South Africans experience as change, has to be seen against the backdrop of a global rethink about the real

purpose of organisations, and - to some extent at least - the purpose of being human. In many respects, this reflects a real concern with something we may call 'definitive moral purpose'.

The implication for communication in general, and communication in organisations specifically, is that we need to rethink both process and content of communications. The emphasis, for example, on the technologies (such as e-mail and the Internet) of communication should be enhanced by a deeper understanding of the fundamental shifts in the expectations of all organisational stakeholders.

Communications as a science has multidisciplinary roots. Perhaps it is time that the science revisits its multidisciplinary nature, and attempts to make a significant contribution also to our understanding of the essential drivers of communication transformation.

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