

# EDITORIAL

It is often assumed that the communication sciences can only be applied in the conventional (even "glamorous") fields such as journalism, advertising and television. (Not to mention those ignoramuses who still believe we are telephone technicians.) Certain contributions in this issue indicate that the discipline has expanded into new areas, including the realms of transcendental communication. And so it should be.

Socio-economic, political and other developments during recent years have left open a wide gap for communication scientists to move through without hesitation. The new interest of the private sector (as SASOL's sponsorship and accompanying article as well as previous sponsorships prove), cannot be frustrated. Their needs for communications expertise are many and varied, from the establishment of a government relations division to the communication to black workers of new measures affecting them. The ambidextrous communication of the private sector as the middleman with government on the one hand, and the black labour force on the other, is fast becoming one of the major priorities in communications research. Researchers can draw readily from available knowledge and research on organisational communication (particularly open vs. closed organisations), their direction, content and structure, and how these in turn are related to functionality, productivity and overall communications climate. New privatisation strategies can also benefit from this.

The challenge is twofold, since not only will hypotheses based on Western experience be tested, but a new set of rules, based on the African experience, must be developed. "African communication", or "Afro-communication", will have to be researched at a much faster tempo, and this applies to all sub-disciplines in communication. The inputs and expertise of black communication scientists are greatly needed.

Communication scientists are not a white elitist group mostly concentrated around Pretoria, and should never become the advisors of only one player in the game of chess, or the marketers of an unmarketable product. If so, they are not doing their job. They are the "brokers", the negotiators, working towards constructive debate and ultimately mutual understanding (not necessarily consensus or agreement) between two different parties, often upholding conflicting values, cultures or lifestyles.

The systems theory – for many communications scholars the bible upon which all of their premises are based – holds after all that it *takes two to talk*. If not, it may well be our last tango in Africa.

It is in this vein that a new development in SACOMM has provoked heated discussion among its members. As the editor of its official journal, I want to refer to this.

With the appointment of Dr Paul Vorster in the direct communications machinery of the State in the Ministry of Defence, the question arose whether anyone in this position may remain on as president of SACOMM. The argument went that SACOMM in this way becomes involved in politics. Many inquiries were made in this connection, among others an official objection from a well-respected member who declared that he could no longer remain a member of an academic association of which the head is a government official, nor could his department remain involved. The precedent was also mentioned that the president of the Political Science Association of South Africa was asked to resign his office after he joined the Department of Foreign Affairs.

It is in the interest of SACOMM's scientific integrity, credibility, autonomy and growth to take a serious interest in the viewpoints of all its members. The issue should therefore be discussed in depth at SACOMM's next annual meeting in September 1988, in the interest of these principles and the setting of guidelines for the future. The debate should be lively.

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