

Die rol van kommunikasie in die nywerheid: kommunikasie eerder as konfrontasie

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Abstract

Effective communication within the South African industrial context is vitally important if the objectives of industry are to:

- *contribute to satisfactory national economic growth*
- *provide adequate job appreciation*
- *distribute economic activity to provide for sensible geographical development*
- *improve the social well-being of the community*
- *improve acceptable economic independence from external economic and political influences.*

The dilemma which faces South African industry is the heterogeneity of the South African population and that communication must take many factors such as race, cultural development, language and standard of living into account.

Recognition by industry of the importance of proper communication in all facets is fundamental to the building of an economically and politically viable social structure in South Africa.

"In a modern organisation almost 90% of a person's activities can be regarded as communication. For an organisation to function at an optimum level, effective communication is indispensable."

The above point of view is particularly true of the South African industry, especially at this point in time when change and development have become the order of the day, and increasing demands are made on industry to play a major role in realising the national objectives of:

- Maintaining satisfactory growth
- Providing adequate job opportunities
- Dividing the national income according to socially acceptable norms
- Distributing economic activity to provide for geographical development
- Improve the social well-being of the community
- Achieving acceptable economic independence from external economic and political developments
- Defending the system against foreign and internal aggression

The dilemma which faces South African industry is that, unlike some other countries which are relatively homogeneous, the local situation is characterised by heterogeneity of race, culture, language, development and aspirations. Often these factors present serious obstacles to industrial development as well as a major challenge to reconcile the interests of industry with that of its numerous publics, through effective communication.

Seeing that I am talking to the converted, I don't regard it necessary to convince you of the important role of communication. However, I would like to quote Wilbur Schramm (1963 : 13): "It maintains the working relationships between individuals and between groups and nations. It engineers change, and it keeps strain at a tolerable level. Therefore, wherever there is pending change or trouble in society, there is a great deal of communication.

This is also very true of communication within the industrial society of modern-day South Africa, where a particular challenge exists. Change is taking place at an ever-increasing pace which will continue to accelerate during the next two decades.

It is particularly at the socio-political, as well as socio-economic levels, where strains are going to develop. At this point in time it is at the socio-economic interface between the first and the third worlds, as they are represented in the S.A. society, that change is taking place very rapidly, creating a high level of stress. Whether we are always capable of avoiding confrontation by good communication is an open question, in spite of the fact that much has been written and said about the subject and the fact that we pride ourselves on being good communicators. There may be many reasons why there is often a notable lack of success, many of them related to cultural, racial and historic structures within the S.A. society, but this is a topic which, no doubt, will occupy much of your time at this conference. Therefore I will not expand further.

What I would like to do, is briefly outline the different target groups industry must identify and focus upon, should it wish to be effective in its communication. These target groups are both external and internal.

External communication

Several target groups exist, which influence the well-being and, in fact, the existence of a company. No company exists in a vacuum and many influences arising out of its environment will impinge upon it, some of a positive and some of a threatening nature. Only if the company identifies these influences timeously and can react in such a way to balance them, can it hope to succeed and make a positive contribution to society.

Communication forms the basis of the interaction between industry and its environment and the efficiency of its communication will determine

its ability to not only react to environmental influences but, also its ability to influence the environment as a leader, thus creating a more favourable situation for itself. This concept is summed up in the words of D.K. Berlo in *The Process of Human Communication – an Introduction*: “Our basic purpose in communication is to become an affecting agent, to affect others, our physical environment and ourselves, to become a determining agent, to have a vote in how things are. In short, we communicate to influence — to affect with intent.”

The most important target groups a company in our position must be cognisant of, are the State, our markets, partners and shareholders. I will concentrate mainly on the major target, the State.

The State

The State plays a dominant role in all our lives, and its decisions and policies can influence our future profoundly. This does not only apply to us as an industry but to each and every individual.

This is particularly true in South Africa where, because of our social structure, the State is very deeply involved in our daily lives. In industrial life this is even more-so, seen against the background of state control or participation in the industries of the country. Also in the chemical industry this is very true if one looks at the development and role of SASOL as a gigantic fuel and chemical company. In fact, it is true to say that Government is an equal partner in our business if you remember that it takes 46c of every Rand of profit you make.

Because of this very fact, proper communications between the State and industry — and vice versa — is of critical importance. An example of how bad communications affect our lives is, for instance, Government's declared intention to adhere to the free enterprise system. Their interpretation is to remove import control from certain industries, thereby exposing them to competition from overseas, which, because of size, distance from markets of differences in raw materials, remove the economic viability from these industries. But on the other hand, the State invests hundreds of millions of Rands in an ADE plant, with massive protection to ensure the viability of its own investment.

Proper communications will ensure that common understanding is reached before a decision is taken, and the objectives for the future can be jointly developed. When one talks about industrial development, it is inevitable that one talks of a joint venture approach, in which both Government and private sector have an important role to play. In South Africa this approach, to my mind, is inevitable.

This approach is very necessary for South Africa. Not only do we have a unique set of circumstances determining the social structure of this country, but we are also faced with external threats to our future and security which need to be dealt with specifically and, most important, jointly.

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In South Africa, more than in any other part of Africa, we have a confluence of the first and the third worlds and the challenge to us in S.A. today is to disprove the statistics of Africa. Throughout Africa the statistics tell a sad story of a lowering of standard of living, starvation, overpopulation and disease to the extent that Africa has been described by its own leaders as a "dying continent", because of lack of technology and an explosive birth rate. In South Africa the application of first world technology combined with third world human resources and an abundance of natural resources have created a unique opportunity to be able to disprove the statistic of Africa. It does, however, require a very clear understanding of the needs of both the first and the third worlds, in order to be successful. This can only be brought about by means of adequate and clear communication between the State and industry and the State and the individual and industry.

This is the real challenge facing us in South Africa.

In addition to the challenge confronting us on the local front, South Africa as a country must be able to look after itself in the international arena. Already we are being denied strategic commodities such as oil and certain weapons, and tremendous pressure is being placed on international companies to disinvest and withdraw "know-how" from South Africa. It is, therefore, essential that communication between the State and industries is effective to enable proper planning of strategies to ensure that all the needs of the country are catered for.

The market

A company or an industry exists because a need for its products exists. Only by effective communication will industry be able to define or create the need for its products and continue to exist. This communication is an on-going dynamic process which should create the correct and proper image for industry in the market place, not only with its existing clients, but particularly also with potential markets or the public in general. Very often, however, companies overlook the long term benefits of proper communication and concentrate on the short term benefits of a marketing campaign.

In an article on corporate communication, Jean du Plessis, Managing Director of Du Plessis Associates, warns that because marketing management regard communication primarily — or even entirely — as a means of generating sales, they tend to be impatient with or indifferent towards the more abstract and longer-term concepts which corporate communications involve. Corporate communication is concerned with the climate in which the company operates, and is a long-term investment in goodwill. The critically important question is: Whose goodwill? Frequently and simplistically, the answer is: these are our

products, this is our market and our prospects — let us therefore concentrate all our efforts on securing their awareness and understanding, and “blow the rest”.

There are some major flaws in this line of reasoning. In the first place, no marketing manager, no matter how far-sighted and well-informed, can know for sure what markets his company will be in within the next ten or even five years from now. In the second instance it does not take into account the millions who are not customers now and may never be, yet whose attitudes could some-day soon be of critical importance to a company and its sales.

This includes interest groups, black and white, for example consumerists and environmentalists, who can and do cause trouble for industry because of ignorance and misunderstanding.

Businessmen cannot afford to sit back and hope that their critics will go away. They need to make friends, and the time to do this is before they need them. By limiting their communication to a narrow, shortsighted and temporal identification of self-interest, many companies are failing to reach sections of opinion that are important now, and they are failing even more to reach sections of opinion that will be important in future.

Only through a process of sustained communication can they state the case, not only for their product, but for their company, their industry, and for the entire free enterprise system. They will be able to gain greater understanding, credibility and trust for their industry, demonstrate their corporate social responsibility, show concern for working conditions, environmental issues and secure for business and industry that respect which is its due as the generator of security and prosperity.

Aandeelhouers en vennote

Aandeelhouers is een van die primêre teikengroepe vir die nywerheidsmaatskappy. Dit is tog hulle spaargeld wat in die maatskappy belê is en hulle vertroue wat noodsaaklik is om die voortbestaan van die onderneming te verseker. Kommunikasie met aandeelhouers is noodsaaklik om hulle gerus te stel dat hulle belegging doeltreffender is as ander aandele wat vooruitsigte en groeimoonlikhede betref. Die kommunikasiefunksie is des te belangriker met die heersende ekonomiese insinking. 'n Benadering van groter openheid, groter eerlikheid en gewilligheid om inligting te verstrek, word geëis in jaarverslae aan die aandeelhouers. Net hierdeur kan die aandeelhouer se vertroue gewek en inligting aan hom verstrek word oor waarheen die maatskappy op pad is.

Interne kōmmunikasie

Interne kommunikasie dui op kommunikasie met die lede van die maatskappy. Dit is op dié vlak dat nywerhede in S.A. die grootste uitdaging in die gesig staar.

In die verlede was die verhouding tussen bestuur en werker 'n byna patriargale sisteem. Die bestuur het vir die werker gedink en besluit, en kommunikasie was eintlik maar in die vorm van 'n mededeling of aankondiging van 'n verandering in lone, salarisse of werksomstandighede.

Maar met die koms van die Wiehahn-verslag en wat daaruit gevloei het, het dié toestand radikaal verander en het bestuur vandag meer en meer te make met 'n totaal nuwe bedeling — die era van inspraak en bedinging het aangebreek.

Terselfdertyd het ons in die afgelope paar jaar al hoe meer bewus geword van die dualistiese aard van ons Suid-Afrikaanse nywerheid wat binne die raamwerk van 'n pluralistiese gemeenskap moet ontwikkel en gedy. Die dualisme waarna verwys word, word veral op twee vlakke gesien:

- Eerstens die bestaan van bedrywe gebaseer op hoë en uifers gesofistikeerde tegnologie. Daarnaas ondernemings wat sterk op hande-arbeid ingestel is. Kapitaal- teenoor arbeidsintensiewe bedrywe.

Ons het daarin geslaag om 'n hoë mate van tegniese gevorderdheid in ons nywerheidswese te behaal. Aanlegte soos die Sasoleenhede is uniek in die wêreld. Miskien het ons reeds te ver gevorder in hierdie rigting vir ons bepaalde omstandighede. Die behoefte aan arbeidsintensiewe ondernemings bly wesenlik in die oorgangsfase na 'n volwasse ekonomie.

- Tweedens vind ons die bestaan van dualisme in ons ekonomie wat saamhang met die groot gaping tussen die vlakke van opleiding en ondervinding van ons mense — die bestaan van 'n hoë persentasie ongeskoolde arbeid en 'n relatief kleiner element van geskooldheid. 'n Wanbalans. Dit val saam met die heterogene samestelling van ons totale bevolking met sy verskille in taal, kultuur en tradisies.

In ons pluralistiese gemeenskap is daar 'n baie groot element van die derde wêreld. Ek het reeds verwys na die groot uitdaging wat in S.A. aanvaar moet word, nl. om 'n sinryker vennootskap tussen die eerste wêreld se tegnologie en denke en die derde wêreld se arbeidsmag en filosofie tot stand te bring wat daarin sal slaag om die gemeenskap in sy geheel tot die eerste wêreld se standaard te verhoog. Om daarin te slaag, vereis egter 'n totaal nuwe bestuurskultuur, wat meebring dat ons baie sterker sal moet dink om mense te betrek wat hulleself tot nou toe meer aan die ongeskoolde en passiewe kant van die arbeidspektrum bevind het.

Hierdie nuwe kultuur waarbinne ons moet dink, sal 'n verbreding van die begrip van bestuur meebring.

- Ons sal die totale mens moet opvoed en hom leer bestuur.

- Ons sal minder klem op spesialisasie moet laat val, groter erkenning moet verleen aan die elementêre in bestuur- en sterk beroepe moet doen op die vermoë van bestuurders om kennis van die bestuursweese aan ander mense binne die werksituasie oor te dra.
- Ons sal die tradisies, sedes en denkprosesse van ander mense moet leer ken en begryp en dit laat assimileer met die bestuursbegrippe van die moderne wêreld.
- Ons sal 'n nuwe element van beplanning in ons bestuursopleiding en die toepassing daarvan moet inbring. Terwyl die bestuurder van gister en eergister hom besig gehou het met bestuursbegrippe en bestuurstoepassings binne die kader van sy opleiding en agtergrond, sal hy nou hierdie begrippe moet verwerk om dit verstaanbaar en aanvaarbaar te maak vir diegene wat nie dié voorregte en agtergrond het nie. Hy sal dus 'n deel van sy werkdag daaraan moet wy om begrippe aan ander oor te dra en seker te maak dat bestuursbegrippe vir al die betrokkenes dieselfde betekenis het. In die verband sal die vermoë om te kommunikeer en veral om in verskillende tale te kommunikeer, van uiterste belang wees vir die toekomstige bestuursweese.

Die verskynsels wat sedert 1979 ingetree het, soos die totstandkoming van vakbonde, stakings en die algemene bewuswording van die mag van die werker, is 'n manifestasie van diepgaande veranderinge wat in ons gemeenskap plaasvind. Dié veranderinge genoodsaak 'n ingrypende aanpassing in ons bestuurskultuur. Indien ons daarin wil slaag om in Suid-Afrika die vennootskap tot stand te bring waarna ek verwys het, sal denkpatrone gedurende die volgende paar dekades radikale en drastiese verskuiwings moet ondergaan.

Om te verseker dat daar in die verwagtinge van veral swart werkers voldoen kan word, sal 'n tydperk van volgehoue ekonomiese groei in die volgende twintig jaar gehandhaaf moet word. Indien die Suid-Afrikaanse ekonomie daarin kan slaag om 'n gemiddelde reële groei van 4,5% per jaar te handhaaf, bestaan daar 'n sterk moontlikheid dat die gaping tussen wit en swart lewenstandaarde aansienlik sal vernou. Sodoende sal die basiese doelwit van die verhoging van die derde wêreld tot dié van eerste wêreld se standaard bereik kan word. Prof. J.A. Lombard (1981) stel dit só:

It should be emphasised that the basis of this rather comfortable outlook is, of course, the original assumption that the South African economy will be allowed to expand over the next two decades at an average annual real rate of growth of about $4\frac{1}{2}\%$, and having already stated that this growth scenario depends heavily on revolutionary advances in the opportunities and the capabilities of the Non-White people of South Africa in respect of the quality of both their labour and their enterprise, we may indeed regard the exercise as on the whole a case of operation bootstraps. Economists agree that in this respect South Africa can become another economic wonder, following the course of West Germany, Japan and Taiwan.

Maar die uitdaging mag nie onderskat word nie. Sekere geleerdes be-
raam dat agt uit elke tien geskoolde/opgeleide werkers teen die einde
van die eeu swart sal wees. Om die geprojekteerde ekonomiese groei te
beheer, sal dit nodig wees dat twee uit elke drie bestuursposte deur
swart mense gevul moet word. Tans is daar in Suid-Afrika net 5,5% van
die ekonomies aktiewe bevolking op die vlak van professionele, tegnie-
se, administratiewe en bestuurswerkers. Die vergelykende syfers vir die
Verenigde Koningryk en die VSA is 14,7% en 24%. Elke bestuurder in
Suid-Afrika moet dus vandag toesig hou oor 42 werkers. Die naaste wat
hieraan kom, is Australië waar die verhouding 1:11 is.

Die uitdaging waarvoor ons te staan gekom het, is kolossaal. Dit gaan 'n
fundamentele herwaardering van bestuursbenadering kos — trouens,
'n hele nuwe bestuurskultuur. Die sluitsteen van die nuwe benadering
sal kommunikasie wees. Tensy ons daarin kan slaag (en ek glo ons kan)
om vooroordele te oorbrug en deur te dring na die mens self en dit by
hom kan tuisbring dat net 'n gemeenskaplike poging, gebaseer op
wedersydse vertroue en geloof, ons in staat sal stel om die hoë doelwitte
te bereik, sal ons misluk. Dit kan nie anders as deur volgehoue
kommunikasie van die hoogste kwaliteit geskied nie.

Die Staat en die individu

Al ons pogings tot beter kommunikasie tussen nywerheid en werker sal
skipbreuk ly indien daar 'n gebrek aan kommunikasie tussen die Staat
en die werker of individu is. Ek wil nie die politieke terrein betree nie,
maar die Staat se optrede bepaal die lot van die individu en sy
waarneming in hierdie verband sal ongetwyfeld sy reaksie teenoor die
nywerheid en sy omgewing bepaal.

Nou reeds bestaan die gevaar dat vakbonde hulle nuutgevonde magte
kan gebruik om deur middel van ekonomiese druk politieke ideale te
verwesenlik. 'n Voorbeeld van swak kommunikasie tussen die Staat en
die werker was die hele pensioenaangeleentheid. In der waarheid was
die Staat se optrede daarop gemik om die individu te beskerm, maar deur
gebreklike kommunikasie het die individu hom bedreig gevoel en
stakings het gevolg.

Die veranderinge wat deur die aanvaarding van die Wiehahn-kommis-
sie se aanbevelings teweeggebring is, is grondliggende struktuurver-
anderinge (deur die Staat aanvaar), wat baie groter bedingingsmag aan
die werker gee — en die werker voel nou die nywerheid en die Staat aan
die tand met hierdie nuwe magte. Dit kan gesien word aan die groeiende
getal stakings en ook werktoestande sedert die Wiehan-verslag se
aanvaarding.

Daar bestaan 'n duidelike gevaar dat dié nuwe magte vir politieke
doeleindes aangewend kan word, omdat daar 'n gebrekkige kommuni-
kasie tussen die Staat en die individu op sekere vlakke van ons

samelewing bestaan. Tensy daardie kommunikasie verbeter, sal alle pogings van die nywerheid se kant tot mislukking gedoem wees.

Volgens my beskeie mening is kommunikasie 'n sirkel wat net doeltreffend is indien die sirkel gesluit is deur wedersydse begrip. Ons het in Suid-Afrika te make met drie sirkels wat mekaar oorvleuel. In die middelpunt van die drie sirkels is Suid-Afrika. Slegs indien al drie sirkels volledig gesluit is, kan Suid-Afrika onbevrees sy rol as leier in Afrika en as land van Goeie Hoop vir al sy bewoners aanvaar.

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