

**COMMUNICATION INTERVENTIONS FOR DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT
IN A NEW COMPANY – LESSONS FROM KWAZULU-NATAL**

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ABSTRACT

This article explores a South African/Australian corporate joint venture whose corporate culture is bi-national, multiracial and multi-ethnic in character, synthesising a variety of elements including modern first world corporate culture, traditional cultures, and the emerging culture of the “new” South Africa. It is based on a project carried out for Ticor SA, a mineral sands mining and processing facility, sixty percent owned by Kumba Resources Ltd, a publicly listed South African company, and forty percent owned by Ticor Ltd, a publicly listed Australian company and manager of the project. This study employs a case study / participant observer methodology and a theoretical methodology. The author was actively involved in the strategic planning and workshop interventions.

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INTRODUCTION

This work is derived from experiences and issues that arose from a three year, “hands on” culture establishment project for an Australian / South African joint mining venture in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.¹ The author was a member of a team² that developed and facilitated the organisational culture establishment programme from 2004 to 2006. 97% of the workforce (650 employees at all levels) participated in the workshops.

The Australian management team soon realised the complexity of South African intercultural relationships, the changing face of the South African “identity” and how organisational culture differed between the two countries (Wickham 2003/2004).³

Globalisation and changes in South Africa’s political and economic environment in the last decade and its re-admittance into the international arena have had clear consequences for South Africa’s international business practice. In common with all business people who work in environments other than their own, it has become as important to establish sound interpersonal relationships, as it has to acquire professional and technical competence (Herbig & Kramer 1991; Rhinesmith 1996; Waisfisz 1994). An understanding of international business communication has become imperative for the business to succeed in the international marketplace (De Wilde 1991; Martin & Chaney 1992; Moran & Richard 1991). A review of the literature of the past few decades suggests that intercultural communication training of managers has rarely been carried out based on a sound assessment of needs (Baker 1984; Earley 1987; Lee & Larwood 1984; Li 1992; Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou 1987; Steyn 1994). In addition, there is little to indicate that existing intercultural business communication training meets the unique needs of joint ventures in multinational and multicultural contexts.

This article offers a tentative theoretical framework for addressing these issues. While the research deals with the intercultural business communication needs of Ticor SA, the findings suggest an approach towards intercultural business communication training programmes for the increasing number of joint ventures taking place throughout the world.

The first part of this article sketches the key themes of diversity management and organisational culture. Communication is shown to be vital to the development of the organisation and it is posited that culture formation is a consequence of *intercultural communication*. A specific definition is given of the latter, which gives recognition to individual as well as a broadened view of cultural differences.

The work then proceeds to question the notion of “ownership” of organisational culture and touches upon the value of generational theory in this context. It refers to the importance of values in the formation of organisational culture establishment programmes. A values-based approach is suggested with regard to strategic planning.

The final sections of the work examine the basic propositions and conditions necessary for facilitation of cultural change processes and suggest a person-centred approach. The value of using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to contribute to understanding

how people individually differ in the way that they behave is discussed. Finally, some concerns around cultural bias in intercultural communication are explored.

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

South African business organisations, particularly mining operations, are becoming increasingly conscious of the need to manage the need for global competitiveness while managing diversity against a backdrop of rapid social change. The complex and ever-changing world of international management requires not only cultural awareness and sensitivity, but also the ability to change, develop, and improve on-the-job performance. In response to this challenge, most multinational corporations (MNCs) have pursued diversity management training programmes in one form or another.

Carnevale and Stone (1994: 24) argue that creating conditions by which organisations will enjoy a competitive advantage requires an environment receptive to diversity where workers are empowered to use their full capacity and economic forces. In other words, the organisational culture must recognise and adapt to that diversity (Kandola & Fullerton 1994). Kandola and Fullerton (1994) and Carnevale and Stone (1994) have demonstrated the importance of cross-cultural understanding of how differences can be turned into a competitive advantage for the organisation by recognising the potential contributions of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Meyer (1999: 23) warns that “diversity training [is] not helpful when cultural and other differences are presented in so much detail that they contribute to further stereotyping and generalisations based on difference”. While it is obvious that cultural differences exist in a multicultural society, each individual is a unique product of many possible variables and influences. How then do we link the needs of global competitiveness and its cultural requirements with those of diversity management?

KEY THEMES IN DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

According to Kandola and Fullerton (1994), managing diversity acknowledges that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity comprises of *visible and non-visible differences* that include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality, and work style. “It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met” (Kandola & Fullerton 1994: 47). Carnevale and Stone (1994) suggest that organisations should welcome heterogeneity by developing *a variety of initiatives* aimed at building managerial and leadership capacity.

According to Griggs and Louw (1995), valuing diversity occurs at the *personal, interpersonal* and *organisational* levels. Hence the need to accommodate *individual differences* at each level in order to build positive relationships. Diversity includes the spectrum of mannerisms in which people differ, and does not necessarily focus on gender, ethnicity and disability only. “To be successful, management interventions must maximise the potential of the total workforce in all its diversity” (Griggs & Louw 1995: 21).

They contend further that the challenge of diversity is not restricted to affirmative action or equal employment opportunity issues, but should also focus on *intercultural* awareness in a rapidly *changing* multicultural society. Madi (1995: 16) remarks that “the issue is not that there should be an Africanisation of the corporate culture in South Africa but, rather that there should be South Africanisation of the corporate culture”.

According to Human and Bowmaker-Falconer (1992: 27), “managing diversity is about creating an environment where people from diverse backgrounds can *express* themselves, grow, develop and be promoted on merit”.

One widely used activity in diversity training is the use of *workshops* as a platform to raise awareness and sensitivity about diversity issues. The primary diversity-training approach postulated by Carnevale and Stone (1994: 30) is appropriate for this article as it merits attention in the context of the South African setting. According to Carnevale and Stone (1994), when people from diverse cultures interact, they tend to respond according to their cultural conditioning about acceptable behaviour. Such responses are spontaneous and are usually based on the assumption of the individual’s own *value* system. Hence it works to achieve its long-range goals of improving morale, productivity and creativity, thereby contributing to the organisation’s competitive position. In a knowledge-based economy, the model is designed to increase employee knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity and creates appropriate attitudes and assumptions to eliminate stereotyping. Carnevale and Stone (1994) focus on the *cognitive* features of diversity training with the aim of heightening awareness, and providing *information, tools* and *techniques* linking development imperatives to diversity training.

From the above discussion the key role that communication, culture, values, cognitive processes and the recognition of individual differences play in diversity management is clear. These themes recur and are elaborated upon in the course of this article.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Buzz concepts abound, but *business culture* or its broader synonym *organisational culture* has withstood numerous business management fashions and trends. It surfaced in the United States in the 1930s (Bjerke 1999: 1) but burst on to the intellectual landscape of business in earnest in the early 1980s. Since then it has captured the interests of academics, journalists and business people alike (Hofstede 1984; Peters & Waterman 1984; Schein 1985; Deal & Kennedy 1982).

Much of the interest in the concept was due to growth of much larger organisations, the expansion of international markets, and the advance of transnational corporations. By the early 1990s, the term was firmly entrenched. It is now a major foundation block of the view of the corporation as a universally dominant culture.

An informative discussion of organisational culture usually begins by looking at the concept of “culture” that has deep roots in the discipline of social anthropology and the general field of socio-political analysis. There are numerous classifications and

definitions of the concept but this author has chosen two for the purposes of this research. According to Trompenaars (1994: 5), culture is divided into two layers, the explicit and implicit layer. The explicit layer is about external manifestations, such as languages, cuisine, clothing, etc. The implicit layer consists of norms and values. Norms refer to the mutual sense as a group of what is right and wrong and how things should be done. Values, on the other hand, determine understandings about what is good and bad and are shared by the group. The author looks in more detail at the importance of values later in this article.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines culture as “the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population”.

For the communication scientist, this gets to the heart of the matter. It recognises that culture cannot form without *communication*. The relationship between culture and communication is important to many different disciplines. As a result, many terms have been used to describe the various ways that culture and communication intersect, including *cross-cultural communication*, *intracultural communication*, *interethnic communication*, *interracial communication* and *international communication*.

For the purpose of this article, the author takes the position of Lustig and Koester (1993) that culture formation is a consequence of *intercultural communication*:

The term intercultural denotes the presence of at least two individuals, who are culturally different from each other on such important attributes as their value orientations, preferred communication codes, role expectations, and perceived rules of social relationships (Lustig and Koester 1993: 59).

In comparative national management studies, “anthropological culture” has usually been considered to be a background factor (almost synonymous with ethnic group) within the broad framework of management principles which are held to be universal (Ajiferuke & Boddewyn 1970: 153; Bjerke 1999: 71; Oden 1997: 71). The dominant role of Western corporate culture in mediating our encounters with the everyday world is “self-evident” (Deeks 1993: 1). “The pre-eminent form today (of culture), at least in the industrialised centers of Euro-American culture, is corporate enterprise” (Frederick 1995: 79).

From this perspective, “organisational culture” is a “business culture” and business practices and values are expected to dominate the material, intellectual and spiritual life of the entire community. Does this suggest that the corporate form is a foreordained outcome of evolutionary process or that its appearance and prominence at this point in time represents a superiority over alternative ways of organising business operations?

Critics would argue that they remain ostensibly Western cultural constructs, distanced from the wider “intercultural culture” that is increasingly manifesting itself in new definitions of nationhood and membership in geo-political communities.

In many developing countries like South Africa, one finds a greater emphasis on collectivities, rather than the individual. Western management from the developed countries has often encountered and underestimated it. The advice of most business consultants has been “adapt or die”.⁴ The importance of cultural collectivities must be acknowledged as a key value during the organisational culture establishment programme.

In developing countries, other business forms, individual proprietorships and partnerships are numerically predominant. Historically the corporate form is relatively recent. Long before the corporation, there was bartering of several varieties: simple trading; face-to-face exchanges; family-, tribal-, clan- and village-based trading practices; and a great diversity of other economic activities recorded by anthropologists and economic historians. In fact, these are still the most common forms to be found in Africa. Yet most often we assume that it is corporate culture that defines the world, and spend little time considering the way the cultural environment defines the corporation.

‘OUR’ ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE?

In the South African context, the question of “our” culture is a vexed one. South Africa is characterised by numerous collective identities and a new emerging sense of nationhood. The country’s sense of nation and of culture are in a stage of transformation. Hofstede (1980) argues that people carry “mental programmes” that are developed and reinforced through their experience, and that these “mental programmes” contain a component of national culture. After analysing the data from more than 40 countries, Hofstede (1980) concludes that these mental programmes denote the existence of four underlying value dimensions along which countries could be positioned into culture areas (Hofstede 1980). These four dimensions are (Hofstede 1980; 1983; 1984; 1985):

- power distance, i.e. the extent of power inequality among members of a society;
- uncertainty avoidance, i.e. the extent to which members of society feel threatened by and try to avoid future uncertainty or ambiguous situations;
- individualism and collectivism, which describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that is reflected in the way people live together; and
- masculinity and femininity, i.e. the extent of roles division between sexes to which people in a society put different emphasis on work goals and assertiveness as opposed to personal goals and nurturance.

It has been argued that these dimensions are important for considering the effects of cultural differences on management and organisation (Sui Pheng & Shi Yuquan 2002).

Many of the recent political changes in South Africa have had far-reaching effects on these dimensions. Individuals who were formerly excluded from opportunities have

increasing and expanding possibilities. As a result there is alteration of organisational practices, cultural norms, and a growing sense of national identity.

Fadiman (2000: 79) cautions Western companies doing business in Africa that the environment “will seem so Westernised that you will assume you can work with the firm in Western ways. This may prove unexpectedly difficult.” One of the biggest challenges that business people face in a multicultural environment is the process of decision-making. Fadiman (2000: 84), for example, describes three African management tools as timelessness, consultation and consensus. All three of these clash with the management expectations of global business culture. The latter prefers fixed deadlines and individual decisions; it rejects consensus building as too slow. It strives for speed (which we call “timeliness”) and admires swift decisions, praising those who “wing it” or “think on their feet”.

Africans prefer decisions to be reached through consultation and consensus, without reference to fixed times. Although African managers can make snap judgments as rapidly as anyone else, they remain aware of ancestral obligations regarding the need for consultation. By acting alone they flout their group’s collective wisdom; by consulting, they honour it. The Zulu call the consensus-building process *ndaba*. To *ndaba* is to assemble, consult, and thereby build consensus. In KwaZulu-Natal (where, in the case of Ticor SA, convincing traditional leadership was key to obtaining mining rights), the first business visit and initial business dealings are approached as a leisurely process of “getting to know each other” as is the way in traditional Zulu culture. Conversation may not get around to business for several days, weeks, even months and it is considered rude for the visiting businessman to press the issue, to show impatience or to fail to respond to social preliminaries (Fakazi 2003).

One might posit a similar need for the consultative process in the New Zealand context. The Maori proverb “He huihuinga taangata he pukenga whakaaro” (A meeting of people; a wellspring of ideas) captures the idea. Marae Protocol “is part of Maori identity countrywide” (Gates 2004: 62).

GENERATIONAL THEORY

Most business leaders would acknowledge that changes in workers attitudes and expectations towards the workplace are manifested most strongly in an organisation’s younger employees. This aspect needs to be recognised in the organisational culture programme.

One of the most frequently asked questions about generational theory is whether it applies to non-Western cultures, especially to people living in developing countries (Codrington 2005). Many question its applicability in China, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In South Africa, diversity management tends increasingly to take into account generation differences. A Human Capital Satisfaction Survey in 2003 (http://www.kelly.co.za/kelly_frame.htm) sampled 2000 employees from more than 250 companies. It used the four standard “Western” generations that are frequently

measured internationally: Matures born pre-1945; Baby Boomers born 1945-1965; Generation X born 1966-1980; Generation Y born after 1980.

Older generations display many similar characteristics across different countries, consistent with the predictions of generational theory. In black cultures in Africa, for instance, the older generations are very traditional and conservative. They expect to be respected simply because of their age and social position, and prefer hierarchical structures of control. Conversely, younger generations often take value positions in contradiction to these, questioning traditional cultural norms and aspiring to a broader, global sense of mobility (*Trend Youth 2*: 2004). The flight of younger people from New Zealand in search of work experience overseas tends to support this thesis (Collins 2005). The younger a person is, the more likely that generational characteristics will fit, regardless of their culture or country. It should be noted that generation differences also have implications for levels of formal education, lifestyle preferences, length of tenure and several other factors, but it is beyond the scope of this article to develop these aspects further here.

It is clear that generational differences add another dimension to the work of the culture establishment consultant who must take these dynamic forces of diversity into account in the development of the organisational culture.

VALUES AS THE BEDROCK OF CULTURE

William Frederick, in his book *Values, Nature and Culture in the American Corporation* (1995), argues for a deeper appreciation of the normative power of values that goes far beyond the often-facile statement of corporate values. A deeper layer of business consciousness is brought to light, one that harbors the fundamentals of business commitment, business ideology, and business philosophy. The culture, the core of any organisation, is the sum of the values, beliefs, and assumptions of its people. He contends that values are the fundamental source of workplace motives, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. The substance of that deep lying stratum — its active content that comes to the surface of everyday business life as behaviour — consists of values.

All people in business — whether executives or employees, competitors or suppliers, investors or speculators, customers or salespeople, accountants or marketers have values. Those values constantly come into play as decisions are made, policies are formulated, new markets are entered, weaker firms decline and die, and as new products pour out of factories, laboratories, and software design centres. Simply put, values can be more readily understood as standing at the centre of business theory rather than at the margin.

The many reasons cited for the failure of organisational behaviour change efforts can be reduced to one sentence: The culture of the organisation remained unchanged or was never clearly formulated as a consensus in the first place. Any attempt to introduce management practices or organisational behaviour changes that are radically different from the existing culture will almost certainly fail if these changes are incompatible

with the existing culture. The culture, that sum of values, beliefs, and assumptions that is the core of any organisation, must support the new initiatives if these behavioural changes are to take hold. Without an understanding of the bedrock of consensual culture of the company, no new set of skills or work processes will bring about the kind of reform that is needed.

Values, for instance, can appear or be hidden at various levels of depth. At the conscious level, or close to it, they may appear as behavioural norms. Such norms are written or unwritten rules of the game. The author's role as consultant is to "expose" the values, build consensus on which values are shared, and suggest respect for those that are the subject of different values throughout the organisation. For example, the South African black executive's managerial behaviour is heavily influenced by the structure of the society outside his firm and by the values, norms and expectations of his people. One consequence of this is that the male black manager sees himself as a father figure and the female black manager as a mother figure. Similarly, black culture tends to suppress individual initiative and often tames the spirit of the most resourceful factory floor workers who are not accorded either formal traditional cultural status or corporate status.

Norms, values and other aspects of culture are generally developed over time. In anthropological definitions of culture, a group must have been together for a period of time for its members to develop a mutual social understanding. The same goes for an organisational or business culture. In a new organisation or company, it is possible to devise means to encourage people to associate and develop common social mechanisms of integration and avoid the situation where even when an organisation has existed for a long time, members may have associated in smaller units within the whole group and developed different subcultures within the organisation, resulting in a lack of overall cohesiveness of organisational culture.

VALUES AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is currently one of the preoccupations of South African corporates. When planning strategy, we are imagining the future, and through analysis and fine-tuning the detail, the plan takes on a view of commercial success in and of itself, ultimately the end goal in which positions and not people count the most.

When this happens, organisations forget that success has little to do with planning and a whole lot more to do with "doing". Defining strategy, as difficult as it may seem, is the easy part. By far the hardest part is making strategy happen. The brutal truth is that the difference between companies that are successful and those that are not is their ability to execute, and execution depends on willing and able people.

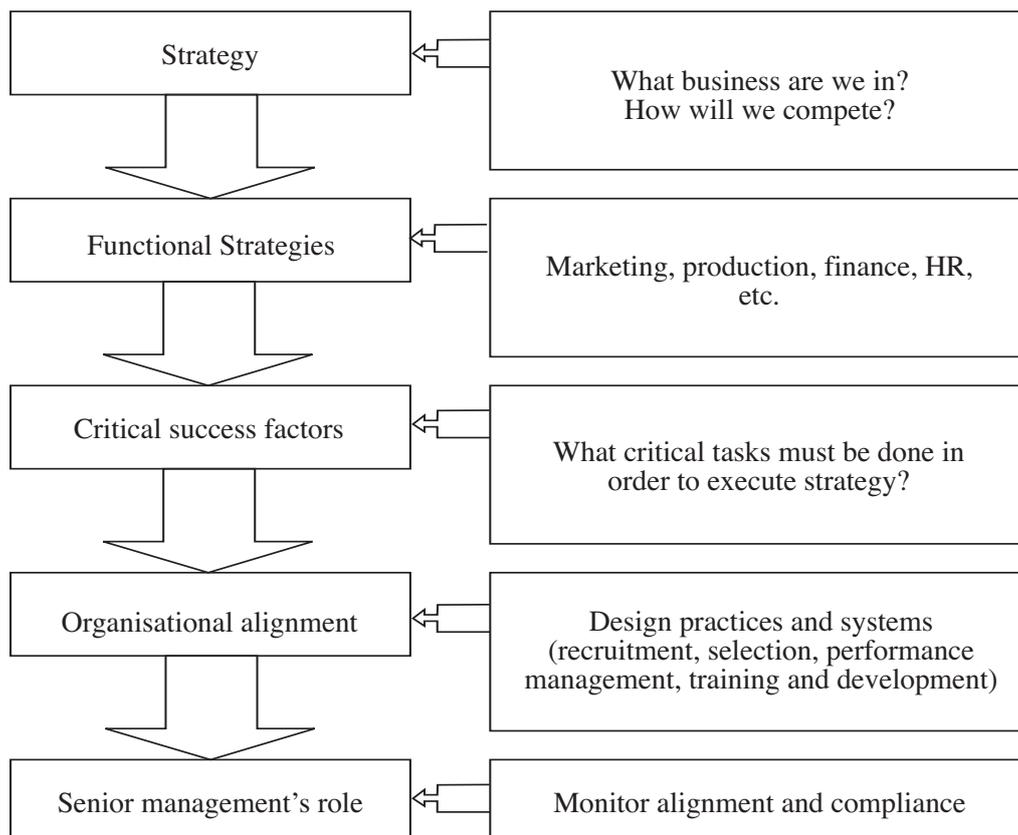
An imperative for South African companies is to gain sustainable competitive advantage by unleashing extraordinary performance from "ordinary" people. This challenge goes broader and deeper than just training. We need to question our philosophies, how we craft strategies, structure our organisations and design

management processes, our cultural beliefs, our prejudices and preconceptions, our values and our style of leadership and management. The result of this questioning should be an alternative approach to developing organisational strategy, and therefore culture establishment.

What must we “do” in order to gain sustainable competitive advantage? Every organisation, public or private, small, medium or large, must seek answers to this question if it is to survive and grow.

The typical approach to finding answers is to conduct research, analyse the research and apply a variety of synthesising methods and processes of logic which distill thinking into a strategic plan. The plan is prioritised, tactically arranged and allocated to chunks of time. The organisation then attempts to align around the plan and hopefully, flowing from this, appropriate action is taken that finally bears fruit and produces the expected performance. One can depict this approach in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: COMMON APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING



Within this approach, senior management's role is to monitor alignment and ensure compliance — in other words command and control is the underlying belief.

Harvard Business School guru Sumantra Ghoshal (Ghoshal & Barlett 1997) argues the need to rescue management practice from the blind alleys that it has run into by recasting management theory from the ground up. He sees today's disillusion with companies and managers as the fault of management theory — in particular the narrowly economic assumptions about human nature. Today's management theory, he suggests, is “undersocialised and one-dimensional, a parody of the human condition more appropriate to a prison or a madhouse than an organisation which seeks to be ‘world-class’”.

The fatal flaw in this strategy-structure-systems approach lies hidden in its objective: to create a management system that could minimise the idiosyncrasies of human behaviour and individual differences and the need for honest and authentic communication. System based theory suggests that if the three elements of strategy, structure and systems were “properly” designed and “effectively implemented”, large, complex organisations could run with people as replaceable parts.

The “idiosyncrasies of human behaviour” that the traditional approach inherently seeks to control are unfortunately very familiar to all of us and based on the following negative assumptions we tend to make about people:

- People are effort averse;
- Management and employee interests are not aligned;
- People are opportunistic, self-interest seeking and dishonest;
- Managers need to design incentives to overcome these difficulties;
- High-powered incentives (i.e., money) are better than low-powered incentives; and
- People work for money and will only comply with management to obtain it.

For any strategic plan to work in the long term, we need to accept assumptions that people:

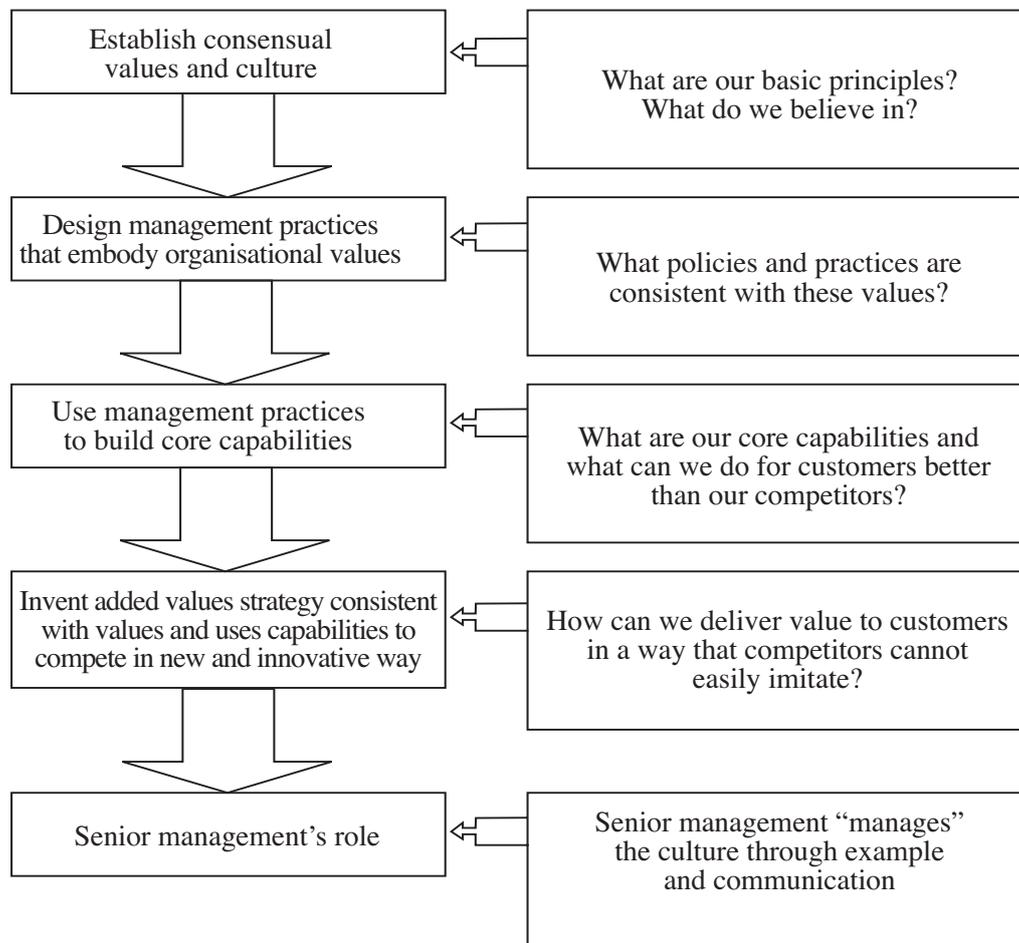
- Are capable of making decisions;
- Need to engage in communication about the business and their role in it;
- Are responsible and willing to be held accountable for their actions;
- Like challenges and learning new things;
- Are motivated by good intention;
- Desire to make a positive contribution and be recognised for it through good communication practice; and
- Want to be recognised as unique and don't like to be treated like machines.

From this starting point the strategy process for senior management becomes:

- Define the core values;
- Develop and build the culture based on these norms;
- Craft business strategies that leverage these capabilities; and
- Ensure organisational alignment and consistency of strategy and human resources practices.

Figure 2 illustrates the process.

FIGURE 2: VALUES AND CULTURE APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING



BASIC PROPOSITIONS AND CONDITIONS FOR FACILITATION

Professor Lovemore Mbigi (1977: 39) emphasises that “fundamental transformation cannot be driven exclusively by in-house facilitators: an outside facilitator as an impartial observer and commentator is crucial”. The limitations of the internal approach is that insiders have to conform to internal politics and power relations and, through omission, have to avoid confrontation with real issues and key influential members of the organisation. The external facilitator must “have the courage to say the unsayable”. If in-house facilitators develop the courage to say the unsayable, they are rarely forgiven.

Typically, organisational culture interventions involve only senior management and union leaders in half-hearted efforts to short circuit broad based organisational transformation. As Mbigi (1977: 39) points out, they rarely succeed because the whole organisation has to understand and identify with the transformation agenda. What is required is an inclusive, multi-levelled, multiracial and cross-functional forum. These need to be held away from the workplace, lasting three to five days to allow for bonding. They must run around the core themes in the organisation, but be flexible so that participants can raise burning issues, collective fears and historical and current grievances with a view to developing high levels of trust. This requires an external, credible facilitator.

Secondly, the intervention should deal establish a shared agenda of high performance and survival that will initiate the long and difficult road of developing a sense of shared vision and destiny. Ultimately a team of in-house change facilitators must be trained and licensed to run the process for a further two years. Their attributes are credibility, a lack of historical baggage, dissatisfaction with the status quo and the passion to make a personal difference.

In the author’s experience, a scapegoat is required to project the burden of the past. In South African organisations the legacy of apartheid, problems in the marketplace and government policies have proved popular scapegoats. Story-telling and humour can be used to ease the tension and collective pain.

Once a decision has been made to move forward, leadership must continually affirm their commitment to transformation and project confidence regarding the future. Transformation initiatives must be implemented to their final conclusion regardless of the problems encountered during transformation.

What is the theoretical requirement for how a facilitator can engage others in a culture establishment programme or a change management programme? Carl Rogers, the psychologist best known for his “client-centred” approach, provides the answer:

Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviour; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided (Rogers 1980: 115).

Therefore, to create the necessary climate for the development of a credible culture establishment programme, we must start with the individual, as argued earlier in this paper. “The best vantage point for understanding behaviour is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself” (Rogers 1987: 494).

One of the challenges the Tigor SA project was to introduce a methodology where individual differences could be recognised to be as important as cultural differences in the wider context of acknowledging diversity. The tool used to generate this awareness was the Myers-Briggs psychological profiling method.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was used to contribute to understanding how people individually differ in the way that they behave. MBTI is based on C. G. Jung’s theory of psychological types, which suggests that differences in people’s communication behaviour are caused by differences in the way that they prefer to use their minds. The profile identified for each individual indicates the function or approach preferred and thus used most often. Through exercising the different preferences each person develops a unique way of dealing with life, interacting with people and reaching conclusions. Such variations in individual preferences and how they are used and developed result in fundamental differences and predictable patterns in human behaviour.⁵

There are many threats to individuals who come from diverse backgrounds to participate in groups — in this case often including fellow team members and team leaders with large variations in age, experience, education and training and cultural background. There is, however, from a theoretical perspective an answer to this problem in terms of facilitation. According to Rogers (1987: 517):

Under certain conditions, involving primarily complete absence of any threat to the self-structure, experiences that are inconsistent with it may be perceived, and examined, and the structure of self revised to assimilate and include such experiences.

The conditions for such an examination are a workshop climate in which participants are accepted unconditionally, without judgement or condemnation. The facilitator, under these conditions, must first coax each individual to explore and present their “symbolised self” and consider the positions of others through a communicative process. Clearly, good intentions are not enough. It requires skill and empathy to inculcate a sense of trust, a plainly spelt out guarantee of the preservation of self-dignity whatever position is taken by the participant. In other words a clear statement that “there are no wrong opinions, attitudes or answers in this workshop” is required. Participants should not only not feel threatened, but must feel that they are being accepted totally.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

When there is no stress or threat to the self, what changes can occur? Since people are unique, it must be stressed that no real predictions can be made. The facilitator cannot

set goals for the participant, as only the participant can decide in what way and how he/she will change their outlook towards the organisational culture. However, the key is to provide the “symbolic” platform from which the participant may view the terrain for change:

Psychological adjustment exists when the concept of the self is such that all the sensory and visceral experiences of the organism are, or may be, assimilated on a symbolic level into a consistent relationship with the self (Rogers 1987: 513).

This proposition recognises the importance of certain situations, including the group situation. According to this proposition, group members will be able to deal with the group situation if it is in agreement with their own perspectives and reconstruction of the self. This emphasises the importance of the maintenance objectives in the group, in other words the objectives that members of the group can identify as relevant to them.

As far as the task objectives are concerned, the group is precisely one of those places where people can share their experiences — both positive and negative — in a safe environment and atmosphere, where they can symbolise their experiences and consequently make them more acceptable to the self. For instance, it may be possible when a group of people symbolise their problem that they will search more consciously for solutions as they see them. Because the group may be regarded as a support group, the proposed solutions will be sincere and creative.

For example, a group of operators from the Tap Room floor, a particularly dangerous, noisy and labour intensive area of the Ticor SA smelter, identified a common problem. They all had to have matriculation in mathematics and science at the advanced level as a condition of employment. Yet they experienced a “glass ceiling” in terms of opportunities for advancement and movement to elsewhere in the plant, which was aberrant in a country where such academic achievement in these subjects is scarce. Given the lack of interest by other operators in this area of the plant to the Tap Floor, it was difficult to replace Tap Room floor operators by transference from other sections. The supervisors and top management had tacitly consented to this situation. The group formulated a suggestion in which the requirement for advanced mathematics and science be dropped in the recruitment process, and the facilitator helped them address this matter to management in the form of a formal, written report and, when later in day the CEO visited the workshop, the matter was also put directly to him. As a result, posts were eventually filled providing improved career pathing for the existing incumbents.

A PERSON-CENTRED PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE

The person-centred approach, well known in the field of psychology, was developed by Carl Rogers (1987). His theoretical ideas are formulated in his now famous nineteen propositions. These propositions about what motivates people on various levels of consciousness provide tentative guidelines for facilitators in their efforts to understand, think about and make sense of what we can observe of others.

We can describe culture as being person-centred, existing in the minds of people, their feelings, meanings, values and behaviour. Culture is individual, distinguishes us from others and shifts the focus from the problem to the person and also determines our understanding of other's behaviour. "Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the centre" (Rogers 1987:483). This statement also implies that culture is also seen as always in flux; it is forever changing and adapting to new information. The notion of a South African "rainbow" culture, discussed in this article, is a good example. We need to add that it is equally important to recognise that no two people share exactly the same cultural world (Du Toit *et al.* 1998: 200). Although people may come from the same ethnic group, you may still have different perspectives.

Authors such as Le Croy (1992) and Egan (1994) take this approach so seriously that they see working interculturally as not only as working with people from other cultures. Le Croy (1992: 215), for example, mentions differences such as gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic, cultural and racial differences. These may influence each person. According to Egan (1994: 52), every person can be seen as coming from a different cultural background. Any two-way conversation — even one between two identical twins — is in a very real sense an intercultural event, because each person is a different individual with differences in terms of personal assumptions, beliefs, values, norms and patterns of behaviour. This implies that the facilitator should be sensitive towards each person, sharing perspectives with each person, group or community. Apart from individual culture, every group and community also has its own "culture" or frame of reference that is part of their decisions and behaviour (Du Toit *et al.* 1998: 200).

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THE FACILITATOR

It goes without saying that if facilitators feel relatively good about themselves and their own value systems, they might be in a position to be more open and not be threatened by the different value system of the person from another culture (or even the same culture). They can be more accepting and open to listen to the person / group / community in front of them, without having the need to change (or confront) their value system. The author, as facilitator, is not a position to comment on this.

The theory (thinking / perception), values and skills (action) when working interculturally are exactly the same as with working people from one's own cultural group. Empathy is empathy — a "way of being", regardless of the people we are in contact with.

Intercultural work sometimes offers the advantage that the facilitator is aware that he / she does not know what meanings the client attaches to particular situations. The facilitator then explores these meanings with the client. When the facilitator and the client come from the same culture, the facilitator is inclined to presume that he / she knows which meanings the people attach to the situation and therefore does not necessarily always explore them. The facilitator makes assumptions that have not been validated by the client. For example, in one session an Afrikaans-speaking employee

who formerly worked on a mine in the North West Province, indicated that travelling to a venue “only” 200 km away from the mine was “close”. In the author’s mind, 10-20 km is “close”. Conversely, a young, black empowerment employee said that although he lived only 20 km away from “town” (Empangeni) the lack of reliable public transport meant that it took considerable organisation to get to this “close” town. Distance in the context of South Africa is different from distance in say New Zealand or the United Kingdom.

Facilitators in the South African context know for example that amongst the Indian population Hindus will not eat beef whereas Muslims will insist on Halaal food. African South Africans will often be unhappy unless meat is served at lunch (“inyama”). On the other hand, younger people in their twenties from the “rainbow” group often will prefer “take away” type food that includes “French fries” or the South African variant *slap chips* (literally “sloppy chips”).

As is required in working with people in the same culture, intercultural work requires that the facilitator attempt to determine what his / her prejudices or stereotyping in respect of other cultures are and why he / she differs from them or feels threatened by them. Okun (1992: 245) points out that the facilitator is often not even aware of his / her prejudices or discomfort unless he / she actively monitors it in the workshop situation.

Rogers first proposition is that people’s experiential world is private and known only to them, unless shared with others in some way or another. The contexts of communication are important here. Commonly, communication authors describe a number of *contexts* of communication that are important in encountering and relating with people, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public and mass communication contexts, all of which have their own unique dynamics (for example Mersham & Skinner 1999).

We might argue that good communication is measured by what degree we engage in the recognition of the other as an individual. This applies equally in the small group, but opportunities to do this are more limited than in a face to face dyad (Konopka 1972: 126-127).

As a result, the facilitator has to work methodically to interact with everyone, but in what appears to be a natural way. Structured interaction sessions can assist. Here the facilitator goes round the table and elicits responses on a theme or topic. Good corporate culture facilitators use these sessions to ask participants to describe themselves as individuals. This can be “Where are you from, what do you do at work and why are you good at it?” Questions that ask for a personal view are helpful. For example “Who is the leader in your life who stands out? What were their leadership traits that you admired?”

Once completed, to engage the dialogue, the facilitator can then ask each of the participants if that is the way they treat their work colleagues and in the case of leaders, members of their teams — or family members. This process of “holding up the mirror” is an effective communication trigger and sets off numerous debates about *values*.

From this base, the participants can be broken up into smaller groups to establish common values that all members support. As a facilitator it is often useful to make the composition of each group as diverse as practically possible with regards to ethnicity, race, gender and age. In this researcher's experience, when groups report back on their values exercise, no matter what the composition of the various groups, there is exceptional commonality and consistency in the expression of such values. There will also inevitably be differences. This is important because it offers opportunities for growth and clarification. As Rogers (1987:522) puts it:

As the individual perceives and accepts into his self-structure more of his organic experiences, he finds that he is replacing his present value system – based largely upon introjections which have been distortedly symbolised – with a continuing organismic valuing process.

Given the context, the facilitator needs to engage in situations that take into account intercultural communication, conflict resolution and the autobiographical “self” of the communicator. As Du Toit *et al.* (1998: 3) put it: “All humans have unique experiences, on a conscious as well as an unconscious level” and this informs how people perceive themselves and their workplace. The experiential world is knowable only to the individual, which means that outsiders can only form an idea of an experience if the individual tells them about it. The facilitator's biggest challenge is to encourage individuals to communicate and explore their own, and others', experiential worlds in an authentic and meaningful way.

CONCLUSION

Organisation culture establishment and diversity management in joint ventures of a bi-national, multiracial and multi-ethnic nature require broader definitions of diversity that take into account factors such as generational differences and emerging, reconstituted definitions of nationhood. A values approach, focusing on a wider definition of diversity, should be used as a base upon which to build organisational culture. Communication across and through all levels is necessary to implement the process of culture formation.

Organisational culture establishment is a complex, multi-faceted process that must necessarily synthesise elements of modern, first world global culture with elements of an older, traditional definition of “anthropological culture”.

Endnotes

¹ Ticor South Africa is a mineral sand mining and processing facility near the Port of Richards Bay in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. Sixty percent of the project is owned by Kumba Resources Ltd, a publicly listed South African company. The other forty percent owned by Ticor Ltd, a publicly listed Australian company. Ticor Ltd (Australia) manages the project. The project is based on three high-grade mineral sands deposits with reserves of more than 16 million tonnes of ilmenite, rutile and zircon and leucoxene heavy minerals. A smelter upgrades the ilmenite to titania slag. The value of the project is R2.6 billion (approx US\$ 372 million). The commodities business in general,

and mineral sands mining in particular, are characterised by similar technologies, products and services. Management realised from the start that only the quality of the workforce, driven by authentic corporate values, could ensure competitiveness in such an environment.

² The author wishes to acknowledge the expertise, knowledge and assistance of consultant Paul Cheshire of Business Improvement Australia in the development stages of the Tidor SA programme *Our Business, Our Future* and the following team members: Koos Davel, Chief Learning Officer, Tidor SA, who partnered the author in every workshop over the two year period and gave freely of his keen insights into the personalities and structures of the company; Thami Msubo, Director of Human Resources, Tidor SA, who unstintingly attended many sessions representing the company as a member of Exco; Elaine Palmer, HR practitioner, Tidor SA, for initially guiding and supporting me through the MBTI administration process; and Steve Wickham, the irrepressible CEO of Tidor SA who “lived” the company values through action and deed, and whose total “hands on” involvement and commitment to the programme makes him an exception to the norm in interventions of this nature. Finally, a vote of thanks to the 650 Tidor people whose enthusiasm and participation in the workshops were the most important inputs of all.

³ The question of differences in organisational culture between Australian and South African mining management teams attracted extensive media attention during the merger of BHP, Australia’s largest corporation, with Billiton, the British/South African minerals giant, in 2001 to create the largest diversified mining group in the world. The key challenges facing BHP and Billiton were to create a new management culture by blending Billiton’s aggressive acquisition policy with the more calculating and methodical corporate governance systems of the larger Australian company. The merger was conditional on South African Brian Gilbertson, former deputy CEO of Billiton, taking over as chief executive once the integration was complete. After only six months in the seat, Gilbertson resigned with an A\$30 million “golden handshake”. Company media releases cited “irreconcilable” differences in culture and approach (between Gilbertson and the BHP Billiton board) that could not be resolved, signalling that the first attempt at cultural engineering at the senior management level failed.

Differences in organisational culture between Australian and South African companies have been reported by Australian mining recruitment agencies when recruiting South African senior professionals for posts in Australia. According to Tony Turton, an Australian based mining recruitment specialist, South African middle management “are used to working with a workforce that is not quite as sophisticated as the workforce in Australia... a lot of people from SA are used to ‘having feedback systems and management control systems – try and do it here and people say back off’ ” (cited in Fraser 2004:12).

⁴ An expression from a speech by former President P.W. Botha, the ‘iron fist’ of the apartheid era, often aired because of its illustrative ironic lesson.

⁵ In deciding whether the MBTI is appropriate for clients from collectivist cultures, practitioners need to assess degrees of acculturation. This presupposes cultural sensitivity on behalf of the facilitator in countries such as South Africa and New Zealand where there is a legacy of distrust concerning “Western” individualism and where values related to communalism are strongly in evidence. Clients whose primary cultural reference is their collectivist culture may find taking the MBTI unhelpful,

while those who are bicultural or whose primary reference is the majority culture are less likely to experience such difficulties.

For example, Colin Hopkirk (cited in Kirby & Barger 1998: 369-70) reports on using the MBTI with New Zealand Maori: "They perceive and experience themselves first as a part of the whole creation, second as part of the hapu (tribe) of which they are the product, third as part of the whanau (extended family) from which they descend, and only last as a distinct individual personality." In spite of these difficulties, Hopkirk states that, in his experience, Maori who are bicultural "seem to accept the MBTI and often find it sensible and useful". Likewise, De Beer makes the following observation about using the MBTI with South African Whites, Afrikaners, and Blacks: "We have not really had major problems with people responding to the indicator. ...We have been surprised at how easily most cultures seem to understand the items" (cited in Kirby & Barger 1998: 370).

This is the also the experience of the author. The preferred way to do this is to engage multicultural groups during workshops about how they each experience and express their type preferences within their culture. Evidence from interviews with people of different types in a variety of cultures supports both the existence of the underlying type patterns and differences in the ways they are experienced and expressed in different cultures (Barger & Kirby 1995).

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