

## Commitment - the challenge for communicators in 2005

Professional communications work seems to get harder each year. Looking back over 2004, the challenge of communicating inside organisations in South Africa seemed insurmountable at the time. The essence of the challenge is perhaps best described by two examples, at the opposite ends of the polls, which highlight lack of commitment.

By [John Bradfield](#) 10 Jan 2005

On the one hand, we have dissatisfaction with work at the top. Marti Smye in her book, "Is it too late to run away and join the circus?" found in her research that about 60% of executives, comprising captains of global companies, would rather be doing something else than working in their current jobs. Many would jump at the chance to walk out of the door of their large company, forget the company song, and find something better. One of her interview respondents summed it up best: "I have a feeling that they promised me something better than this for a life, but I can't find the original contract."

On the other hand, employees sometimes also just seem to be going through the motions to survive. A recent email that popped up in my email inbox presented the startling fact that more than half of most companies' employees come to work just to do their job. They try to keep out of the politics, the boss' rudeness, and just get by with enough work to keep them in the game. Yet, the author of the email pointed out that the corporate strategists, human resources, communications, and marketing functionaries are there to try to turn employees into ambassadors for the company so that they may deal effectively with customers and improve the business.

In South Africa the challenges intensify. We have people who were excluded feeling blocked and frustrated while previous beneficiaries of the system watch and wonder as they get less and are asked to give more. At the same time, both are expected to join with their compatriots and work together in unified teams.

With both upper management and employees not really wanting to be where they are but needing to make money to live, pay off mortgages, cars, and education, the question must be asked whether a basic organisation can provide a sense of purpose, connection and common effort, and help to turn employees into ambassadors for their companies.

Leadership, culture, cooperation and communications help point towards an answer. But commitment completes the equation.

Leadership today is cited as an important part of organisational success. However, leadership is not that easy to define, emulate, and train for. A rather blunt definition of leadership is that leaders initiate or instigate change. Managers, instead, maintain the status quo. If this is so, what are the essential roles of the leader? A University of California study found that the roles of the leader are: to initiate structure and provide consideration. Essentially leaders need to provide the organisational structure within which employees operate. As quality guru, W Edward Deming has pointed out; it is not the leader's task to beat up the people for greater quality and productivity, but to change the system. The other dimension - consideration -- includes the empathy that leaders provide for their people so that they may operate in an environment where people and interpersonal issues are important.

Today more than ever before, culture has become increasingly important to support the company's vision,

mission, and business objectives. Culture itself is difficult to define and there are many definitions. The basic definition of culture is that it is the shared norms, beliefs, values and management style of an organisation. The dimension of culture that is increasingly important is adaptability to change. With the global marketplace and technology changing at such a rapid clip, the adaptive organisation peopled with employees who can adapt to change is increasingly important for competitiveness. However, given prevailing attitudes, it is exceedingly difficult to change culture.

Whatever the existing attitudes, one of the most important things is to share values that help people in the company work towards a common effort. Organisations thrive or decline depending on cooperation at all levels. It is critical that the majority of employees find ways to cooperate because without joint effort the organisation will not achieve its goals. Where there is conflict and the absence of cooperation, communications can assist in helping to identify common ground and help to manage coalitions of interest to the mutual benefit of all parties.

As people in companies work more in teams with flatter organisational structures, communication takes on an even greater importance. Communication provides feedback from the environment so that teams, divisions and the organisation itself can adapt rapidly to changing circumstances.

In the real world, where reality consists of employees who sometimes lack commitment and bosses who wish they were somewhere else, communications has a challenging role. Communications can help to articulate a cleaner, clearer vision for the organisation. As Keith Yamashita of Stone Yamashita Partners says, communications can give employees the clarity they need to champion the cause of the organisation "Employees are the keepers of the culture and ambassadors of the brand. We need to realise that design and communications help to visualise strategy so people can act upon it, to make new behaviours tangible and to magnify positive shifts in culture in teams."

## ABOUT JOHN BRADFIELD

John Bradfield, BA (Communications) and MBA, has expertise in developing communication systems for companies. He runs workshops on communications. His articles cover business matters and consumer lifestyle subjects for a variety of publications. He has travelled widely and studied different ways of doing business abroad. For further information, email [johnbradfield@tiscali.co.za](mailto:johnbradfield@tiscali.co.za).  
View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>