COMMUNICATING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DURING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE:
A SOUTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY PERSPECTIVE

by

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Life is a great partner.
Its demands are not unreasonable.
A great capacity for change lives in every one of us.

Margaret Wheatley

Declaration

I declare that the Master's dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree MPhil (Communication Management) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

Anné Leonard

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Abstract

South Africa is often described as a nation in transition since the societal and political transformation is an ongoing process. The South African employment environment is one area that now boasts a number of laws that are interrelated and aimed at achieving transformation of the workplace, as well as the economic empowerment of those who had previously been victims of racial segregation. The Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 is regarded as central to the appreciation of equality of individuals in the workplace, irrespective of race, gender and/or disability.

The management of communication is central to the process of corporate transformation as a result of this Act. (This fact is confirmed by the emphasis in the Act itself on organisations' duty to inform and consult with stakeholders and several guideline documents.) Since previous research had pointed to broadly defined communication problems, the overarching research question of this study is: "How do South African organisations manage communication about Affirmative Action (within the context of Employment Equity)?"

Chaos theory (a postmodern perspective) serves as the theoretical framework from which organisations' approach to the duty to inform and consult with stakeholders, transformational change management, the management of communication and transformational leadership were investigated. A conceptual framework for the management of communication in this context, which is based on the ideas of the chaos perspective, is also proposed.

Empirical evidence regarding the research question was gathered by means of a qualitative, multiple case study investigation. The most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners were interviewed in each of the three organisations, while the Employment Equity communication strategy of each organisation was compared to the theoretical framework by Thomas and Robertshaw (1999).

The unique corporate philosophy of each organisation influences the manner in which Employment Equity strategies are implemented. The term "Affirmative Action" is not utilised in any of the organisations. Communication has strategic value in the external arena, while internal communication about Employment Equity is not satisfactory in two of the organisations. All types/levels of leaders have

communication responsibilities in this context, while one organisation also relies on the philosophy of self-directed leadership. Only one organisation is currently managing communication according to a formalised strategy.

Recommendations regarding the management of communication in this transformational context can be summarised with the overarching requirement that transformation should be approached as a "thinking science". The multitude of paradoxes that were highlighted by the chaos perspective should be considered constantly: herein lies the real challenge for South African organisations.

Opsomming

Suid-Afrika word dikwels beskryf as 'n land wat in 'n oorgangstadium is, synde sosiale en politieke transformasie 'n voortdurende proses is. Die Suid-Afrikaanse werksomgewing is een terrein wat nou spog met 'n aantal wette wat nou verwant is aan mekaar en ten doel het om transformasie van die werkplek teweeg te bring, asook die ekonomiese bemagtiging van diegene wat voorheen slagoffers van rasseverdeeldheid was. Die Wet op Gelyke Indiensneming Nr. 55 van 1998 word beskou as sentraal in die waardering van gelykheid van individue in die werkplek, ongeag ras, geslag en/of gestremdheid.

Die bestuur van kommunikasie is sentraal in die proses van korporatiewe transformasie as gevolg van hierdie wet. (Hierdie feit word bevestig deur die klem wat in die wet self gelê word op organisasies se plig om belangegroepe in te lig en met hulle te konsulteer, asook verskeie riglyndokumente.) Omdat vorige navorsing dui op breë kommunikasieprobleme, is die oorkoepelende navorsingsvraag van hierdie studie: "Hoe bestuur Suid-Afrikaanse organisasies kommunikasie omtrent regstellende optrede (binne die konteks van Gelyke Indiensneming)?"

Chaosteorie ('n post-moderne perspektief) dien as die teoretiese raamwerk van waaruit organisasies se benadering tot hulle plig om belangegroepe in te lig en met hulle te konsulteer, transformasiebestuur, die bestuur van kommunikasie en transformasieleierskap ondersoek is. 'n Konseptuele raamwerk vir die bestuur van kommunikasie in hierdie konteks, wat gebaseer is op die idees van die chaos-perspektief, word ook voorgestel.

Empiriese bewyse rakende die navorsingsvraag is ingesamel deur middel van 'n kwalitatiewe, meervoudige gevallestudie. Onderhoude is gevoer met die mees senior Kommunikasie-, Menslike Hulpbronne- en Gelyke Indiensnemingspraktisyns in elk van hierdie organisasies, terwyl die Gelyke Indiensneming kommunikasiestrategie vergelyk is met die teoretiese raamwerk van Thomas en Robertshaw (1999).

Die unieke korporatiewe filosofie van elke organisasie beïnvloed die wyse waarop Gelyke Indiensnemingstrategieë geïmplimenteer word. Die term "Regstellende Optrede" word nie in enige van hierdie organisasies gebruik nie. Kommunikasie het strategiese waarde in die eksterne arena, terwyl interne kommunikasie rondom Gelyke Indiensneming onbevredigend is in twee van die organisasies.

Alle tipes/vlakke leiers het kommunikasieverantwoordelikhede binne hierdie konteks, terwyl een organisasie die filosofie van self-gedrewe leierskap ondersteun. Slegs een organisasie bestuur kommunikasie tans aan die hand van 'n formele strategie.

Aanbevelings rakende die bestuur van kommunikasie in hierdie transformasiekonteks kan opgesom word met die oorhoofse vereiste dat transformasie benader behoort te word as 'n "wetenskap wat denke vereis". Die vele paradokse wat deur die chaos-perspektief uitgelig is, behoort voortdurend oorweeg te word: hierin lê die werklike uitdaging vir Suid-Afrikaanse organisasies.

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