

Communicating for change: A guide to managing the future of South African organisations.

Manning, A.D. (1987)

Communicating for change: A guide to managing the future of South African organisations

Johannesburg: JUTA

116 PP, R19.50.

It is generally possible to place publications dealing with particular disciplines somewhere on a continuum ranging from the highly philosophical and often metatheoretical through the pragmatic/semi academic to the purely practical. Similarly, readers differ in their needs and preferences and hence few practitioners will be found on the theoretical/philosophical end of the continuum just described. The converse would of course hold in part for pure academics.

In "Communicating For Change", Manning moves, often very rapidly and confusingly so, along sections of the academic/practical spectrum and in the process, he may run the risk of losing the reader. As the second part of Mr Manning's title suggests, this is essentially a work for practitioners in the fields of organisational behavior and communications. Bearing in mind the vitally important functions these may fulfill in a volatile present day South Africa, a work of this nature will always be eagerly acquired and if the reader would pardon the indulgence, "digested". The problem that exists not only with regard to this book but with many similar publications which have appeared recently in this country, resides in the way that basic and underlying theoretical issues are briefly glossed over. In this book the reader is often only given a cursory glimpse at that which is foundational to much of Anthony D Manning's argumentation. In so doing the reader is often deprived of a foundation on which to build a proper understanding of the practical and managerial actions that are so frequently suggested. The odd, misplaced or poorly explained figure does not assist much in this regard.

Having mentioned this, it must be said in all fairness that the author was clearly not intent upon producing a work for academics and he makes no pretences about this. He has set out to share with the reader some of his very relevant consulting experience and attempts to leave the reader with a few very handy rules of thumb. Thrown in for good measure is some content matter of a slightly more theoretical, albeit popular nature.

In the first chapter, the now familiar issues of the South African skills shortage (including the brain drain), over population, under-education and insufficient economic growth, are touched upon. In a similar vein, the need for increased openness, involvement and participation amongst members of the labour force as well as the necessity for a really "free" free market economy receive attention. Finally the author introduces his concept of the cycle of renewal which involves analysing situations and possibilities, atomising organisations in an attempt to involve all and energising people in order to facilitate the realisation of collective potential.

Certain concepts pertaining to essential organisational functions and activities, are illuminated in Chapter Two. These include those activities leading to the provision of services and products, and the need for organisations to be flexible, aware

of environmental variables and yet well balanced. Also touched upon are the issues of product life cycles, limited resources and unlimited opportunities. In addition, the effects of poor communication on performance and the influence of stakeholders with different agendas, are pointed out. The "what makes people tick, and tick especially in organisations" issues, is dealt with in the following chapter. Another often cited concept: that of the organisational mission is once again introduced. The rest of the chapter is taken up by views on what ideal and the most appropriate communications activities entail.

The penultimate chapter reflects the author's very valid concern with worker participation at all organisational levels and by all races, whilst chapter five contains certain suggestions as to how changes can be brought about in organisations and especially through communicational tools such as quality circles, teams, mission statements and willing communicators. Finally some useful hints are given as to how communicational efforts can be integrated. In what amounts to a concluding note, the author attempts to re-stress the necessity for participation and better communication.

A glance at the subject matter dealt with in "Communicating For Change" certainly reveals its relevance. At the same time however the reviewer cannot help but to feel that Manning's message(s) would have been more vivid, had the book been better planned and the content of most chapters clearly delineated and yet sensibly linked. Ultimately the reader would have benefitted from a more systematic approach in the conceptual scheme of the book.

An appropriate way to approach this book, would be to scan its content for relevant and useful practical hints and patches of semi-academic ideas. Whilst at times well written, this book will not necessarily leave the reader with an holistic view of whatever the author wished to convey.

J. VAN VUUREN
PERSONNEL DIVISION
CALTEX OIL (SA) PTY. LTD.
PARKLANDS