



Non-profit organizations bridging the communication divide in a complex South Africa



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: South Africa's post-apartheid governments have made remarkable progress in consolidating the nation's peaceful transition to democracy, but many South Africans still view themselves and each other according to stigmatizing categories. As the country's remarkable and peaceful transition to democracy unfolds, millions, both urban and rural, are still confronted with having to survive unemployment, homelessness, lack of basic services, HIV/Aids, food insecurity and unacceptable levels of crime and violence. Confronted by the complexity of our development challenges, one of our biggest failures is a lack of communication, trust, common purpose, collaborative leadership and sustainable relationships between the various sectors and stakeholders in development. Transforming South Africa's society to remove the legacy of marginalization will be a long-term process requiring the sustained commitment of the leaders and people of the nation's diverse groups. So the question remains: *how can non-profit organizations (NPOs) establish themselves as development providers within the uncertain political arena, of which South Africa is characteristic, in order to represent all the masses who cannot speak for themselves and more than often find themselves in a marginalized and stigmatized position?*

Principle results: Some Non-profit organizations recognize that their relationships with stakeholders is of great importance for their survival, various forms of communication take place without the necessary planning and without clear objectives for the development of these relationships. NPOs need a positive image and reputation due to financial implications where they do not have sufficient funds to support or market themselves effectively. In this climate of polarization NPOs play a pivotal role in providing a voice to the poor, mobilizing a motion of change and creating a platform for relationships, credibility and trust. Within the theoretical framework of relationship management theory, the interests of all stakeholders are balanced through the management of the stakeholder relationships. *Major conclusions:* Non-profit organizations need to ensure that they protect their stakeholders (especially those who are in desperate need of the services rendered by these organizations), deliver better services and although not operating for the purpose of making a profit, manage themselves so that they do generate profit which will enable them to support themselves especially when funding is something that is becoming a rare phenomenon. Although NPOs find themselves in difficult financial times they need to renovate and almost reinvent themselves, in order to be fully capable to address many social problems in SA and to indicate to those who support them (especially financially) that they are to be trusted, committed to make a difference, that they deliver on their promises and to ensure open communication channels with all their stakeholders. NPOs need to manage their reputations which

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are built on their corporate identities because it is the organization's reputation that often creates a lifeline in uncertain times. If the NPOs succeed in managing their identities effectively, it may serve as the foundation for developing and maintaining relationships with their respective stakeholders which in turn could change the face of South Africa's society. These organizations might go about creating a platform for dialog in an attempt to build sustainable productive relationships that can go about uplifting and empowering those who would otherwise not have such an opportunity.

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1. Introduction

South Africa's post-apartheid governments have made remarkable progress in consolidating the nation's peaceful transition to democracy, but many South Africans still view themselves and each other according to stigmatizing categories (Conservapedia, 2013). As the country's remarkable and peaceful transition to democracy unfolds, millions, both urban and rural, are still confronted with having to survive unemployment, homelessness, lack of basic services, HIV/Aids, food insecurity and unacceptable levels of crime and violence. Confronted by the complexity of our development challenges, one of our biggest failures is a lack of communication, trust, common purpose, collaborative leadership and sustainable relationships between the various sectors and stakeholders in development (Degenaar, 2012; Mbuli, 2008; Miller, 2012). Transforming South Africa's society to remove the legacy of marginalization will be a long-term process requiring the sustained commitment of the leaders and people of the nation's diverse groups (Conservapedia, 2013).

In this climate of polarization NPOs play a pivotal role in providing a voice to the poor, mobilizing a motion of change and creating a platform for relationships, credibility and trust. Within the theoretical framework of relationship management theory (Grunig & Grunig, 2002; Grunig & Hon, 1999; Ledingham, 2003), the interests of all stakeholders are balanced through the management of the stakeholder relationships. Although some NPOs recognize that their relationships with stakeholders is of great importance for their survival, various forms of communication takes place without the necessary planning and without clear objectives for the development of these relationships (Dyer, Buell, Harrison, & Webber, 2002). NPOs need a positive image and reputation due to financial implications where they do not have sufficient funds to support or market themselves effectively. The non-profit sector should manage their identity to ensure a positive image in the minds of stakeholders and to establish relationships with their stakeholders (Van Dyk, 2007; Holtzhausen, 2008). If the NPOs succeed in managing their identities effectively, it may serve as the foundation for developing and maintaining relationships with their respective stakeholders which in turn could change the face of South Africa's society.

So the question remains: how can NPOs establish themselves as development providers within the uncertain political arena, of which South Africa is characteristic, in order to represent all the masses who cannot speak for themselves and more than often find themselves in a marginalized and stigmatized position?

In order to study the significant role of NPOs in this context, it is necessary to firstly look at theoretical approaches to the South African political economy in general, relationship management theory with the aim of creating a sense of trust between the stakeholders and corporate identity management.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Political economy: a broad foundation

From a general viewpoint political economy can be defined as more concerned (than mainstream economics) with the relationships of the economic system and its institutions to the rest of society and social development. It is sensitive to the influence of non-economic factors such as political and social institutions, morality, and ideology in determining economic events. It thus has a much broader focus than (mainstream) economics (Riddell, Shackelford, & Stamos, 1998; Sakrey, Schneider, & Knoedler, 2008). In addition, Macnamara (2010) states that political economy "is the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources". These definitions will be used as a guideline for the purpose of this research.

When studying political economy it is inevitable that one would refer to two very predominant 'forces' within this subject, namely one of history's most influential economists and philosophers, namely Adam Smith who was very well known for his work on morals and economy, especially his book titled: *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (1776). With this publication Smith declared it to be his objective to identify those processes that must be encouraged in order to bring forth a well-governed society, (in which) universal opulence extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people. He emphasized economic growth, appropriate government policies, and the distribution of income and wealth. Smith's system of natural liberty is a mixed economy in which invention, innovation and imitation in the private sector are supported, promoted and furthered by institutions enconced in the public sector. Smith thought the dynamic interaction of the public and private sectors would result in a process of growth and development in which the members of the working class are the principle beneficiaries. Although Smith's philosophy was adopted in England and other European countries in the 19th century it did not yield a nearly equal distribution of income, nor did the working class tend to see most of its benefits. It was Karl Marx who subsequently explored the reasons why 19th century capitalism failed to operate in the manner Smith

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