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Diving deep for pearls of wisdom: the value of qualitative research

By Mpumi Ralane and Phuti Mongalo (GCIS)

Diving beneath the surface data to uncover why South Africans have the attitudes they do and to make sense of research paradoxes, GCIS uses qualitative research to gain a deepened understanding of public perceptions. This is done by exploring and gaining an in-depth understanding of and insight into people's attitudes, behaviour, motivations and concerns regarding government's services, initiatives, programmes and products.

GCIS started conducting qualitative research in 2002, in line with the GCIS corporate strategy which emphasises the importance of communication research for government and role players. Qualitative research aims to investigate communication needs, understand the communication environment (as reported by citizens through their own experiences and voice) and explore the impact of communication products and services in terms of access and reach.

This type of information is particularly helpful to communicators, as it allows for the development of campaign messages based on the target audience's motivations.

Informing key communications decisions

For example, research might seek to establish the target population's attitudes towards a departmental programme before a communication initiative or a product concerning the programme is developed or finalised. To this end, qualitative research has played a major role in informing decisions concerning certain com-

munication campaigns and/or products such as the State of the Nation Address (SoNA), the 16 Days of Activism campaign and National Census 2011. Research has examined public perceptions of communication messages, the conversion of *Vuk'uzenzele* into a tabloid and *Public Sector Manager* magazine.

Qualitative research findings vindicated the decision to move SoNA to the evening instead of the morning in order to increase national viewership and listenership. This was because many participants in focus groups conducted in 2007 said that the SoNA was not delivered at a convenient time of the day.

"I don't think the time is right because most of the people are at work," (MP, Middleburg, 25-34, LSM 4-6, Black).

"It's not good that it happens while we are at school because we won't know what is happening," (LP, Waterval, 18-24, LSM 5-6, Black).

Following these insights from the public, the recommendation to change the time slot was implemented. When participants were asked again in 2013 if the time slot still suited them this is what they had to say:

"7pm is alright for students because sometimes you would be cooking or coming home from work at that time," (KZN, uMzinyathi, Black, 18-34, LSM 1-4).

"It was quite plain and simple. The date and time were perfect," (WC, Heideveld, Coloured, 35+, LSM 5-7).

"The late slot is good because most people are back from work. It attracts a bigger audience," (WC, Langa, Black, 18 - 34, LSM 5 - 7).

Vuk'uzenzele's conversion into a tabloid

An example that highlights the use of qualitative research to test a product is that of *Vuk'uzenzele's* conversion from a magazine to tabloid newspaper format. Findings from this research supported the conversion from magazine to tabloid publication. Respondents, especially the youth, were of the view that newspapers were more user-friendly than magazines.

"As youth we are not into magazines and we prefer newspapers as they are mostly read these days. Newspapers tell stories as they happen in our communities ... things that are relevant to our lives. A newspaper is generally portable as one can easily fold it and keep it for safe sake," (MP, Sakhile RDP Ext 6, LSM 3-4, Black).

"We like the newspaper format because it is soft to touch and easy to handle," (GP, Soshanguve SS, LSM 4-5, Black).

"I like the newspaper, it is attractive and it is the channel used by many people to get informed. If the magazine is put next to the newspaper I would really choose the newspaper because it is easy to read and one can follow the headlines easily ... people looking for work normally read newspapers compared to magazines," (NW, Bethanie, LSM 3-4, Black).

Currently, qualitative research is rolled out throughout the year according to the specific research need. Therefore different qualitative research approaches are used, e.g. telephonic interviews were conducted to ascertain readers' experiences of the *Public Sector Manager* (PSM) magazine.

Overall, *PSM* was perceived to be a high-quality magazine that portrayed a professional image of government communications, both in terms of look and feel and relevant content. Some of the favourable comments included:

"I think it's a rather nice, glossy magazine; it's upmarket," acting chief director, provincial government.

"It portrays a professional image of government communications," deputy director, national government.

"When it comes to publications that are put out by government you think of some newsletter and then you get this. It's on par with your normal magazine that you get off the shelf every month," communications manager, SOE.

Some of the participants expressed views about the content of the magazine:

"It's a very balanced magazine - it's catering on a wide range of topics and it caters for everybody," deputy director, national government



"It goes in-depth on the perspective of some of the decision makers in government and it also gives you a more in-depth understanding of the business of government and where government is actually going," director GCIS.

"What I like most is that it is very informative - all the new stuff that's happening in the public sector. It gives me some insight into other public service managers: the profiles, the challenges they face, and issues that they are addressing," director, national government.

Qualitative research methodologies

In addition to telephonic interviews as demonstrated with *PSM* magazine, through collaboration with a service provider, GCIS uses appropriate qualitative research methodologies depending of the information sought.

In most instances, data is collected through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. In-depth, qualitative interviews allow researchers to examine issues at length, from the interviewee's personal perspective. The data gathered during interviews typically consists of verbatim responses to the interviewer's questions, which are designed to elicit opinions, feelings, attitudes, descriptions of personal behaviours, and other elements related to the research problem.

Focus groups occur with groups of individuals (typically between eight to ten people, with one or more groups in total) and are generally focused on a particular issue of interest.

Participant observations and immersions involve observing human behaviour in natural settings that can elicit insightful data that cannot be captured using other data collection methods. The data gathered using observational approaches consist of detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviours, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organisational processes that are part of observable human experience.

For the GCIS qualitative research, the participants recruited are reflective of the standard demographics of South Africans who are 15 years and older.

The participants come from both urban and rural areas (including deep rural), and are recruited from all Living Standards Measures (LSM) categories. Research is conducted in the participants' preferred languages.

With the vision of being "The Pulse of Communication Excellence in Government," GCIS aims to fulfil its mandate through various ways including qualitative research - to lead government's strategic communication by driving coherent government messaging and creating open and extended channels of communication between government and people, towards a shared vision.



SUPPORTING MEDIA DIVERSITY



CEO of the MDDA Lumko Mtimde.

By *Lumko Mtimde

Over the past decade the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) has been transforming the media landscape in the country.

In 1994, the late former President Dr Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela voiced his concerns about the lack of diversity in the media. Addressing the International Press Institute Congress in Cape Town, he said: "Freedom of expression, of which press freedom is a crucial aspect, is among the core values of democracy that we have striven for ... critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy.

"The press must be free from state interference. ... It must have sufficient independence from vested interests to be bold and inquiring without fear or favour. It must enjoy the protection of the constitution, so that it can protect our rights as citizens. ...

"The tragic absence of diversity in the South African media has been a matter of grave concern to us over a number of years. ... It remains to be seen how these changes will affect both the diversity of viewpoints and address previous imbalances in the access to and control over the press."

In 1996, the Communication Task Group (COMTASK) launched by former President Thabo Mbeki recommended the establishment of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) as a statutory development agency for promoting, supporting and ensuring media development and diversity, set up as a public/private partnership between the South African Government and major print and broadcasting companies to assist in (amongst others) developing community and small commercial media in South Africa.

Vision:

Access to diversified media for all

Mission:

Ensuring the sustainable development of a vibrant, innovative and people-centred media

Value proposition:

Integrated development services and resources that enable media development and diversity.

Strategic objectives:

- Deliver innovative products and services that delight stakeholder expectations
- Strengthen MDDA processes, systems and procedures
- Grow and diversify the MDDA funding base
- Create a learning environment and build capabilities that deliver MDDA value products and services.

It was established in 2003, in terms of the MDDA Act, 2002 (Act 14 of 2002), and started providing grant funding to projects on 29 January 2004.

The MDDA is a well-managed organ of state, which has continuously received unqualified audit reports for the past 10 financial years. It has become known for developing and diversifying the media landscape in South Africa, through the guidance of the board, the dedication of management and staff, and adherence to the dictates of the Public Finance and Management Act.

The MDDA also has a strong value system that promotes integrity, caring, professionalism, commitment and transparency which underpins its operations. Since its inception the agency has supported more than 567 different projects, with R272 million in grant funding, throughout South Africa, in all nine provinces, focusing mainly on historically disadvantaged communities and the use of indigenous languages.

The Agency has had a profound impact on the lives of many South Africans, and we believe in building an environment where diverse, vibrant and creative media flourishes and reflects the needs of all South Africans. This will promote communication, sustainable social development and growth amongst all citizens of South Africa.

As the MDDA celebrates its tenth financial year, with a combination of unqualified and clean audits over the years, with eight of them under the stewardship of Lumko Mtimde, who provided leadership and strong management control of the agency.

The MDDA thanks government, whose valuable support for the agency through GCIS and The Presidency has made its work manageable, and the funding partners of the MDDA. We look forward to renewing our funding agreements, strengthening our relationships and working together towards ensuring that every South African citizen has access to a choice of diverse range of media.

The South African media landscape of 2013 is vastly different to that of 1994, thanks to the Constitution Act of 1996, Independent Broadcasting Authority Act of 1993 now the Electronic

Communications Act of 2005, Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act of 2000, the Media Development and Diversity Agency Act of 2002 and a number of other and similar interventions brought by the new democratic dispensation of 1994.

On 9 May 2009, in his Inauguration speech, President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma said:

"We seek a vibrant, dynamic partnership that is enriched by democratic debate that values diverse views and accommodates dissent. Therefore, we need to make real the fundamental right of all South Africans to freely express

themselves, to protest, to organise, and to practice their faith. We must defend the freedom of the media, as we seek to promote within it a greater diversity of voices and perspectives. We must deepen the practice of participatory democracy in all spheres of public life."

Ten years after the establishment of the MDDA and 20 years into our democracy, as we celebrate the achievement and successes of the MDDA, we must remember the words of Presidents Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma which remain relevant.

*** Lumko Mtimde is the CEO of the MDDA.**

What some of its beneficiaries have to say about the MDDA:

Radio Riverside, Northern Cape, * Thabang Pusoyobone

"Radio Riverside is a community radio station that was started in October 1999 after a group of community leaders in the Upington region came together to discuss the idea of establishing a community radio station to address the communication gap in the region as there was lack of media coverage by the mainstream media.

The station was licensed in 1999 by the then Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and started its broadcasts on 11 October 1999.

The station currently broadcasts in a radius of +/- 100 kilometres to towns in and around // Khara Hais Municipality with the main town of Upington in the ZF Mgcau District Municipality of the Northern Cape but also to parts of the Kheis Municipality (north-east of Upington) and the Kai Garib Municipality (west of Upington). According to the December 2013 RAMS (audience research figures), the station has an average of 87 000 listeners per week.

The MDDA assisted the station through funding to purchase the outside broadcast unit. Our station in 2013 generated just over R1,2 million only from outside broadcasts. Some of the outside broadcasts however include linked broadcasts, with Radio Riverside linking other community radio stations in the province to big government events or activities. The MDDA also funded the station to build two new state-of-the-art digital studios at our new premises in 2013 and some of the funds were used for administration support and office equipment. The support by the MDDA ensured that we provide our communities with enhanced sound quality and we have the best broadcasting equipment to enable us to service our communities better. The MDDA has also supported Radio Riverside through ... training of our staff in different focus areas including news and journalism, marketing and finances as well as governance.

Radio Riverside currently employs 28 full-time and 11 part-time staff members. The full-time staff members comprise managers, presenters, producers and journalists, sales persons, drivers and an office assistant.

A total of 25 of our full-time staff members got skills training from journalism to management and production and presenting. The latest training that the MDDA supported Radio Riverside with was the basic journalism course which was accredited by the University of Free State and was attended by three of our newsroom staff [who] graduated in December 2013.

Radio Riverside ... is working on increasing the station's broadcast reach to at least 130 kilometres. We are planning on extending our current premises with a view [to] establishing an ICT centre which can be accessible and affordable for our communities."

*** Thabang Pusoyabone: Station Manager - Radio Riverside 98.2FM**





A graduate of the media literacy and culture of reading programme - Nthatisi Julian Ntseho, Eastern Cape

"I am Nthatisi Julian Ntseho. I matriculated in 2010 at Moiketsi Graves senior secondary school. In 2009 when [the] MDDA was launched at Mount Alyff for the media summit training programme I was one of the five learners ... chosen to represent Moiketsi Graves at the launch and we won the first cover page for the MDDA's first newsletter. In September [that] year the MDDA sent us to Rhodes University in Grahamstown where we met Africa's top journalists. My love for media developed then and till now I dream about it.

"In 2011 I started working at Moiketsi Graves as an assistant teacher for about six months. I then went to live in Klerksdorp, North West, where I volunteered at StarFM as a co-host. Early this year I moved to Soweto, when I realised that I have no one to help further my studies, I tracked down Mr. Lumko Mtimde via Facebook. He then advised I should e-mail him and include Ousi Manana explaining my story to him. After weeks of silence I was advised about the media summit held at Birchwood Hotel on 10 and 11 April 2013.

"At the media summit I got an opportunity to address the members of selected institutes. I explained my journey with MDDA and my personal life story. I was then advised that the Deputy Minister of Communications would try and sort out the education side of things which would mean that he [would] arrange that I attend a [National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa] Nemisa [course] and study any media-related course. I was also approached by Trinity [Mohlamme, station manager of] Alex FM who advised that once the education side of things had been sorted he would love to mentor me and arrange that I get involved in the radio and television industry."

Coal City News : Mpumalanga, * Lola Michelle Mashiane

"Coal City News was formed in 2004 ... I realised that there was a gap in communication [between] the public and township of Kwa-Guqa in eMalahleni. It then expanded its footprint in 2011 after [getting] funding from [the] MDDA, to eight community newspapers in the Nkangala district of Mpumalanga. Our readership for *Coal City News* is 100 000 while collectively with the other papers we are ... at 280 000. In 2005 I received funding from the MDDA and in ... 2010 for operational costs. I am grateful for an organisation like the MDDA; it gave me an opportunity to start not only a project but also a sustainable business with the eight publications I'm running and 15 people [who] are employed full-time.

Over 30 people received skills training because we also take interns and also train those who have the love of writing to become good journalists. My project is already sustainable and I see [a bright] future ... we are receiving a lot of good responses from national, provincial, district and even local government in terms of advertising.

Today we [print] the following papers fortnightly:

- *Coal City News*
- *Mhluzi Reflection*
- *Kriel Voice*
- *Delmas News*
- *Phola Post*
- *eMakhazeni Observer*
- *Thembisile News*
- *Siyabuswa Express*

The MDDA added great value, helping me to sustain my business and gave me a chance to grow at a reasonable rate without stress but focus and determination".

* *Lola-Michelle Mashiane, managing director of Community Newspapers Initiative (Coal City News)*





Class of 2013 in the media limelight

By Suzette van der Westhuizen (GCIS)

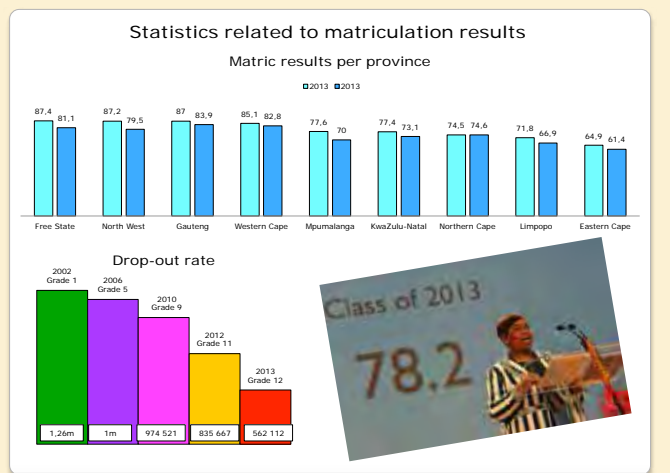
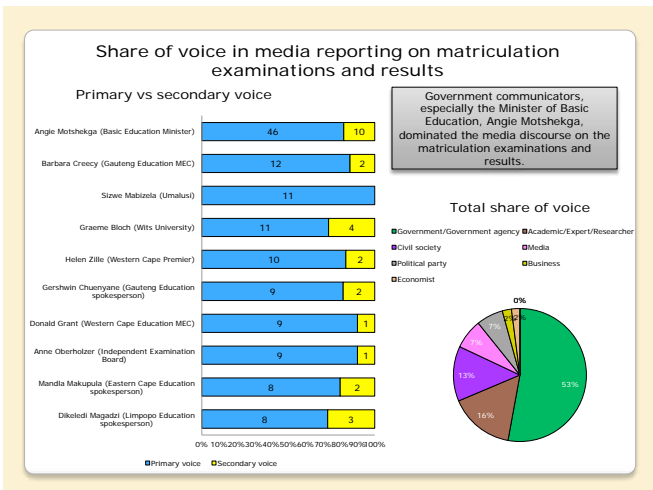


From the run-up to the 2013 matriculation examinations to schools opening for the new school year and hand-over to Higher Education for the student intake, the Department of Basic Education and provincial communicators communicated continuously about the different aspects of the exams. This ensured both a large share of voice for government, as well as positive tonality on this issue.

At the same time Umalusi began issuing assurances that they were ready for matrics to write their exams. Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga explained what government had done to better manage the exams, including tightening security.

Expectations

As the exams kicked off, many provincial communicators expressed their optimism about the performance of the matric candidates of 2013, based on various support plans to ensure candidates achieved good results. Many provinces vocalised their expectations of the exams and many fulfilled these. The 78,2% pass rate that was achieved surpassed the overall pass rate of 75% predicted by the Education Department.



Encouragement and preparedness

The period leading to the commencement of matric examinations is usually marked by increased communication from government and other sectors, with messages of encouragement to those sitting for the exams. This is accompanied by a hike in media attention.

Two weeks before the exams provincial communicators started encouraging parents to support learners to overcome this

Job prospects

As in previous years, the issue of job opportunities for successful matriculants was reported on throughout the 2013 matric exam period. It was noted that despite the importance of a matric certificate, there were few prospects for those who did not go on to pursue further education.

The National Employers' Association of South Africa (Neasa) said the majority of matriculants did not have the basic skills employers were looking for, because the curriculum did not give priority to vocational training. The biggest challenge was language, comprehension and numeracy skills.

Marking of exam papers

Competency tests for markers is an issue that remains unresolved. Umalusi was lambasted by teachers' unions for raising the issue of competency tests for teachers who mark question papers. However, analysts pointed out that those markers with limited knowledge put at a disadvantage those learners who produced innovative and original responses. Media in the Western Cape applauded the fact that markers in that province had been subjected to such competency tests.

Learners failing matric

The Department of Basic education advised learners planning to write supplementary matric exams about the requirements and recommended a study routine and revision which assisted in understanding the content.

The debate about the publication of matric results was renewed. Specialists who treat people for depression and anxiety warned that matriculants felt despondent when they did not see their names in newspapers, when in fact they might have passed. This heightened the risk of suicide. The Congress of South African Learners (Cosas) also expressed disappointment at the publication of results, as learners who failed were traumatised when their names were not published.

At least two learners committed suicide because they failed their exams. Provincial education departments encouraged learners not to despair and explained the options for learners who did not make it.



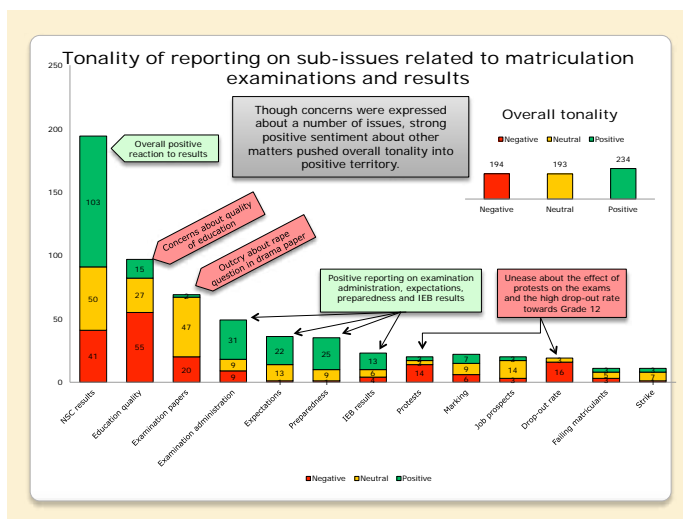
Coverage of the NSC results

The bulk of coverage of the matric exams centred on the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results, which saw a marked increase in the national matric pass rate to 78, 2%, from 73, 9% in 2012. Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga was widely quoted after describing the class of 2013 as the best since the advent of democracy in 1994. President Jacob Zuma also congratulated them, saying education would take the country to prosperity, which was why it was one of government's key priorities.

There were many celebratory media headlines conveying the positive trends. Some analysts said that this was the time to rejoice at improvements and claim victories. Others argued that citizens and parents made education a national priority and 'some' in government responded; so did teachers and learners. The fact that the 60, 6% pass rate of 2002 had increased to 78, 2% in 2013 was emphasised; as was the 10% increase in the number of matriculants with university exemption.

However, many education experts warned the public not to read too much into the increase in the matric pass rate. They cautioned that we should claim improvement only if learners were able to go to universities and flourish, or if the economy absorbed them. The main debate unfortunately concentrated on the quality of education, the pass requirements and the dropout rate.

Pessimistic views from some political parties also attracted coverage. Even before the announcement of the matric results, Democratic Alliance (DA) leader Helen Zille said that if the national pass rate was more than 2% better than in 2013, the DA would ask for an audit, as such a huge improvement was impossible in such a short time. This she promptly did, citing concerns over the quality of the markers, the process of moderation and the high dropout rate. Media agreed that there was merit in her call, as there was scope for provinces to inflate their pass rates.





Media coverage of the pass requirement

There was heated debate about the issue of the pass mark. Many said the high pass rate was misleading in the face of pass mark requirements of only 40% and 30%. Some academics said the pass mark standard for matrics ought to be raised, claiming only between 22% and 24% of 2013 matriculants would have passed were they required to score at least 50% for each subject. They were in favour of an annual incremental increase in pass rate requirements. Others did not see this as an adequate response to the problems facing education, as it did not address the problem of the quality of education.

Minister Motshekga said she was “not deaf” to calls that the pass requirements were too low. A task team was investigating this issue. Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande defended the pass mark, saying the country had become “dangerously elitist” by wanting to exclude learners who performed badly.

Education standard

Debates about the standard of education always follow the release of the results. There was vigorous discussion in the media about the standard of education. A research paper by the University of Cape Town found that the matric certificate was still an important gateway and increased people’s job chances and earnings.

Other commentators disputed this, saying more and more universities required learners with exemption to write their own benchmark tests. They saw this as indicative of a future in which the matric certificate would “not be worth the paper it’s written on”.

Minister Motshekga maintained that the system had improved, citing international studies indicating that progress had been made in the basic education sector. She said South Africa favourably competed with the best.

Debate over the dropout rate

The issue of the number of learners who drop out of school has been raised in previous years. Education experts were widely quoted saying the improved matric pass rate masked the underlying problem of high drop out rates plaguing the school system. Only half of the learners who started Grade 1 in 2002 (around 1,26 million) enrolled to write their final exams in 2013 (56 112). This brought the effective pass rate for the 2002 intake to 34,8%.

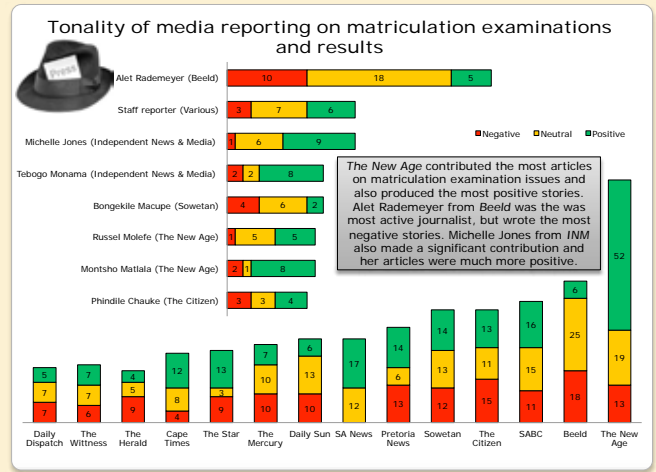
Analysts argued that schools and provincial administrations used “culling” of weaker learners between grades 10 and 12 to increase their pass rates. Others noted that children did not have to attend school after they turned 15. If parents did not value what the school system held for learners, they might not encourage children to stay in school.

General assessment of media coverage

Media interest in the matric exams persisted right through from before the exams kicked off until well after the an-

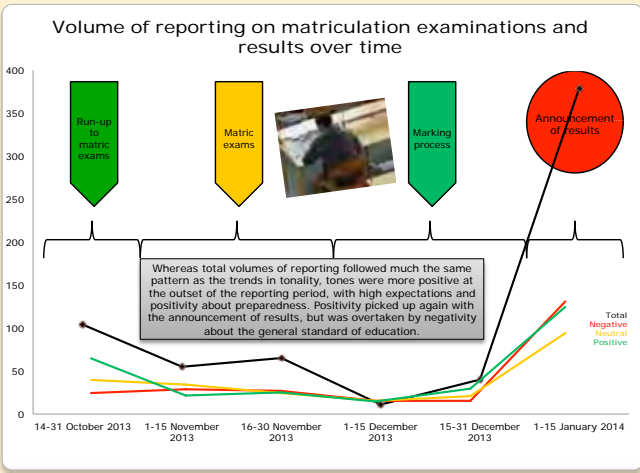
nouncement of the results. To a great extent this can be attributed to messages put out by government communicators, and the generally positive tone attests to that. Media also did a huge amount of their own investigation, engaged the opinion of analysts and published plenty of editorial comment.

The New Age offered by far the most coverage on the issue, followed by *Beeld* and the SABC. *The New Age* was also overwhelmingly positive in its coverage of the matric exams. While most of its coverage was neutral, *Beeld* tended to be more negative in its reporting.



Tonality in coverage fluctuated over the reporting period. It was more positive during the run-up to the exams; more neutral during the exams; more positive during the marking period; but after the announcement of the results sentiment became slightly more negative. This can be ascribed to the ensuing debate over pass requirements, dropout rates and the standard of education.

Overall, communication about the matric exams was well managed. All aspects of the operation were addressed as the process unfolded. Communicators at national and provincial level were tuned in to handle issues as required. It was a job well done.



Boosting

the bottom line through internal alignment

*By Daniel Munslow

Effective internal communication within organisations has a pivotal role in keeping employees engaged. While many companies still see communication as a “soft” or “nice-to-have” element of business, more and more are realising that employee disengagement carries an actual cost to a business.

A 2013 article published on American Express Open Forum (www.openforum.com), reporting on a recent Gallup poll, stated that 70% of employees in the United States feel “fully disengaged” from their workplace. Disengagement results in reduced productivity, higher turnover and loss of intellectual property (IP) and scarce skills. This ultimately leads to profit loss.

The cost of disengagement

According to an ADP (a global human resources management organisation) study cited in the article, the cost of disengagement amounts to the equivalent of R23 583 per disengaged employee per year. This is a scary figure. Take, for example, a company comprising 5 000 employees. If half of them are disengaged, the total cost amounts to almost R60 million. This cost includes elements such as staff turnover, loss of productivity, employees who don't release discretionary effort, lack of alignment across the business and the duplication of tasks. That's a substantial chunk off the bottom line.

5 drivers that enhance engagement

Several internal communication audits conducted by Talk2Us for listed South African companies over the past two years have revealed five key areas that employees highlight which help to develop and nurture engagement. It's worth emphasising that each area requires two-way relationship building between the employer and employee. Where this is absent, it often results in employees having differing views of the company as a brand versus the company as their employer.

The key areas include:

- clear communication of company values;
- trust in fellow employees and managers;
- better line management communication;
- caring and trustworthy managers who drive for growth; and
- confidence that the business is heading in the right direction.

Employee engagement is often seen as the responsibility of human resources when it is, in fact, a business imperative. The hard reality is that flawed management practices contribute significantly to employee disengagement. Disengaged employees are unproductive and this has a direct effect on the bottom line of any business.

Case study – putting this into practice

A JSE-listed leader in the telecommunications, multimedia and information technology arena with current annual revenue of over R10 billion, approached Talk2Us to align its workforce following a merger and acquisition that resulted in two cultures coming together. These cultures needed to be aligned to ensure a common frame of reference among employees, enabling them to live by a single set of values and behaviours.

In addition, the company introduced a seven-pillar strategy to ensure operational efficiencies, cost optimisation, improved earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBIDTA), margins and operating profits.

The leadership toolkit

Local and international research has shown that rich, face-to-face communication is the most effective means of successfully engaging employees. To instil the company's values and achieve the goal of unifying the organisation's subsidiaries, a detailed briefing document was compiled for leaders, providing them with a consistent script to share with the business units. This briefing document contained a summary of the business strategy, new brand, values and behaviours; as well as how the managers needed to go about hosting the engagement session to share information with their teams.

In essence, the briefing document provided information about the framework within which the organisation can operate and build an increased sense of pride, alignment, and unity. It aimed to help the company instil and maintain the core values across all business units, while simultaneously enhancing transparency, confidence and trust in the leadership team.

What the toolkit included

1. **Briefing document:** Unpacking the entire toolkit.
2. **Pillar wheel:** This visual tool enables leaders to have a simple conversation with their teams. It outlines the drivers for change, programmes and measurements for success.

3. **Art of Influencing Others participant guide:** This outlines and explains some of the key principles leaders were exposed to in the training session.
4. **4C Engagement Model pocket guide, video and game:** This pocket guide gives leaders a quick overview of the elements that support engagement.
5. **Leadership Guide to Effective Conversations:** This outlines meeting structures that drive effective conversations. Meeting formats and agendas are designed for each of these types of meeting.
6. **STAR Methodology:** This provides leaders with guidelines to help them communicate effectively with their employees (this formed part of the Talk2us 4C Engage leadership development course, during which this toolkit was rolled out).

Several key principles were taken into account in developing this briefing document that is rooted in the key drivers of engagement:

1. Transparency ensures that all stakeholders are familiar with the company's vision and direction; as well as what to do to help achieve a common goal.
2. Transparency ensures that every stakeholder has a personal commitment to the aims of the company. This is instilled by the direct line manager when cascading the information.
3. Transparency drives trust and trust drives engagement through rich conversations.

With transparency comes trust, and employees are more likely to engage their managers in a constructive conversation that drives engagement.

THE ROLL-OUT – 4C ENGAGE COACHING

The roll-out of the programme was done face-to-face with members of the executive team – the Top 20 and then the Top 200 – going through the Talk2Us 4C Engage Leadership Development Course to enhance their communication skills.

The 4C Engage course focuses on four pillars namely:

- (1) coaching and facilitating conversations among leaders about the importance of leadership communication;
- (2) unpacking the STAR methodology to assist leaders in communicating their messages;
- (3) going through the Art of Influencing training to better understand communication styles; and
- (4) connecting the dots and bringing it all together.

Three key focus areas for the leadership development module address how leaders can: (1) build rapport; (2) identify common communication filters and, more importantly, overcome those barriers; and (3) recognise communication styles thus helping leaders in business to understand the characteristics of their communication styles and how to adapt those when they communicate with their teams.

During the sessions, the company's organisational pillars, culture, leadership, communication, values and behaviours were also shared in the form of a detailed briefing document.

Once the leadership development sessions had been completed, the leaders were given two months to cascade the information out to the business using the tools provided in the leadership toolkit provided during the session.

It was imperative that the corporate culture was made real to all employees. This was done by making the core values and beliefs accessible to everyone and ensuring they were unpacked into behaviours, thereby making the intangible tangible. It

is also a well-established fact that employees mirror the behaviour of their leaders. It was therefore imperative to align values with actions to foster a sense of alignment – the ability of executives and employees to connect, communicate and act as a single, aligned entity.

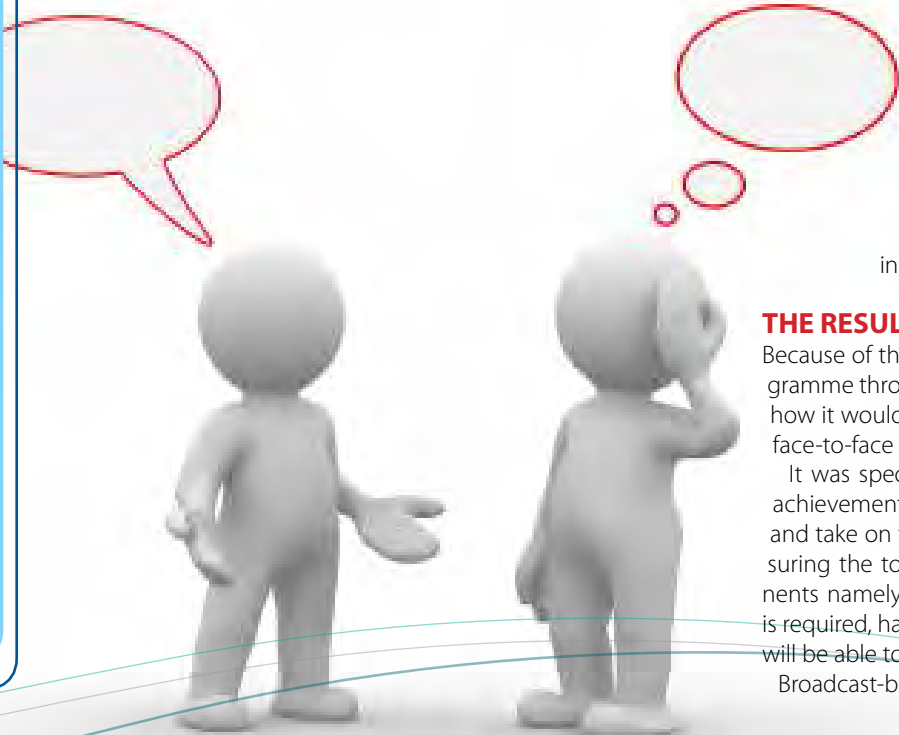
All of this was supported by ambient broadcast communication which served to reinforce the key messages communicated by leadership in the toolkit cascade after the 4C Engage training.

THE RESULT

Because of the launch of the company's leadership cascade programme through 4C Engage, the organisation was able to define how it would achieve its aspirations and strategic goals through face-to-face conversations.

It was specifically designed to reflect on the company's past achievements, identify opportunities to collaborate, innovate and take on the challenges that lie ahead. This was done by ensuring the toolkit was positioned to address three key components namely whether: people understand (Think) why change is required, have the capability to deliver (Feel), and whether they will be able to (Do) what is asked of them.

Broadcast-based communication can only achieve the Think



and Feel components but employees indicated they always want to know what is required of them; in other words, once the briefing session is over, they want to know what it is that they need to do differently. This comes across strongly when delivering face-to-face communication and creating an engaging dialogue.

It has given employees the opportunity to provide feedback on key issues that affect them from day to day, and feel heard by the leadership team. In turn, it has granted the leadership team the opportunity to obtain first-hand information about how people feel and what some of the challenges are on the ground. Some leaders have already submitted reports and solutions to address staff concerns across the business.

The leadership team has recognised that clearly communicating the company's vision, values and behaviours, and strategic direction; listening to what employees have to say and valuing their input goes a long way in promoting a culture of authenticity and transparency, which in turn drives trust at all levels of management across the business.

WHERE TO NEXT?

In terms of the bottom line, there is a strong correlation between an aligned workforce and improved operating profits, although it is too early to provide definitive evidence of financial return in this case study. This will take about a year to demonstrate. Previous implementations have shown that employees working towards a common goal and working to the same cultural characteristics, who understand what is required of them, are more likely to spend less time looking for information and questioning and debating; and spend more time executing the deliverables.

This finding is backed up by numerous global research results, most recently by the State of the American Workplace issued by Gallup in 2013. The company's research found that companies with engaged workforces have higher earnings per share (EPS) and seem to have recovered from the recession at a faster rate. In a recent study, Gallup examined 49 publicly-traded companies with EPS data available from 2008 to 2012 and the 12th quarter. Further, organisations with an average of 9, 3 engaged employees for every actively disengaged employee in 2010 to 2011 experienced 147% higher EPS compared with their competition in 2011 to 2012. In contrast, those with an average of 2, 6 engaged employees for every actively disengaged em-



ployee experienced 2% lower EPS compared with their competition during that same period.

In addition, it has been found that companies with highly effective communication had 47% higher total returns to shareholders over a five-year period compared with companies with less effective internal communication practices.

The year 2014 is most definitely the time to refocus efforts on internal communication as a strategic driver to deliver employee engagement.

Talk2Us Internal Communication Research has found the following overall five key drivers that affect employee engagement, according to employee feedback:

1. Focusing managers and employees on the importance of engaging activities
2. Engaging employees and helping them understand company direction
3. Leveraging internal communicators to handle change management effectively
4. Branding the "employee experience" – aligning the gap between how employees perceive their company as a brand and as an employer
5. Helping managers communicate effectively through enhanced interaction abilities and measuring the impact of employee communication through targeted internal communication audits to show what return the communication team is delivering to the business.

* **Daniel Munslow** is a director at Talk2Us, a strategic internal communication consultancy with over 12 years' working experience with leading listed and multinational organisations. He is a strategist, trainer and facilitator, working with leadership in organisations to assist them in achieving brand engagement with their employees.

Daniel is an IABC Africa regional board member, a judge of the IABC Africa Gold Quill Awards, has served on the Blue Ribbon Panel and is an All-Star presenter at the IABC World Conference. He is also chief judge of the South African PRISA PRISM Awards.



Optimising Your



LinkedIn

Profile

By Wayne Bischoff, Habari Media

Today relationships matter more than ever in the communications profession. That's because people increasingly tune out irrelevant messages and select content and join groups of interest to them. This is reflected in the growing number of visits to and time spent on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn members comprise the world's largest professional community - and they work in organisations of all sizes. Consider that:

- the number of members of the government sector who have joined LinkedIn has grown by over 110% in the last three years, with over 100 000 individuals on the platform
- there were 184 million unique visitors worldwide to LinkedIn in the third quarter of 2013 and over 11 million professionals in Africa and 3 million in South Africa are listed
- one in every three professionals is on LinkedIn with 200 000 joining daily.

The reason LinkedIn members invest their time in this medium is their professional mindset. In other words, they are looking for ways to achieve their ambitions and further their careers. As a result, members are highly receptive to the advertising of professional services, content and experiences that can help make them more knowledgeable and, ultimately, more successful.

Whether someone is searching for people, jobs, companies or groups, LinkedIn provides the most relevant results based on your professional identity, your network and how the people in your network engage with LinkedIn. Plus, one of the first steps many members take when receiving con-

tent from a company or another member is to click through to the personal profile or company page to learn more about the sender. That's why you should maintain a complete and optimised profile.

Get the most from your profile in five steps:

1. Use a Profile Picture

Did you know that adding a profile picture makes your profile seven times more likely to be viewed by others? Your photo helps the people you invite to connect to identify you at a glance. It also helps you present a personable and professional image on the leading professional networking site.



2. Grow Your Endorsements

Bolster your professional brand by adding skills your connections can endorse you for and recognise those you've worked with on their professional strengths.

3. Package Your Summary

A summary of 40 words or more makes you more likely to turn up in search results. Tip: Include keywords featured in job descriptions for your field.

4. Showcase Your Experience

Add pictures, videos and presentations to your experience section to create an eye-catching portfolio. More than 2, 5 million pieces of rich media have been added.

5. Use Your Vanity URL

Add it to your business card, website, email signature, etc. (www.linkedin.com/in/yourname) to increase the likelihood of being found by useful contacts.

A final note: As you add connections and recommendations, your profile develops into a peer-reviewed picture of you, of your personal brand. Make sure it's in focus, well composed and easy to find. Put your best foot forward.

