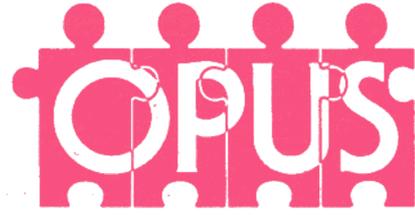


**"South Africa and the World
at the Dawn of 2006"**

**Report of Two Listening Posts
held on 11th January**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Report 1

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES.

Theme 1: Living in a split society

Splits referred to are race, poverty / abundance, materialism / spirituality, isolation / sharing, own / other, and in nature.

Theme 2: Crime

Crime is the most threatening thing in our society leading to fear, relying on self protection, isolation, helplessness, blaming, rage and acting out.

Theme 3: AIDS

AIDS is a major killer in society and is associated with fear, anger, shame, avoidance and silence.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Theme 1: Living in a split society

Analysis:

The mentioned splits are race (black / white), poverty / abundance, materialism / spirituality, isolation / sharing, own / other, and nature (representing destruction and prosperity). The discussion constantly oscillated between pessimism and optimism. This may be indicative of the level of ambiguity and even disintegration, and the difficulty to transcend opposites and paradoxes.

Race was mentioned as the most observable difference in our society. Pessimism and disillusionment were expressed referring to home roles and after work activities. These are characterised by a lack of integration representing the old style in our society of living in separation, seeking comfort and protection in the own and in sameness, in terms of ethnicity and culture. Optimism was expressed that South African society has moved considerably since 1994 from the separation of apartheid, to the integration of

black and white especially in terms of work roles. Mandela's concept of the rainbow nation is at least coming alive in the work place where diversity is celebrated to some extent. This is further facilitated by the laws on affirmative action and employment equity.

The above implies a reversal of roles creating a dynamic around envy. Whites who had abundant opportunities before and have lost these because of for example affirmative action, see blacks as "having it all". On the other hand, although some blacks do have significantly more and better circumstances now, others are still struggling to manage because they have no history or memory of abundance.

Poverty / abundance refers to the haves and don't haves. On the one hand this split between rich and poor is continuing and growing. The poor is becoming even more isolated from the rest of society, representing the status quo (the apartheid split). The new rich seem to be driven by materialism, and as a fast growing middle class its spending power is stimulating the economy as never before, representing a new description of abundance. The materialism is juxtaposed against an increasing focus in society on spirituality, defined and practised from both an African and a western perspective. The materialism has a "me, myself and I" value system (selfishness) whereas the spiritual has the tendency to share resources (even if it sometimes associated with shame and guilt). The amount of guilt depends on whether one gives or not.

The split between own and other also refers to xenophobia. The own is seen as "our country of milk and honey" being invaded by "the other" to escape their severe political and economical issues. The projection onto "the other" has to do with own insecurity about jobs, opportunities and resources.

During the listening post, a severe storm (with thunder, lightning and heavy rain) broke loose over Pretoria. This was so loud that participants could hardly hear one another. The discussion turned to nature representing destruction in its power for destruction in either drought or flood (called an "impending doom") as well as the prosperity that good rain could bring.

Hypothesis:

Living in a society with so many and ingrained splits, ambiguities and paradoxes, leads to feeling overwhelmed, inhibited, paralysed, hopeless, helpless, incapacitated, disempowered, preoccupied and guilty, with a confused sense of belonging and identity (around the lies of sameness and the superficiality of integration), a lack of insight to understand the real diversity and poverty issues (and for some flight into work and progress), which results in apathy, not having energy to pro-actively change society, using flight into appearing busy in performing mundane tasks, continuing the games of political correctness, not sharing resources, continuing the separateness and even creating new forms of apartheid, and not attending to the abundance of opportunities to share and build.

Theme 2: Crime

Analysis:

This theme was linked to the issue of split, namely, between perpetrator and victim. The preoccupations and experiences were filled with stereotypes, such as blacks are

perpetrators and whites are victims, the affluent are the only victims, and the government is powerless to deal with crime and corruption. Leadership and people in authority in organisations as well as in government, are blamed for not attending to crime and not containing safety for citizens. What is more, leadership is not only blamed for being passive, they also participate in crime. There was a reluctance to acknowledge the positive in leadership - in what it represents as well as its task outcomes and contributions. The blaming of authority figures is a projection of own reluctance and inability to make connections with others, either in similar or in different crime related situations.

Hypothesis:

Because of the overwhelming nature of crime, people feel lost, unsafe, mistrusting, unauthorised, and are becoming passive, followed by blaming authority figures for not taking up their power as a defence against taking up own leadership roles to change situations, to make a difference and to connect to the other.

Theme 3: AIDS

Analysis:

This theme was also connected to the issue of split. References to AIDS as a terrible and frightening pandemic, was accompanied with feelings of apathy, dissociation, disgust, understanding, empathy, as well as efforts to directly help victims and their families. Although AIDS is influencing organisational life to a large extent (with direct effects on the economy), it has its most negative influence on family life. The split dynamic is about shame and caring. Some family systems disconnect from and disown their infected family member, while others openly acknowledge the facts and take care of their loved ones physically and emotionally.

Hypothesis:

AIDS as an overwhelming physical threat to society, has become the container of many projections about denigration and fear of death, with the AIDS victims and their families identifying with the negative projection leading to more isolation, as if this will keep the projector isolated, safe and alive with the other non-infected ones.

Convener: Frans Cilliers

Report 2

1. SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

The subject of **boundaries** was raised first. One member spoke about encountering several patients where there seem to be few boundaries. Mention was also made of the difficulty of drawing boundaries in life and therapeutically. This situation is also evident in the broader sense in South Africa as a whole. There is still a great deal of **chaos** politically and in the structures in society since 1994.

We face municipal elections and the ruling party, the ANC, is trying to tighten boundaries to reduce the chaos of theft, fraud, violence and mismanagement in government and municipal structures across the board from education to health.

Mention was then made about the total violation of boundaries that occurred over the past few months in small towns near Port Elizabeth. Two young women were murdered in the one town and a young boy of 6 in the other.

The difficulties, experienced by family members who are involved in family businesses, were mentioned. Several discussions had taken place in the group that meets monthly where family members had requested assistance to resolve conflict and / or manage the dynamics and emotions between family members. In one instance the parents divorced and the adult children remained in the business working for the father. This situation led to many muddled boundaries. Experiences in the work with these family businesses is that roles are often inappropriate with adult sons not being allowed sufficient freedom and being kept frustratingly in a child position, as well as fathers holding on to the authority. There were strong feelings of competition, rivalry, jealousy, helplessness and many more. In addition there were boundary problems regarding separating the business from family and personal life.

The conversation then moved to increased numbers of people working from home both in South Africa and abroad. This also often led to boundary problems regarding ending work at the end of the day and leaving the office firmly closed. Intrusiveness into one's home from outsiders as well as family members encroaching on the work space was mentioned.

A conversation then took place about children and education and the differences in education between South Africa and UK. Two grandchildren had moved recently to the UK and the one moved from year 2 in South Africa to year 4 in UK because of his age. The change for the younger child was less because she moved from a pre-school year to year 1 in UK.

Still staying with education, several professional educators are seeking therapy because of mergers in South Africa of several large educational institutions. These mergers have not only included different universities but Technicons as well. In the run up to the merger people were afraid that they would lose their jobs. Now there are issues of superiority and inferiority. The university staff members consider themselves to be superior to technicon staff members. This is causing huge amounts of stress, tension and rage.

In addition many previously known boundaries have become unclear as staff remain unsure about new rules and roles. There is suspicion and a continual "looking over the shoulder" as it is evident that there is no longer a need for all the staff and there is uncertainty about who can be trusted. Leadership positions have as yet not been clearly defined, some leaders have been deposed and there seems to be a search for new leaders.

These dynamics ripple down to teaching and students suffer. Some students who would have done post graduate studies at this university have chosen to go to a university which is not undergoing the same transition.

The conversation then moved to couples and a remark was passed about the fickleness and brittleness of relationships that are being seen in therapy. Some couples present as though the relationship is strong and yet within a very short time the relationship breaks down. There is a chaotic quality to relationships as couples move rapidly in and out of a healthy state. One wife married for 25 years reached a point of such desperation that she felt it preferable to kill herself than remain in the marriage for another day. After a brief period of time this crisis subsided and the marriage is on track again. These dynamics reflect an **all or nothing** quality and that something of the "throw away" culture in which we live may be influencing hasty decisions about relationships.

These dynamics also seem to be evident in other relationships. An example was cited of a friend who was experiencing marital problems and the group member gave emotional support generously and unstintingly only to have this same friend then just distance herself. The group member was left angry and wondering about what was **real**.

This sparked off a conversation about what was real and what was not. This is complicated off course because individual perceptions play a role. There are differing perceptions about what is safe and what not in Port Elizabeth and in South Africa as a whole. Even in the group there were marked differences. Some members would not walk around the block alone while others walked alone in the bush believing it to be safe.

Crime has been normalised to such a degree that we have become desensitised. A black lady who worked as a cleaner for one of the group members spoke about not letting her son into the house if he was drunk because then he may rape her. There is a higher tolerance for violence as it is seen as a daily hazard.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

- Boundaries - chaos, violence and crime
- Continual change affecting perceptions of what is real or not
- Educational chaos - leadership struggles and blurred boundaries
- All or nothing culture that causes vacillation in relationships

3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Constant change leads to different individual perceptions about

- what is real or not, safe or unsafe.
- who is in charge or where the real leadership is (Past Deputy President Zuma saga is an example).
- great difficulties in setting and maintaining boundaries which leads to chaos in many spheres of life.

Convener: Lorna Brown