



Office of the Premier

NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE

DIVERSITY FRIDAY

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THE SAME MESSAGE: DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS

"Abandon the old concept based on conformity, and create a setting where people, authorised to think for themselves, are also able to collaborate with one another"

~ Hirschhorn

BIRDS IN A TREE

An African professor went on sabbatical leave to America where she lectured to post-graduate students. She then posed a simple problem, which she used to put to her African under-graduates: 'There are five birds sitting in a tree. If you take a slingshot and shoot one of them, how many are left?'

Most of the Americans answered 'four' with certainty; they said 'one subtracted from five equals four'. But, almost all of her African students' answers were 'zero'; because if you shoot one bird, the others will fly away'.

~ Management Principles, P.J. Smit & G.J. de J. Conjé, pp. 236, 3rd Edition, 2002

What is the moral of the story?

Take a look at this picture:

Note their different reactions.



When there is disparity between the views of different people, their disagreement could be based on their different understanding of the information confronting them. Every person has a unique framework against which received information is processed.

In this case the logic of common arithmetic ($5 - 1 = 4$) does not apply. Any person living in a village or near a game reserve will know that if you shoot and kill one bird, the others will not sit around and wait to also be killed.

Culturally it means that $5 - 1 = 0$, because the other birds flew away and there were thus none left in the tree.

But how can this understanding assist a diverse organization in dealing with issues at an organizational level?

Diversity of viewpoint and opinion in an organization energizes and stimulates group interaction and creativity. There are always different routes to solve a problem, and this depends on the diversity of opinions and viewpoints.

UBUNTU: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

The upbringing and socialization of individuals in African Society have always emphasized interpersonal, informational and decision-making roles.

Interpersonal roles are subsumed in the notion of UBUNTU in isiZulu and isiXhosa, UNHU in Shona, BOTHO in Tswana, BROEDERBOND in Afrikaans, BUNHU in Tsonga, VHUTHU in Venda and BROTHERHOOD in English.

Thus Ubuntu is a literal translation of the notion of collective personhood and collective morality ("Esprit de Corps").

Have a 'ngca' (nice) Diversity Friday

~ EMPLOYMENT EQUITY AND DIVERSITY UNIT ~

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