

## BEYOND DIVERSITY

### *looking ahead - and inwards*

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During the week of 20-24 November 2006 a strong contingent of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport got to know the staff of the company Pure Innovation from up close and relatively personal. Several groups were handled simultaneously at different venues by these capable and affable professionals. The outcomes aimed for were basically 'to understand the diverse and changing environment', as well as the individuals involved, and 'to demonstrate the ability to manage people energy effectively' and the 'skills required to maximise the strengths and opportunities of members in a diverse team to achieve positive results'. Quite a mouth full!

Naturally, most participants were reluctant to do yet another 'workshop type of thing', especially those who actually need such an experience most; the lone wolves, the skulkers in the trenches who wallow in their comfort zones, content to grumble and scowl, while, for the most part they are just naturally dead set against any form of change. To them terms like 'diversity' sound like 'adversity' and 'conversity' can only really mean 'confrontation'. Why think about abstract ideas, what good can possibly come from such time-consuming (and strenuous, heaven forbid) activities? 'Thinking about differences,' indeed. 'Finding common ground?' What for? It is all a lot of window dressing, after all. Or, so some people may believe.

Enter Carmen, Anthula and their colleagues, who proved to make short work of the awkwardness that seems part and parcel of this kind of situation where a substantial number of people, strangers mostly, are forced to get to know each other in double quick time. The modus operandi was basically to jolt the participants out of their usual ways of thinking and concepts such as 'scoring goals' by giving all and sundry A's, implementing a 'team energy model' and reflecting on how to stop 'downward spiralling conversations', not to mention

really weird games like throwing a tennis ball to blindfolded people, pretending to travel in a taxi, and holding hands in a circle like we used to in kindergarten, also had a few people glancing around in case a quick exit was possible.

In the so-called Woolworth Room a group of 20 people were seated around four tables. There the dynamic duo, Anthula and Carmen, worked with them - sometimes together, mostly in tandem, the one smoothly taking over from the other like riders in the Tour de France. Only here there was no Lance Armstrong and this absence of competition, in other words, none of a Baas-Klaas relationship, was carried over in their teachings. One got the distinctive impression that these two practice what they preach and are motivators par excellence; as sure of themselves and their curriculum as their names are exotic. Two days went really fast and

from the very first session everyone seemed to look forward to the next one. When the last questionnaire was being completed a new kind of reluctance was being experienced - this time everyone, the course presenters as well as the attendees, were not exactly keen to leave. Clearly a bond was formed amongst everyone in that room.

Diversity? Perhaps, despite the fact that half the group were from the Western Cape Archives and Records Service, but the 'common ground' aspect of conversity was definitely 'found' - whether it was Dalena from Library Services or Luvuyo from Transport, all were comfortable with one another and will be so in future whenever they may be called upon to liaise on any level.

Back at the different workplaces the course was discussed as everyone settled back into the familiar daily grind of their respective line functions and to quote Mervyn (Croeser the cleaner): 'I just hope that we can all remember to continue giving each other A's.'

A commendable sentiment indeed from someone who is only four years from retirement. May those who still have many years ahead of them in the Department share Mervyn's wish.

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