



## **UKZN Griot. Of Climate Change and Extinction**

Dealing with the stupidity of daily life in my commercial transactions I have come to the conclusion that climate change is not really an issue. Getting anything done, no matter how small, takes 27 phone calls, 47 emails, and the herculean efforts of dealing with duffers at the other end. No-one can spell properly anymore and emails lack addressees. As Chisholm's Third Law, Corollary 4 states, "No matter how long or how many times you explain, no one is listening". The reason is clear as Brown's Law of Business Success explains: "Our customer's paperwork is profit. Our own paperwork is loss". There is always bewilderment from an incompetent supplier when I ask to whom I should address my bill for the time I take to do its work?

One example after two months of endless one-sided communication between me and my spouse and our house insurer, notwithstanding our helpful listing textbook-style of the insurer's recurring organisational, customer and technical failures, all we got in return was a "dully (sic) noted".

Climate change is caused by miscreants who have no idea about what they are doing, or why they are doing it, or whether or not it needs to be done – no matter the cost to the environment or their employers. They are not even aware that climate change will affect them – personally. So they continue with their wasteful practices, with conspicuous consumption and in blissful ignorance. They have no ability to put themselves into the client's shoes or experiences nor could they care less about the cost of inefficiency to bottom lines. They know that stupidity, inefficiency and obstruction is the norm. And stupidity is usually rewarded. Just ask the failed multimillionaire top dogs of state owned-enterprises in South Africa. Too many to mention!

Obviously, I am not talking here only about the front-of-house folks, but the invisible managers who operate behind the scenes, leaving the former to clean up their mess while the high end-looters sit in their counting houses oblivious to everything but their bank balances. But there is always a positive: SABC staffers kept broadcasting no matter

Hlaudiness. SAA keeps flying safely despite the minister, Her Myeniness and the unions who disparage the pilots as “glorified taxi drivers”. Eskom techies keep “the lights on” despite Molefeness, the Minister and the Eskom board. OUTA and Corruption Watch are amongst the civic organisations seriously on their trails, their tails and their piggy banks. And, let’s not even mention rogues Bell Pottinger (BELPer) and KPMG which together enabled the three expatriate bros to capture and bankrupt an entire economy (as in “Zupta monopoly capital”). The work done by the DA in toppling a global PR (sic) firm through legal means is astonishing, and now KPMG is on the defensive also. McKinsey, come clean now .... Are these firms working on behalf of Zupta capital not the real representatives of “White monopoly capital”?

Few staff actually go the extra mile any more. But the Guptas went to Doha.

Back home, when asked a question, the employee stares at a screen, and repeats the mantra ‘It can’t be done’ - or pretends to have suddenly gone deaf, indicated by sullen dikbek reaching down to the counter. Staff are not “authorized” to be innovative. Glazed-eyed, they then lose the store a sale or alienate customers who know that it can be done. This nonsense often starts at university – when administrative staff are told by academics that their job is not to think but to do - one of Brenda Gourley’s pet peeves. By the same token, students subjected to mass banking education rarely learn to think. I wonder whether BELPer or KPMG even begin to comprehend the scale of their national looting they enabled from the hard fought-for South African democracy.

Is it any wonder that managers devise software that prevents what could be done by hand previously – like writing a check for staffer who was left off the salaries computer run. Remember those bizarre days of yore at UKZN? The practice of “transformation” did not include the value of efficiency or humanism or *ubuntu*.

Often, I have shown clueless retail service staffers how to do their own jobs, after finding out who in the company to speak to. Surprise is the result, but irritation is their response because this means extra work for them. And, often, the managers I speak to – when they can be tracked down – have little idea of what they are apologising for. Expensive stupidity reins at every level, from CEOs down.

Human stupidity and refusal to think laterally will get us before does climate change. Elon Musk may be the one person who actually gets to Mars before the skittles start falling. He has a plan.

My real appreciation goes to the consumer journalists who doggedly track stupidity, short-sightedness and myopia on behalf of bewildered customers. Of course that some customers are not themselves averse to fleecing their service providers – or are not themselves stupid managers. It’s this cohort that often results in the enddistancing between service provider and customer.

So, my newly inaugurated Fall-on-your-Sword Bell Pottinger Award recognises stupidity as an innate value in much PR practice that the sanitised theory often misses.

The KMPG Hoist By Your Own Petard Award is a stark reminder that auditing is not necessarily about ensuring financial probity, but about power and which clique is legitimised to wield it.

With regard to my insurer, get outta my life. Climate change? Not to worry, our species will be the most unsuccessful and short-lived ever to inhabit the earth as the well-off knowingly, willingly and with great determination consume the entire planet to extinction. We will have created our own catastrophe.

Now, gotta finish that paper on consumer culture in order to tick my KPA form.

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*Disclaimer: The views expressed in this column are the author's own.*