

In spite of the great promise that lives within the SME sector and the repeated statements of commitment to grow the sector, the results have been less than encouraging. The numbers fail to excite and the social and economic impact is nowhere close to making a difference in the lives of the citizenry or in the economy. Where have we got stuck? What is it that has locked us into a cycle of so much talk and so little impact?

### The Myth of Creativity

As a people we have subscribed over time to a belief that we are blessed with high levels of native creativity. We use the Carnival mantra (the greatest show on earth) to delude ourselves into a false sense that we are a fountain of innovation and truly different ideas. But if we were to ask ourselves about the level of cultural creativity in the country, what would be our honest response? Have we really done anything truly groundbreaking recently? Our music and architecture, the range of goods we produce, our designs and services ... can we legitimately claim to be truly creative?

Our institutions, built on a history of negation, have more often than not served to disempower and suppress what native talent and creativity might have existed. Our families, schools and workplaces have often served to stifle the different and the daring ... those who would challenge the status quo. For far too many of us, we learned to toe the line, to speak when spoken to, to "give the teacher the answer the teacher wants".

As a nation, our way out of this is to loosen the fetters, to encourage real creativity, to welcome the different, to listen to the "fool" whose idea is so farfetched that it can be the doorway to new worlds. This means letting go of "shoulds", being willing to stand in someone else's place and see the world the way they see it, looking for the second and third "right answer".

### The Language Gap

Entrepreneurship requires the ability to not just conjure up pictures but to articulate and express these ideas in words. A paucity of language skills reduces significantly our ability to fully develop ideas or to persuade and engage someone else in a potential business enterprise. Whether it is with a likely partner or a potential financier, our family or employees, the absence of powerful language actively reduces our ability to influence and mobilise resources necessary for our business success.

Even worse is the fact that low language and literacy levels will discourage or dampen our desire to read and research, two critical dimensions on the road to entrepreneurial and business success.

One possible way out of this morass lies within our education system and failing that, within the sphere of adult literacy training. Having the idea and the skill or talent is not enough. We must be able to read, explore, articulate and promote the idea through strong language skills. Failing that, the best ideas will die with us, unexpressed and unfulfilled.

### An Aversion to Critical Thinking

Casual listening to day-to-day dialogue about issues taking place around us will reveal a surface level of apparent thought and expression of ideas. Close attention to the quality of dialogue as expressed on the airwaves or in print will lead us to a discovery of massive gaps in the quality of analysis and inference about issues being discussed.

We talk a lot but seem to think, really think, very little. This speaks to a pervasive intellectual or cognitive laziness that prevents us from raising and asking truly probing questions. In the absence of proper questioning we are unlikely to have gathered appropriate and relevant information and hence are unlikely to be able to interpret accurately and to come to reasoned conclusions.

What does this have to do with enterprise development? Everything! A business idea not fully and thoroughly explored, an idea to which we have not applied reasoned analysis, an idea whose assumptions, implications and consequences have not been examined, will of necessity be restricted in scope and may well be so flawed that it will ultimately flounder and fail.

As we pursue success, we must do two things – think openly and communicate effectively. The experiences of our past may very well have conspired to close off these two paths to many of us.

The solution to this dilemma is the teaching of

critical thinking skills to as many people as we can – at school, in clubs, on our sports fields, in our workplaces ... wherever. Without this, ambitious forays into business lending and financial planning are doomed to fail.

What critical thinking skills training will do is unleash a flood of thinkers who can take their ideas, develop them thoroughly and thoughtfully, express these ideas and engage others in powerful business enterprises.

This combined process of mobilizing real creativity, developing strong language skills and encouraging critical thinking has the power to liberate thousands of people stuck in a consumption-focused "small business" model.

But we must also be aware that this process can be seen as a threat to those who would want people to remain stuck where they are, working without the fundamental skills, not understanding what is really required but hoping to establish and grow successful SME's.

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