

THE BIRTH OF THE BLACK MANAGEMENT FORUM

I: CONTEXT: IN THE FACE OF THE INSTRUMENTS OF CONTAINMENT

- The majority population forced to assume a minority status that was aided and abetted by:
 - Forcing communities to occupy a minority position throughout society
 - Living in a state of impermanence, forced mobility, no control over own life
 - Destabilisation of normal life within communities and families
 - Individuals forced to live under a permit system: you had to seek official permission to conduct activities generally considered normal or automatic
 - (ask black Africans who are living and working in South Africa on term permits)
- Black South Africans, in particular, were discouraged from starting, participating, supporting or belonging to organisations of any kind – safe those operated by churches (Look at the impact currently)
- The over-arching objective of the apartheid state was to ensure that by the early or mid-1970s all black people would move back from towns and cities into their respective homelands or tribal communities
- Thus, black South Africans could not imagine or envisage living full and normal life within the apartheid state – you could not think or plan where you'd be in the next five or ten years

II: IN THE BEGINNING – THE 1970S

- This entire decade was dominated by social unrest and campus activism of various kinds:
 - International student protests washed on South African campuses early in the 1970s culminating in the rise of the Steve Biko era activism – giving black youth a voice
 - Progressive churches organising on the side lines – planting the seed for formation of “black study group”
 - South Africa was running neighbourhood destabilisation programme aimed at unsettling political systems and leadership in neighbouring countries
 - The first non-unionised strike by black municipality workers in the city of Durban – unleashed a rash of many workplace disobedience (1973) – push-back against extreme racism by Rhodesian white immigrants
 - The idea of a starting a corporate home for future black managers – a la The National Development and Management Foundation – (NDMF) – 1973-4
 - Rumours of South African military going to war against Zambia and neighbouring countries
 - Soweto student uprising – 1976
 - A hasty response from the apartheid government and big business and formation of:
 - The Urban Foundation
 - The Small Business Development Corporation

III. BIRTH OF THE BMF

- Many and uncoordinated factors, processes and events brought about the birth of the BMF:
 - It's easy to be seduced by the urge to air-brush history and say this event was the effort of a single individual – I take credit for putting the idea down on paper and then mobilising those available to listen to and support the idea of building a corporate home for future black managers
 - Like many other progressive organisations that sprung up in the 1970s, the idea of the BMF resembles one of the low-hanging fruits leading to the death of apartheid and the birth of our democracy
 - As early as the 1970s, there was a realisation among black and (progressive) white South Africans that a democratic South Africa will not prosper without the support and participation of an array of organisations rooted in democratic values
 - One of our early challenges was to find and use like-minded organisations as guidelines or benchmarks – NAFCOC
 - The NDMF – served as one of the midwives or nursemaids for the BMF
 - First- and second-hand experience and lessons were borrowed from black American organisations that had survived their own version of apartheid or Jim Crow
 - The exercise entailed an extended visit to the leadership of organisations serving black American schools, colleges, universities, business and churches:
 - The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – (Drs Montague-Cobb and Brodus Butler)
 - The Urban League
 - The Robert Russa-Moton Foundation
 - The Booker T. Washington and The Tuskegee Institute
 - The Black MBA Association

IV. ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVE AND FOCUS

- A brand new, independent and self-sufficient organisation dedicated to the pursuit of the advancement of competent and fully operational black managers, business operators, supervisory personnel and so forth
- Establish and operate formal structures and facilities designed to expose, train and equip young black South Africans with managerial skills, competencies and first-hand experience
- Establish and operate a sustainable forum for dynamic dialogue, conversations and exchange of experiences and ideas between and among people and organisations sharing interests in people development
- In the spirit of the time, we had to incorporate an item that described the nascent organisation as 'a non-political organisation' – an unstated condition for black organisations to declare and uphold

V. SOME LESSONS

- Drawing inspiration from the cathedral-minded insights and tenacity of those who created institutions and resources that live across centuries or millennia - black American organisations, Basílica de la Sagrada Familia
- Rising above interminable squabbles for position, recognition or mutual rivalry
- Capacity to resist seduction by party political institutions and other self-serving institutions and/or their leadership
- The unintended entrenchment of counter-productive, messy leadership transition – Africa's 3rd term leadership or life presidency
- When to open the doors to young South Africans from different backgrounds
- Staying honest and committed to the original flight-plan, namely:
 - Establishment and running of formal training programmes and resources for managerial capacity-building

- Entrenchment of internal structures dedicated to the running a dynamic forum for constructive dialogue and conversations
- Ensuring long-term organisational sustainability, relevance and support from key stakeholder groups
- Constantly reminding ourselves that the task of reversing the damage brought about by the rig enforcement of apartheid policies and schemes that successfully barred us from:
 - learning to form and master the art of running successful organisations;
 - acquiring the requisite discipline, to support and participate in our own organisation requires focus, patience and a great deal of maturity
 - drawing the benefits that accrue from our own organisations will take even longer the time it took to cause the damage
- we'll do well to resist the temptation to continue inflicting more damage on ourselves – in our capacity as unwitting agents of apartheid and allied enemies of democracy, equity and fairness