

Why ethics and reputation matters in Africa

By  Juanita Pienaar

12 Jun 2019

African Public Relations Association (Apra) presented its second ethics and reputation research study at the organisation's 31st annual conference hosted in Kigali, Rwanda last month. The study, powered by reputation research agency Reputation Matters, surveyed 225 CEOs, executives, directors, senior management and public relations individuals across Africa, with the overarching goal to better understand how ethics and reputation play a role in our daily lives and on a business and country level.

In line with the theme 'Africa and Storytelling: Changing the Narrative', one of the key findings to emerge from the study was that ethics is the invisible driving force on many aspects of people's lives. It enables people to achieve their personal visions and helps them to do their daily activities in the right way.



Reputation management in Africa study

16 May 2019



With this in mind, we spoke to Regine le Roux, MD of Reputation Matters, who presented the results at the conference, and asked her to sum up some of the main insights that stood out to her and to elaborate on how we can change the narrative and positively influence the stories that are told about Africa...

Very interesting findings revealed at Apra's annual conference held recently in Rwanda. The key question being, "Do ethics really matter in Africa?" What were the key insights shared?

The study was conducted across three levels: individual, organisational and country level. The respondents were asked similar questions across all three levels pertaining to the importance of ethics. On an individual level as well as an organisational level, respondents felt that ethics is a strong driving force behind the decisions they make in their personal life as well as in the organisations they work for.

However, on a country level, respondents indicated that ethics is not a strong driving force behind the decision making of the African leaders.

"An interesting trend that surfaced on both an organisational as well as the country level is the perception of responsibility of ethics: CEOs and leaders need to set the example in everything they do, with ethics driving their decisions. They should be the custodians of ethics and reputation, to take their organisations and countries forward."



Regine le Roux, managing director of Reputation Matters.

What stood out to you personally and why?

We asked a series of questions about ethics and whether it is the driving force behind different aspects of an individual's life. On a personal level, respondents felt strongly that ethics is a driving force enabling them to do their job the right way.

This really stood out, as it resonates with and explains why organisations also scored high with regards to ethics:

individuals are the ones who work within the organisations and if ethics is the driving force behind the way they perform their daily activities, it gives us hope for the future.

Individuals have an impact on their organisations; they can influence the organisation by conducting business in an ethical manner.

■ **Botswana was once again voted as being perceived as the most ethical country in Africa. Why do you think that is?**

We didn't specifically ask respondents why they selected a specific country (this is definitely something we'll add next year).

This is my take:

“ The majority of the respondents were South African, so personally, I think that we as South Africans really don't know the rest of our continent very well. Ask anyone to list five countries in Europe and name their capitals; most people will do so without hesitation. Ask the same people to list five African countries and what their capitals are, and the answers are not as fluent. ”

Botswana is our closest neighbour who seems to be getting it right. They have a strong economy and there is also a perception that Botswana has strong ethical leadership at the helm. Reputations are built on perceptions, and it is this perception that has contributed to this score.

■ **How do you think we can change the narrative and positively influence the stories that are told about Africa?**

By setting the example and visible ethical behaviour. We as business owners and leaders need to walk the walk and talk the talk. Ethics needs to be something that is incorporated into every aspect of our lives and each decision and action that we make.

Leaders need to have a core set of values in place that will drive their behaviour. Through the active implementation of these core values, leaders can inspire others to also lead by example. Actively implementing a core set of values will ultimately lead to a positive reputation.

With that said, yes, it is leaders' responsibility to set the example, but it is also our individual responsibility in the way that we act and the things we say that will impact how our countries and continent is viewed.

If we can all start by celebrating the positive aspects of our countries and the continent and sharing at least one positive story each day, we'll start seeing a massive positive shift in the narrative of our beautiful continent.

■ **Why is research like this important to the PR industry?**

Research, whether for a continent, country or company provides a baseline and helps to identify gaps, risks and key priority areas to focus on. It also helps us to identify what is working well. It doesn't help to only focus on the negative aspects; positive aspects need to be celebrated and leveraged off as well, especially when it comes to changing perceptions and narratives.

■ **What are your hopes for the Africa of tomorrow?**

We have a magnificent continent! It's time that we stop selling ourselves short and start celebrating everything that we have to offer. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to change mindsets and the narrative, but it starts with each one of us to make the difference.

The hope is that our leaders are held accountable for their actions and for them to adopt a non-negotiable ethical value system, setting the example on a daily basis. That we will respect every individual so much that our actions are driven by an ethical value system that becomes a reality in everything that we say and do and not just something that sounds good in

theory.

That we become so proud of our countries, our countrymen and continent so much so that we can't ever imagine leaving the shores of our continent for other countries, and to attract those who did leave back.

■ **Anything else you would like to add?**

We are very grateful to everyone that participated in the survey, thank you! If you didn't get a chance to have your say this year and would like to be part of the 2020 survey, please send your email address to research@reputationmatters.co.za so that we can alert you when we open the survey again next year.

If you are keen to quantify the reputation of your organisation, please do not hesitate to contact us on: research@reputationmatters.co.za.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the former editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She was also a contributing writer.

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