

question of our time. "The severest test of work today is not of our strategies, but of our imaginations and identities. For a human being, finding and doing good work is one of the ultimate ways of making a break for freedom," writes Whyte in *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work and the Shaping of Identity*. He believes that, as humans, we carry enough burdens in the outer world not to want to replicate that same sense of burden in our inner selves.

For a world that has been consumed with power and the pursuit of profits, Whyte's injunctions can come as relief.

The poetic tradition holds that each person has a particular way of being in and belonging to the world

"Engaging with poetry aligns the power of the mind with the power of the heart and could play an increasingly important role in creating a totally new, changed business culture," says Alberts. "Whyte challenges us all by asking us to rethink our daily habits and assumptions. Through his poetry, he forces us to look inside ourselves and reflect on our own journeys.

"Poets like David Whyte encourage us to explore and revisit our own 'lenser edges of life' and, because of this, they play an increasingly important role in business," she adds. "Our personal journeys and the search for identity and self-actualisation become more understandable – and, hopefully, more meaningful – using poetry.

"In my own work with people in various organisations, I increasingly find an intense and earnest yearning for another way. Corporate business leaders repetitively express their yearning for 'more meaning' in business."

What is certain is that business requires new approaches and transformative thinking, both in terms of the way it relates to consumers and interacts with culture, as well as the role it plays in people's lives.

Poets will no longer live outside the fringes of business, but will become increasingly commonplace within the heart of the corporation as cultural decoders, praise singers, mediators between management and labour and as facilitators for forging a new paradigm for leadership. ■

Whyte believes work presents our greatest opportunity for self-discovery and growth, yet is the one place where we are least ourselves. The danger, he believes, is that work is a powerful force in the shaping of our identity and if we do our work unthinkingly, Whyte maintains, it can shape us away into nothing.

Business consultant Reitha Alberts believes one needs to put Whyte and his argument in the context of the new world of work and the changing role of business in society. Alberts is a specialist in strategic thinking, corporate governance and ethics, as well as leadership development, and lectures on these subjects at the University of Stellenbosch Business School. She also works in Stockholm for the Applied International Management Programme and lectures to African business leaders in Sweden.

"Due to the fast pace at which decisions are taken and the dynamics of the external environment, people sometimes find it difficult to make sense of business itself and particularly of their own role in all of it," she says. "Employees no longer have a clear, 'grand narrative' according to which they can plan and organise their careers or their personal lives. This has been a cause of uncertainty and existential anxiety for most people. More than ever before, people seem to be increasingly searching for authenticity and for more meaning in business."

Meaning and belonging are a strong theme of Whyte's public talks, his work with business and his poetry. "There is a tremendous breadth, texture and colour to human life," says Whyte. "It is this breadth and texture that poetry celebrates. The poetic tradition has an understanding that each person has a particular way of being in the world and a particular way of belonging to the world.

"Moreover, each person has a way of finding their particular place through the imagination. The imagination is not the ability to think things up, but the faith you would have in the images which reside in you at any one time. These images are actually making sense of an incredibly complicated and quite often chaotic world around you.

"If you can't make a friend of the unknown, then life will always appear as a kind of enemy or something that is constantly at your throat," he says.

In the uncertainty that has become global markets and shifting economies, companionship with the unknown is a