

Case studies on diversity interventions  
in some South African organisations

# Being different together

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EDITED BY MELISSA STEYN



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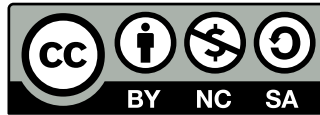
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*Top, from left: Dorrian Aiken, Kurt April, Lize Booysen, Philomena Essed, Claire Kelly  
Bottom, from left: Stella Nkomo, Crain Soudien, Melissa Steyn, Isaac Swafo*

“Only by persistent and unremitting educational efforts will we one day see that mutual helpfulness and tolerance between differing peoples have become as important to our welfare as having clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment.”

*Alan B. Slifka*

# Introduction



Contemporary post-colonial geopolitics has witnessed the changing nature of the nation state. Initially conceived of as the territorial “home” of an ethnically and racially homogenous group, the notion of the nation state is increasingly characterised by difference and complexity. There are few contexts where people are not confronted by difference in the workplace, in organisations and public spaces, and as an aspect of the general body politic. The challenge therefore is how to value what different groups may bring to the collective while, at the same time, maintaining cohesive societies. In difficult economic times, this includes rejecting policies that approach difference through segregation, expulsion and ethnic cleansing in favour of inclusive political and economic measures and equitable sharing of resources. It also requires public spaces that are characterised by accessibility and safety for all raced, gendered and differently abled bodies. For organisations, the challenges cluster around such issues as how to create environments that can bring into play the strengths of difference to promote organisational goals, while at the same time enabling employees to reach their full potential, to have their contribution valued and to feel recognised and respected.

Contemporary South Africa is no exception in facing realities such as these, although the specific contours that the challenges take are obviously shaped by South Africa’s history, its socio-economic capacities and the particular demographics that form its population. At the national level, the country has been challenged not only by the legacy of its apartheid past, but also by the pressures of globalisation and the concomitant movements of people, especially the arrival of nationals from neighbouring African countries and the departure of skilled South Africans, predominantly members of the advantaged white population relocating to “first world” countries.

Apartheid was always about creating differential life opportunities, where white South Africans, especially white men, were systematically advantaged. The visibility of the history of violent oppression by



the apartheid state often distracts attention from the banal day-to-day discrimination that characterised apartheid society in terms of social relations, access to employment, and personal and professional development. This hierarchic legacy is still deeply entrenched in the South African social fabric and its institutions. As part of putting the diversity of the nation on a new footing, South Africa has been engaged in a well-documented process of redress and rearticulation. Thabo Mbeki's 1996 "I am an African" speech is probably the most influential intervention at the level of national discourse. Quoting the Freedom Charter of 1955 he emphasised the nation's inclusivity: "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white ... It rejoices in the diversity of our people and creates the space for all of us voluntarily to define ourselves as one people" (Mbeki 1996).

Both in society as a whole and in the workplace specifically, widespread legislative reform has attempted to redress stratification along a number of axes of difference (named in the constitution as race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth<sup>1</sup>). This has been met with mixed success at both levels. The government has introduced legislation<sup>2</sup> affecting labour relations, basic conditions of employment and employment equity, providing the basis for far-reaching changes in South African employment practice. For example, the following acts have been promulgated to ensure that diversity and equity become a reality in the business environment:

- Amended Labour Relations Act, No. 66 of 1995
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996
- Amended Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No. 75 of 1997
- Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998
- Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, No. 53 of 2003

Structures have been put in place to monitor labour standards and provide the means for unfair labour practices to be challenged and rectified, most notably the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration and the Labour Court. The Department of Labour requires

.....  
1 Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution: <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96cons2.htm>

2 <http://www.labour.gov.za/legislation>

companies to set targets for diversifying the workplace in such a way that previously excluded groups will be represented and promoted.

Despite the legal imperative for affirmative action<sup>3</sup> and broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE),<sup>4</sup> the diversity of the South African population remains largely untapped as a resource, and is still often regarded as a source of difficulty, even liability. The case studies in this book show that the employment directives since 1994 have not been able to plumb the depth and breadth of discrimination in the workplace along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, language and disability. As can be seen in all of the case studies in this book, gender equality has been subsumed by issues of race despite the African National Congress (ANC) government's stated commitment to recognise gender equality in government appointments, empowerment strategies and ministerial representation (controversially expressed most recently in President Jacob Zuma's government's creation of the Department for Women, Children and People with Disabilities).

Employment equity measures such as affirmative action, which were conceptualised in countries like the USA, were designed to introduce a representative number from minority groups into relatively homogenous organisations. The changes envisioned for South African organisations are of a different order: in this country, the majority demographic has to be brought into the centre, politically, economically and organisationally – a fundamental transformation in processes, structures, identities and relationships. Conventional thinking around change management also struggles to address the profound shifts in class structure that post-apartheid South Africa has experienced. While a burgeoning black middle class has emerged as access to education and employment has increased, the post-apartheid government's shift towards neo-liberal economic policies has left the majority in poverty. The case studies that are presented here are a reminder of this sometimes volatile transformation of South African life, where new opportunities and challenges often come into conflict with old mindsets and practices.

The case studies that make up this book were part of a national research project undertaken from 2004-2009 by Intercultural and Diversity Stud-

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3 <http://www.labour.gov.za/legislation/acts/basic-guides/basic-guide-to-affirmative-action>

4 <http://www.labour.gov.za/legislation/acts/employment-equity/broad-based-black-economic-empowerment-act/>

ies of Southern Africa (iNCUDISA), a research unit based at the University of Cape Town, in collaboration with researchers from the School of Business Leadership at the University of South Africa (Unisa), the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands and Antioch University in the USA. The focus of the research was on various South African organisations where diversity interventions had been implemented. The purpose was to assess to what extent organisations have changed in the direction of deep transformation of their structures and culture, and in doing so, to theorise diversity from a South African position and deepen the discussion around marginalisation, transformation and power in the South African context.

Case studies were conducted by Diversity Studies MPhil and MBA students, under the supervision of senior researchers. The students underwent training in Critical Diversity Theory and the methodologies they would need to employ. The final studies were also submitted as the formal research component of the students' degrees. At each site, the organisation was invited to identify what they regarded as the diversity intervention. The study then assessed the degree to which the named intervention had made an impact on the organisation. This impact was not considered in terms of the "bottom line", but in terms of the differences that were discernible in: demographics; policies; and the extent to which the members of the organisation felt a palpable change in the organisation's understanding of their differences.

In conducting the case studies, an attempt was made to achieve a 360-degree assessment of the organisation. Researchers spent time on site collecting data which included desktop research of company policies and documents, participant observation, personal interviews and focus groups. Using a triangulated data collection strategy, "thick" data was gained for each case study. All the qualitative data was analysed using Interpretive Grounded Theory (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Miles and Huberman 1994, Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1994, Babbie and Mouton 2001) and emergent patterns were interrogated using Critical Discourse theories.

In all, 12 studies were conducted in a range of sectors and from a number of geographic regions. Of the 12 studies, eight were selected for inclusion in this book. As the intention is that the book should provide material for use by practitioners and teachers, the original reports/theses were edited into two formats. The first format provides more detail of the

organisation, the diversity intervention applied at that organisation and the researcher's evaluation of its impact. The second format is shorter, and is suitable for duplication for teaching purposes. Interviews with diversity practitioners are included in each chapter.

Some short technical notes are in order. The ongoing use of racial categorisation in the "new" South Africa is a topic of debate in the country. It is the government's policy that in order to monitor, assess and promote redress, the use of the categories employed by the apartheid system is necessary. The study that forms the basis of this book worked with that premise, and therefore the categories are generally employed as in current South African labour legislation and practice. This does not in any way suggest a belief in objective racial categories. There is some variation, even between the individual cases in this book, in the use of the terms "black" and "African". As far as possible, the term "black" refers to the Black Consciousness definition, in which all groups who have experienced oppression under white supremacist rule are considered black. Thus, this includes African, coloured and Indian people. Generally, the term "black African" is used to refer to the majority population in this book and broadly in the society, but this is not uncontested, and neither is the use of the term "coloured", which is used to refer to the creolised community most populous in the Western Cape.

In reporting comments of participants, we have retained the actual words of the interviewees. Only some minor edits have been made for intelligibility. Where words have been added, they have been put in square brackets.

It is the hope that the material presented in this book will help to start to rectify the paucity of material for those working and teaching in the broad areas of diversity, equity and transformation in South Africa, and perhaps even in other contexts.

Melissa Steyn

# Glossary of key terms



**Employment Equity:** The Employment Equity Act attempts to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfilment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced in the past by designated persons. It gives effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences (Tucson Corporate LGBT Coalition 2005).

**Diversity:** A broad definition of diversity ranges from personality and work style to all of the visible dimensions of diversity, to secondary influences such as religion, socio-economics and education, to work diversities such as management and union, functional level and classification or proximity/distance to headquarters (ibid.).

**Valuing Diversity:** Valuing diversity builds upon the critical foundation laid by workplace equity initiatives. The focus is on recognising the uniqueness in everyone, valuing the contribution that each can make and creating an inclusive work environment where awareness of, and respect for those of different cultures is promoted. It is the quality of the work experience, rather than simply the participation rate of designated persons (ibid.).

**Diversity Management:** Managing diversity is different from valuing diversity because it focuses on the business case for diversity. In this scenario, capitalising on diversity is seen as a strategic approach to business that contributes to organisational goals such as profits and productivity. It also does not involve any legal requirements and is not implemented just to avoid lawsuits. Managing diversity moves beyond valuing diversity in that it is a way in which to do business and should be aligned with other organisational strategic plans (ibid.).

# Glossary



AA	Affirmative action
ABET	Adult basic education and training
AI	Appreciative inquiry
AIM	Aeronautical information management
ANC	African National Congress
ATA	Aviation Training Academy
ATC	Air traffic control(ler)
ATSA	Air traffic services assistant
BEE	Black economic empowerment
CDP	Career development plan
CEO	Chief executive officer
CO	Commercial organisation
CSC	Community service centre
DEISA	Diversity and Equity Interventions in South Africa
EAS	Employee assistance services
EE	Employment equity
EEC	Employment equity committee
EECF	Employment Equity Consultative Forum
EETC	Employment Equity Training Committee
EMC	Executive management committee
FSC	Financial services company
GM	General manager
HOD	Head of department
HR	Human resources (department)
IHL	Institute of higher learning
IMP	Integrated management process
IOP	Institutional operating plan
JSE	Johannesburg Stock Exchange

KPA	Key performance area
LIC	Large industrial company
LSAM	Large South African manufacturer
OE	Organisational effectiveness
PMI	Power management inventory
PR	Public relations
SADC	Southern African developing countries
SAPS	South African Police Service
SATCC	Southern African Transport and Communication Commission
Sekupu	(Fictional name of company)
SFPC	Small food-production company
UPSIDE	Unleashing Potential – Skills in diversity and equity (accredited workshop)
UACC	Upper airspace control centre
VC	Vice-chancellor

# Critical Diversity Literacy



## *Diversity awareness in 12 South African organisations<sup>1</sup>*

Melissa Steyn

### Abstract

South African society has undergone a remarkable political and legal transformation since 1994, moving from apartheid towards a democratic society that enshrines the rights of diversity. However, deep social divisions and inequalities persist. Twelve case studies were conducted as part of the DEISA research programme into diversity and equity transformation in South African organisations. The concept of Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL) was useful to judge the organisations for their disposition towards diversity, and the extent of their achieved transformation. The CDL model proposed here is a conceptual tool for teaching and implementing transformation towards more socially just approaches to workplace diversity, even in complex postcolonial contexts.

### Introduction

With the pressures of rapidly changing internal demographics within national states, as well as the ever-accelerating interconnectedness of

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1 An earlier version of this article was published in *Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences* 3(3), 2010, Pinterič, U. (ed.), Vega Press, available at <http://vega.fuds.si/>.



communities across the globe, there is an enormous thrust to theorise questions of diversity, coexistence and identity, not only in order to formulate sound progressive policy and practice, but because engaging issues of difference in mutually affirming ways is necessary if we are to have a future together on the planet (Adler 1997, Bauman 2004, Essed 2002, Mindell 1995, O'Hara-Devereaux 1994, Senge 2000, Sen 2006). International thinking on human rights increasingly recognises diversity as a human rights issue, as can be seen explicitly stated in documents such as the Declaration of the World Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa (World Conference against Racism, 2001). South African society has seen a remarkable political and legal transformation in the past 15 years, moving from institutionalised apartheid towards a democratic society that enshrines the rights of its people in all their diversity. The South African Constitution (1996) prohibits all forms of unfair discrimination based on criteria such as race, gender, sexual orientation and other grounds, and the Equality Act (2000) recognises the promotion of diversity as a fair reason for “positive” discrimination such as in affirmative action. Constitutional Court Judge Pius Langa (2007) has indeed found that:

The acknowledgment and acceptance of difference is particularly important in our country where for centuries group membership based on supposed biological characteristics such as skin colour has been the express basis of advantage and disadvantage. South Africans come in all shapes and sizes. The development of an active rather than a purely formal sense of enjoying a common citizenship depends on recognising and accepting people with all their differences, as they are. The Constitution thus acknowledges the variability of human beings (genetic and socio-cultural), affirms the right to be different, and celebrates the diversity of the nation. (Constitutional Court Judgment, CCT 51/06, 2007)

Widespread reform has taken place in the labour sector since 1994. The government has introduced new legislation affecting labour relations, basic conditions of employment, and employment equity, thus providing the basis for far-reaching changes in South African employment practices. The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, the Labour Court, as well as other structures set up to monitor labour

standards provide the means for unfair labour practices to be challenged and rectified. A significant piece of legislation that has changed the labour landscape in South Africa is the Employment Equity Act (1998).

This requires every employer to promote equal opportunity in the workplace by eliminating unfair discrimination from any employment policy or practice and to demonstrate progress in diversifying the workplace in such a way that previously excluded groups are fully represented, and promoted. Yet the profile of senior positions remains overwhelmingly white and male, and progress remains very slow (Commission for Employment Equity 2006, Booysen 2007). Similarly, the National Skills Development Strategy sets out a vision for skills development that has “the promotion of equity” prioritised as one of six central goals. Skills development is one way in which equity can be achieved, and through the Skills Development Act (1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act (1999), the government is compelling organisations to widen opportunities, build equity and encourage collaboration to make this happen. Black economic empowerment measures, and more recently, broad-based black economic empowerment legislation (2003) also seeks to change the complexion of ownership of companies to reflect the demographics of the nation.

On the ground, however, South African society is a long way from embodying the progressive legislation in everyday practices and approaches. Deep social divisions and inequalities persist, perpetuated along the fault lines created by the past colonial and apartheid ideological commitments, within the context of a region grappling with conflict, political upheaval and poverty at the same time that it opens up to the pressures and opportunities of globalisation; the diversity of the population more often than not is regarded as a source of difficulty, and unequal access and opportunities persist (Grunebaum and Robins 2001, Makgoba 1998, Steyn 2003, Zegeye 2001, Ansell 2001, Franchi 2003, Booysen 2007, Commission for Employment Equity 2006). It has become commonplace to observe that while one can change laws one cannot legislate the hearts and minds of citizens. To develop an ethos in which ordinary people develop the requisite understandings, approaches and skills to bring about transformation of the various sectors of society, they themselves have to undertake the learning and educate themselves about how oppression functioned in the history of the country, how ordinary people participated, and continue to participate, in perpetuating oppressive

systems, and how individuals can make a contribution towards greater social justice within their sphere of influence. They have to become literate to the issues of oppression and discrimination in all guises, become intolerant of injustice in the status quo, and come to care about creating a more equitable present and future. In short, they need to become “literate” in issues of diversity. This is especially true for those who hold positional power, such as people in management positions.

These are the people who are responsible for driving change in their organisations – a generally held view, almost to the point of a truism, is that transformation is only successful when there is executive and management commitment for the change processes.

This chapter does not set out to argue the need for diversity or inclusionary practices in organisations, as this is a separate issue and is well documented and debated in the literature (Loden and Rosener 1991, Thomas and Ely 1996, Collins 1996, Litvin 2006). Drawing on data from a research programme into Diversity and Equity Interventions in South Africa (DEISA), which examines the diversity “industry” in South Africa, I will rather examine transformation in South African organisations through the conceptual model I am proposing, namely, Critical Diversity Literacy.

## Critical Diversity Theory

The notion of Critical Diversity Literacy can be located within a paradigm that can be called Critical Diversity Theory. This approach to diversity draws on the theoretical tradition originally emanating from the Frankfurt School (Carr 2000), and is therefore aligned with Critical Management/Organisational Studies (Lorbiecki and Jack 2000, Litvin 2006, Kersten 2000, Collins 1996, Deetz 1997), particularly those studies that are informed by post-structuralist and postcolonial insights (Fischer and Van Vianen 2004, Grimes 2001, Macapline and Marsh 2005, Prasad 2006). It focuses on multiple axes of difference where power dynamics operate to create the centres and margins of gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, age, etc. as well as their varying intersections.

It also acknowledges the centuries of colonial history and ideologies of Western/European (white) superiority and African/Asian (black) inferiority (Kelly, Wale, Soudien, and Steyn 2007). Such an orientation entails a

radical look at the constructions of difference that underpin institutional culture and interpersonal interactions, and moves beyond merely tolerating, or assimilating, differences into dominant practices, which is the case for some approaches to diversity (Kersten 2000, Litvin 2006, Prasad 2006, Steyn, Soudien, Essed, Nkomo, Booysen and April 2003).

The strength of this position is that it does not present itself as value free, aligning with the now well-established argument in feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial and other emancipator scholarship that no research ever is value neutral, but that scholarship that claims value neutrality inevitably reproduces dominant ideologies. Rather, the research declares its social agenda up front. In brief, this particular stance towards diversity

- departs from a profound commitment to the values of democracy, social justice, equity and empowerment;
- recognises that the incorporation of people that have been marginalised should not involve a process of assimilation, but a transformation of the cultural milieu in order to bring about new social meanings and representations;
- rejects essentialised notions of identity, naturalised notions of race, gender, etc., and discourses which reify homogeneity;
- stresses that identity and difference are constructed within specific historical, cultural and power relations. (Carr 2000, Giroux 1997, Goldberg 1994, Steyn et al. 2003).

By these criteria, a Critical Diversity approach is recognised by its effectiveness in increasing democratic and equitable modes of organisation (Brah 1992, Adams, Blumenfeld, Castenada, Hackman, and Peters 1997, Deetz 1997, Delgado and Stefancic 1997, Giroux, 1997, Thomas and Ely 1996, Zack, Shrage, and Sartwell 1998). It provides a distinction between difference management which encourages window dressing, and that which aims at profound transformation, at the level of deep structure and values (Bonnett 2000, Essed 2002, Ismail 2002, Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, and Chennault 1998, Mandaza 1999).

# Critical Diversity Literacy

This chapter proposes a conceptual tool, Critical Diversity Literacy,<sup>2</sup> to express presence (or lack) of a Critical Diversity approach. It can be defined as follows:

“Diversity literacy” can best be characterised as a “reading practice” – a way of perceiving and responding to the social climate and prevalent structures of oppression. The analytical criteria employed to evaluate the presence of diversity literacy include the following: 1) a recognition of the symbolic and material value of hegemonic identities, such as whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, ablebodiedness, middle-classness, etc.; 2) analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other; 3) the definition of oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems rather than a historical legacy; 4) an understanding that social identities are learned and an outcome of social practices; 5) the possession of a diversity grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of race, racism, and antiracism, and the parallel concepts employed in the analysis of other forms of oppression; 6) the ability to translate (interpret) coded hegemonic practices; 7) an analysis of the ways that diversity hierarchies and institutionalised oppressions are mediated by class inequality and inflected in specific social contexts; and 8) an engagement with issues of transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening democracy/social justice in all levels of social organisation. (Steyn 2007)

The concept of Critical Diversity Literacy was found useful to judge the organisations studied in the DEISA research programme for their disposition towards diversity, and the extent of achieved transformation as indicated by how respectful of difference the people working in the organisations experience them to be.

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<sup>2</sup> I am deeply indebted to France Winddance Twine, whose concept of racial literacy (2004) I have adapted and extended.

# The DEISA project

DEISA (Diversity and Equity Interventions in South Africa) is a research programme that studies the transformation “industry” in South Africa. It explores issues such as the kinds of interventions being undertaken under the rubric of Diversity and Equity, how these are experienced by people working in the organisations, the impact of these interventions, the theoretical frameworks used by practitioners and, especially, how interventions may or may not articulate with the quest for social justice in a democratising South Africa. While the programme is based at iNCUDISA at the University of Cape Town,<sup>3</sup> the research team is interdisciplinary and interinstitutional, including researchers from the School for Business Leadership at Unisa,<sup>4</sup> as well as the Netherlands and the United States.<sup>5</sup> The project was funded by the South African-Netherlands Partnership for Alternatives in Development (SANPAD), and the South African National Research Foundation.

Twelve case studies of organisations were undertaken, mostly in the two major hubs of the South African economy, Gauteng and Cape Town. Two studies were in other regions of the country. The case studies that fell under the private sector were: Small Food-production Company (SFPC); Small Clothing Manufacturer (SCM); Retail Company (RC); Financial Services Company (FSC); Large Industrial Company (LIC); Commercial Organisation (CO) and Large South African Manufacturer (LSAM). The public/state work environments studied were: state-owned Financial Institution (FI); Local Government Department (LGD); Institute of Higher Learning (IHL); a South African Police Service station (SAPS); a large commercialised-resources state-owned enterprise (“Sekupu”).<sup>6</sup> The main focus of the studies was the nature and effectiveness of the broad spectrum of interventions that had been carried out in these organisations under the rubric of diversity. The case studies attempted to assess the degree to which the members of the organisation felt a palpable

.....  
3 Members of the research team based at the University of Cape Town: Professor Melissa Steyn, Professor Crain Soudien, Professor Kurt April, Claire Kelly

4 Members of the research team at Unisa: Professor Lize Booysen; Professor Stella Nkomo

5 SANPAD International Collaborator: Professor Philomena Essed

6 Except where companies actually wished to be identified, pseudonyms in the form of generic descriptors are given to the companies.

difference had occurred in how the organisation approached their differences subsequent to the intervention. They were conducted by students in the MPhil Programme in Diversity Studies (UCT) and the MBA Programme (Unisa) under supervision of the senior researchers. These students underwent training in the theory of Critical Diversity Studies and in the methodologies they would need to employ. They were given a general template for the final report in order to ensure comparability of the results.

Analyses of the main findings of the DEISA project are presented in other publications (Booyesen, Kelly, Nkomo, and Steyn 2007; Faull 2008; Kelly, Wale, Soudien and Steyn; Van Aswegen 2008). For the purposes of this chapter, however, the interview data across the case studies were reanalysed specifically to assess interviewee comments about how they experience the way their organisation approaches questions of diversity. The eight criteria of CDL given above were used to categorise comments which were then analysed using discourse analysis (Parker 1994, 2005).<sup>7</sup> While CDL is clearly a skill set applied to the individual, this chapter proposes that the concept can be used to reflect on the complexity and success of an organisation's engagement with diversity. The next section of this chapter analyses CDL in the organisation studies by DEISA, according to each of the criteria. The purpose is not to compare the companies, but rather to illustrate the ways in which the presence – or absence – of CDL is revealed through the way in which employees talk, and can be demonstrated to be prevalent across the organisations and by implication in South Africa generally. Because there was no evidence of CDL in relation to other axes of difference such as ablebodiedness, heteronormativity, nationality and such like in the data, the analysis therefore will focus on race and gender, which were uppermost in the minds of the interviewees. The absence of discourse on the other dimensions of diversity indicates how little awareness there is of how entrenched the norms are, resulting in virtual invisibility of any contestation of identity (Nkomo and Stewart 2006, Steyn and Van Zyl 2009).

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7 Because the case studies were conducted by 12 different researchers, the systems for referencing interviewees were not uniform. Quotations are reproduced from the respective research reports. Where the report itself is cited, it is referenced as such.

# Unpacking Critical Diversity Literacy in the organisations

*(a) Recognition of the symbolic and material value of hegemonic identities, such as whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, ablebodiedness, middle-classness, etc.*

In the organisations studied, it was clear that hegemonic identities in relation to race, and to a lesser extent gender, were experiencing a measure of existential crisis, given the changes taking place in the workplace as a result of legislation and the ensuing greater degree of diversity. This was particularly evident amongst white males, who interpreted the incursion of black people and white women into their “territories” as victimisation and unfair “reverse” discrimination:

How long will the fact that I am white count against me? Discrimination [against whites] continues in spite of the new constitution.  
(White male senior lecturer – IHL)

Yet, interview after interview showed the power of both whiteness and masculinity were clearly being reproduced in all the organisations. From the stories told, one can recognise the ease with which these hegemonies continued to dictate the terms of engagement and dominate the organisational cultures. Those in positions of whiteness and maleness experienced a freedom to regard themselves as “normal”, the standard to which others must aspire and be brought up to speed. The lack of diversity literacy is often revealed by defensiveness of hegemonic privileged positions in the face of the “attack” of transformation, such as the women who felt that they had to “defend the white race” in diversity workshops. The hegemonies also play themselves out in more subtle ways, such as in traces of colonial discourse that sees the task of white people to “uplift” others to the level of the “norm”, even when quite genuinely committed to bringing about change in the workplace:

... the troubles and problems of before were more targeted at the African people, they are the ones that have to be uplifted by this,



so they must actually give us comment on how the guys have been doing. I personally have seen a remarkable change in all my colleagues from old to young; people are accepting African people and socialising with them, they are understanding, sometimes they don't agree but, I mean, people are like that, but I have seen a great improvement. (CO)

In this curious mixture of more, or less, conscious wielding of “soft power” (Prasad 2006), it is clear that those in hegemonic positions show very little awareness of how much they are taking for granted, and to what extent they are privileged by the system. It is those who are on the “other” side of the hegemonic axes, the ones who are likely to be disadvantaged, insulted, or treated unjustly by the normative arrangements, who “read” the advantage and recognise the actions of privilege:

A casual conversation with a coloured female supervisor revealed that women must have “strong character”, “prove” themselves and “show” what they can do at [SFPC]. Put differently, women need to be masculine in order to succeed in a culture that does not value the feminine. This undervaluing has tangible consequences, the first being around temporary and permanent positions. Some women floor workers believe that men are favoured over women in the granting of permanent positions: “Mansmense word meerder permanent gemaak as wat vroumense permanent gemaak word.” [Trsl: *Men are more often made permanent than women are.*] (Claire Kelly, citing a floorworker)

The following interviewee explains how she has learnt to curb her creativity and minimise her input at her workplace because of unchecked racist comments at a workshop where white views, interests and concerns were able to dominate:

But on some things that were said, they also had a negative impact on other people like myself for example. Uhm, the fact that, uhm, the fact that black people learn slow, that they are not as competent, I have to be honest it haunted me for about four months, because there were situations where I could give my input by showing initiative, you know in the work environment you don't only do

what you are told to do – you can foresee this will be a problem tomorrow – let me be creative and solve it now. But you know living with that feeling that I’m not as creative as other people, you know it, you know, it really gets you into a situation where you do what you’re expected to do, you don’t see the importance to show initiative ... I even discussed it with other people, this workshop brought some negativity because I really felt very bad after that. It was just an attack, a way of attacking other races. It shows a lack of respect to other people, I remember another remark, I would not say who made that remark, but he said, he said, “These people, these people cannot file flight plans because they are [only] capable of cutting wood.” (CO)

Another interviewee comments on the difficulty those who are accustomed to having positions of authority, and for whom being in charge over others is part of their identity, have in adjusting to the “abnormal” situation of being subordinated to those they believe are “supposed” to be their inferiors:

Sometimes some of these males develop an issue because they have to listen to a female manager and in other instances it appears that these males do not always know how to react to these situations where I am the senior to make the decision. (CO)

Women in focus groups expressed the view that they were not sufficiently respected, and that diversity training did not always significantly address the development of CDL in relation to gender during workshops. There is evidence that non-hegemonic groups often simply resign themselves to the inevitability of the ongoing dynamics, even when they carry costs to themselves, if passivity ensures their continuing employment:

Every second guy is acting in a sexual harassment manner to other people. “Hey you’ve got lekker [*nice*] bums” and all that. You see, so that will be there always. No matter how you try and control it. (LSAM)

*(b) Analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other*

Generally, there is no doubt that when people think of diversity in South African organisations, they focus on race. Mostly, too, the respondents in the studies talked about diversity issues in terms of single dimensions, without expressing a sense of how oppressions intersect or depend on each other for their power. An important exception is the intersection of whiteness and masculinity, which others certainly recognised as being a doubly advantaged position, where whiteness and masculinity enhance each other's power. As one woman put it, power resides with "Persons that are from the old school and in management positions." (LIC)

Other intersections became more apparent to the respondents when the alignments that hold hegemonies in advantaged positions started to unravel. A case in point is that of working-class masculinity. With the introduction of the new legislation the class status may pull against expectations of the hegemonic gender order as women are now able to advance to the managerial classes previously monopolised by men:

Yes, everybody is not happy ... because the wife is bringing now the same salary or even more than your salary. My wife is working and she earns more than me then she says to me I am going to town and I will be late. Now, we don't feel that it is OK for our wives to speak to us like that. Now because of equity my wife can tell you something. Yes, the guys are feeling the pain and that is very bad as I told you about those ladies that are working here those ladies are top managers. And maybe these ladies are married and she brings R23 000 from work on her salary and monthly and maybe I bring R6 000. Money speaks, so she is the best. (LSAM)

The discomfort is "read" by the women who occupy these positions within the "reversed" gender order:

Sometimes some of these males develop an issue because they have to listen to a female manager and in other instances it appears that these males do not always know how to react to these situations where I am the senior to make the decision. (CO)

In the retail company, some of the respondents commented on the interlocking marginalising effects of racism and HIV/Aids stigma, commenting how other racial groups perceive this to be “black disease” and an “African problem”, as a way of denying their own vulnerability and/or infection, and also keeping their position elevated above “them”. The social construction of Aids thus becomes another way in which racism can operate.

I just feel that where issues of HIV are concerned, especially with coloured people, it is going to gain momentum, because we have this perception that HIV is only associated with black people. As I've heard in situations, some people have, because of their religion, have been told to keep it a secret. And people keep it a secret. So I think that the peer educators should expand to the coloureds as well. (RC)

*(c) The definition of oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems and not only a historical legacy*

A very noticeable trend is that it is the people who experience the effects of racism and sexism that are most aware of how it continues in the workplace, and of the forms it takes. For them, struggles are ongoing:

There are policies that address diversity and there have been opportunities as a result of these policies. However, the playing fields are still not even. (LIC)

A number of people spoke about the personal price paid by those who challenge the powerful normative positions:

I think victimisation is still a reality. I have seen victimisation, it's not just a fear within. And to solve this who do you go and speak to? 'Cos the other manager is friends with the one that is victimising you ... and they talk to each other. To whom do you go? We need someone who can mediate, that someone impartial, somebody that's impartial. (CO)

Other people talked about the ways in which discriminatory dynamics are perpetuated through a lack of willingness to act against those who perpetuate them:

INTERVIEWEE: I know that the one guy signed a warning for sexual harassment that works in the X department.

RESEARCHER: Do you think that they are dealing with it effectively?

INTERVIEWEE: No.

RESEARCHER: Why not?

INTERVIEWEE: He's still there! (LSAM)

Evasion of present oppression went hand in hand with denial of the enduring forms of racism and sexism, most often amongst dominant positionalities. People who raise such questions are often seen as trouble-makers, or wanting special excuses for incompetence:

That's the sort of stuff that one always has in these big factory environments, is that you're going to have people who just, just want to stir trouble for the sake of stirring trouble. But as I say, there is a younger set coming in and a group which is not so jaded by the past of the country ... I don't want to get into the whole political thing. I want to look at things from who can do the job, who can't do the job and who wants to do the job. And not just for the sake of, you know, shame, they're previously disadvantaged, I'm going to have to make an exception. (Sekupu)

At the same time, comment after comment made by white people reveals the virulence of racism, uttered without any sense of how much more they are revealing about themselves than those that they construct as the "problem":

I don't know if it is a thing of how they were brought up. It's definitely a thing that stands out ... let's take an example, say you have a fault on a technical line then the specific races will take a bit longer, not necessarily always, but especially the first time they are known to take longer ... to get to the bottom of the problem ... then the black will struggle a lot but the white guy will say OK – he

will click much quicker – I don't say he will click immediately but he will click quicker, where the black will say, "Yoh! What is this here?" (LSAM)

Similar tendencies to perpetuate taken-for-granted "facts" about the nature/abilities of women abound. A junior manager in an engineering firm put it:

... there is some stuff that a female cannot do that a male can do, like the big hoses, for example ... My personal point is that I would rather have males because of the physical work involved and most females cannot cope. I have a woman who is like a brick and a ticky high. What is she going to do as far as physical work? (LSAM junior manager)

Yet a woman engineer in the same site reported that most of the work for professional engineers entailed reading meters and flicking switches! Particularly problematic from the perspective of CDL is that privileged groups, rather than examining the ongoing effects of racial and gender privilege, are more likely to construct racism and sexism as problems that are not only past, but actually now "reversed". This makes a more complex analysis of how legacies of colonialism and apartheid interact in complex ways with the attempts at redress difficult:

... they're saying, "We're trying to fix the numbers" ... Yes, I hear that being spoken of, yes. Look, I understand that all people should be given a chance and I have no problem with that. I also feel – look I don't mind people being given a fair chance, that's good, I have been in my job for 10-13 years, you sit and do the same job for a long time. That's the only thing that catches me – it's now like I've been put in the corner ... I just feel, you know, there's no opportunity. (LSAM shop floor employee)

The tendency for white people, especially white men, to see themselves as the victim of unfair politics where policies such as affirmative action are practised is fairly widespread, and is recognised by scholars as deflecting attention away from ongoing economic inequalities (Gallagher 2008).

*(d) An understanding that social identities are learned and an outcome of social practices*

The tendency to essentialise race and gender is highly prevalent in the discourse within all the organisations studied. People are attributed characteristics merely by virtue of their assumed race, with little appreciation of the social and contextual processes that bring people to particular understandings of themselves and their environments. Black people, especially, were aware of how they were being stereotyped, especially in the context of affirmative action, which is often regarded merely as tokenism:

I would like people to know that I have the content and character to do the job – not because I am black. (IHL)

Sometimes I am seen as a black face and not as an academic and because of that, we can use her. (IHL)

It was striking that processes of cultural essentialising often operated even when there was an apparent recognition of social influences in shaping people's sense of self. In the following quotation the attribution of a "pathological culture" (Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi 2008) provided explanation for the purported lack of financial planning in the black workforce. Many other possible explanations are ignored, such as the economic demands of a large extended family.

... invariably this is all non-white people, OK, and I don't mean anything, OK, this is a fact, but because of the lifestyle and the culture and the way they grow up, it's not important, as long as they have a job, that's important, so long as they have money in their pocket, that's the short-term benefits. It's more important than the longer term and I don't know how to bridge the gap to make, to make some of them see further. (SFPC)

At the same time, there were indications of shifts in perception as more nuanced and differentiated understandings were developed through diversity interventions:

Before I had this perception that I grew up with about white people, always I knew they are bad people but it made me realise people are different and there are stereotypes out there but we are to deal with the situation. (SFPC)

In line with tendencies elsewhere, the respondents in these studies tended to minimise the social and systemic levels of the dynamics of exclusion and marginalisation by personalising, or psychologising, the issues so that change depends on the individual, rather than broad-based reform (Steyn et al. 2003).

Those members who elaborated on these points, including the Area HRM, Supt Stirk, almost always returned to the view that diversity issues are very personal and that in the end it is up to an individual to change themselves (Andrew Faull – SAPS)

*(e) The possession of a diversity grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of race, racism, and antiracism, and the parallel concepts employed in the analysis of other forms of oppression*

The general difficulty in finding a language to talk about race, racism and other oppressions was readily apparent in the interviews. A common complaint from black interviewees was that white colleagues assumed to have the right to define them, and did not recognise the limitations of their knowledge, which is often conditioned by the racially skewed past. One black female junior lecturer explains that she has difficulty with:

The groups who think they know everything. Because I am black it's accepted that I don't know . . . They've got their own perception, they think they know us, think they know too much. It's all about my colour. It's difficult with white groups. (Black female junior lecturer – IHL)

Another young lecturer concurs:



White people talk to you as if you're not used to anything and know nothing. (Coloured female senior lecturer – IHL)

Researchers reported a similar lack of grasp of concepts such as sexual harassment. In one study, two cases of sexual harassment had been reported. However, the researcher commented:

The manner in which the captain talked about the two cases was rather disconcerting in that he dismissed both as not being “real” sexual harassment. (Andrew Faull – SAPS)

Lack of self-awareness, as well as lack of recognition of how limiting assumptions about the “Other” permeate the workplace, closes down the possibilities for genuine dialogue in raced and gendered contexts. The levels of grievance about transformation in the workplace make any discussion of diversity extremely fraught. The lines of victimisation and disadvantage become crossed, especially when the commitment to non-racialism and non-sexism of the South African constitution becomes recast in terms of colour- and gender-blindness, forms of evasion of enduring power inequalities. The following employee casts transformation as illegitimate and hasty, deflecting the discussion of racial and cultural domination of the institution, and putting the attempts to name and address race, racism and antiracism on the defensive:

How long will the fact that I am white count against me? Discrimination (against whites) continues in spite of the new constitution . . . Change to African culture in the institution is happening very fast. I do not experience it positively and feel less at home. (White male senior lecturer – IHL)

A salient feature of the environments depicted in the case studies is the high levels of anxiety prevalent in relation to talking about questions of race. One white female senior lecturer, for example, mentions how “On the surface everything is friendly and kind but I can feel underlying tension” (IHL). Another said that: “It feels as if I am in the middle of the Red Sea that can close at any time” (IHL). Respondents feel uncertain, helpless, frustrated and see no progress. Trust levels are very low.

It is difficult to see how the necessary conceptual tools for dialogue on these topics can be developed in cultures of such defensiveness. One person describes how even in diversity workshops, people are reticent, and hesitate to engage:

Resistance to participate, people even, even with the focus group trying to get people just to take part, they always think, hey, that I can't, maybe I'm going to be put in a position where I will be focused on or looked at or penalised. They don't want to really say I have taken part in a specific project. (CO)

Another tells of her reluctance to “come out” on the racial and gender tensions she senses:

If I speak my mind I'm going to get into trouble – I'm going to become a marked person. (Admin staff – SFPC)

It would appear that it is difficult to move the conversation beyond simple questions of employment equity to the more complex and challenging issues of organisational cultures, personal attitudes, ideologies, and structural/systemic injustices. People just don't want to “go there”.

This is one of our standard agenda topics in our weekly meetings, we try address this on a continuous basis and, uhm, we talk quite a lot about the diversity in the work environment and also try to get feedback. But the staff still seem to not share their views and opinions openly, uhm, it's as if they still hold back quite a bit on diversity ... We had an incident the other day when a black guy, one of our assistants which is at the lower level of skill and competence, he, uhm, his son died and the funeral arrangements ... and it came forward, you know, people don't want to talk about it, as if it's a secret. It's a funny experience I had, that people don't want to share how they operate in such a sad situation. (CO)

The trend seems to be that difficult issues get folded into other topics, rather than addressed directly, thus maintaining strategic silences and allowing the existing dynamics to roll over. This changes when open conflict makes it impossible to ignore diversity issues, yet even then there is

a tendency to reframe racial content in “neutral” terms in order to make things less explosive:

The training is on a voluntary basis and originates from conflict situations, so management sees it as a conflict-management intervention. That conflict is usually along race lines. Training is reactive, not proactive. (IHL)

A characteristic of some of the organisations studied is the tendency for racial tension to be defused by way of humour. The members of the SAPS, for example, reported how:

Sometimes [we joke] but this is not in a bad way ... one of them [the white members] will come in and say, “Yup, we boertjies,<sup>8</sup> we are really getting screwed here” ... The coloureds will also get involved and we’ll end up by saying, “No man, the blacks get all the nice jobs. We get the shit end of the stick.” That’s when we’re sitting in the parade room and everybody will laugh about it. (SAPS)

While it seems that it is in the context of humour that race and gender get addressed most directly, it is questionable to what extent this constitutes the development of capacity to name, and enter into dialogue about, social positionings in ways that do the required “race work”. This humour, as cited here, hides power imbalances and buys into, rather than challenges, racial “common sense”, thus acting as a vehicle for perpetuating, rather than deconstructing, racism.

*(f) The ability to translate (interpret) coded hegemonic practices*

It is clear that many interactions and organisational activities operate through coded hegemonic practices, where the power, racial, gender and

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8 “Boer”, which literally means “farmer,” has been used to refer to Afrikaners. It is often considered to have derogatory connotations. It is used here in the diminutive “boertjies” which denotes affectionate, light-hearted, apparently self-deprecating banter.

other messages are reproduced in ways that obfuscate their character, and make them difficult to name as such. Without question, there is no lack of skill in encoding privilege and prejudice. Those in positions of power within the organisations clearly know what is expected in terms of language and “correct” procedures, and are careful to maintain the face presentation of the company. Nevertheless, numerous examples were given by respondents of ways in which these practices were able to conceal underlying power dynamics and continue processes of marginalisation, discrimination and unfair competitive advantage. Two examples described below are maintaining the public visibility of whiteness and circumventing black managers:

The one issue I have a problem with is that when it comes to the outside world, there is a tendency not to send Africans as representatives of the company; maybe it is fear that the guys could be poached, or may embarrass the company. Is it a lack of trust? There is that unwillingness to send Africans to outside forums even in areas where it could make sense and the EECF [Employment Equity Forum] has no powers over this. On paper there appears to be commitment but the actions are not supportive. (Black African manager – Sekupu)

Yes, I think there is a lot of pressure on these guys; maybe they cannot report straight to you because you are a black manager: “I prefer to rather report to a general manager instead of going to [packing] manager – no, I go straight to the next level.” On my side black managers don’t last, especially in this plant. (Junior manager – LSAM)

As has been shown in this chapter to be the general trend for CDL in these organisations, it is those who are oppressed by hegemonic systems – whether by direct or indirect, overt or covert means – who seem to be able to recognise and name these practices most skilfully. Those who perpetuate the encoded practices explain their practices in terms of doing their work professionally, maintaining standards and treating everyone equally. The woman below is not fooled by the attempt to hide behind an apparent language barrier to exclude her and sabotage her productivity:

Especially the floor manager, he's got too much racism, ja. Like when I am trying to make an order by him and I think that the best person to ask is the floor manager, so like I know that he can speak English but I find that he takes the coloured person. When I make an order by him he speaks Afrikaans to this coloured guy who then must translate it to me. And this other manager I say I must make an order but he says, "What did you say? Write it down!" Why must I write it down if he can hear what I am saying? Things like that. He thinks that he is better than us – why must he be rude to us? If you see him and you want to make an order and a coloured guy comes, then it's meant to be first come first served, but he will always serve that coloured guy first and tell me to wait. (Black African female Xhosa-speaking employee – RC)

The 12 studies indicated that hegemonic whiteness is increasingly being encoded through discourses of globalisation. Since sanctions were lifted, South African companies have become part of the international trading community, and have been striving to develop competitive edge. In these circumstances, English as the international language of business, and Western cultural styles are held to be the appropriate conduits for employees wanting to "add value" to the company. These "standards" are evoked even in circumstances where they are not relevant to the job, and in ways that keep the speakers of African languages constantly on the back foot.

*(g) An analysis of the ways that diversity hierarchies and institutionalised oppressions are mediated by class inequality and inflected in specific social contexts*

I think our management team apart from [a particular manager] is 80/20 white. Eighty per cent is lily white ... What I see lacking is a succession plan. (Shop floor employee – LSAM)

The above comment indicates how, in general, the "stickiness" of class translated within the work place into differentiated status positions within the organisations studied, and was found to inflect people's experience of race and gender, and also the manner in which diversity was handled.

I can say with the managers there is a lot of apartheid and that is the reason. (Shop floor employee – LSAM)

Managers are here to stop fire, they are very defensive. How can they do diversity management? Soft issues are the last thing in their minds. (Coloured professional – Sekupu)

A fairly widely held opinion, also reflected above, was that people who were secure in class and status privilege tended not to be greatly engaged with the emotional salience of these issues to “Others”. One researcher comments:

Astoundingly, the chairperson of the committee, a white male director, was unable to recall the diversity intervention. However, he noted that he might have been absent on the day of the intervention. (FI)

Once again, it seems that working-class women, particularly black working-class women, experience levels of gender- and race-related hardship in this intersectional space from which middle-classness normally protects more privileged, and white, women:

In 1999 I went on maternity leave. Then I came back, then I could only take a month leave, a straight shift, but they know it's not easy when you have a baby and the baby needs care and that. They don't see to give you any longer, maybe two months, or three, just back to the day shift. They force you, if you can't work the night shift, then you must take your things and leave ... so in that regard they don't help women. So here you have to be afraid to have a baby, because when you come back, then there is no work for you, or they tell you: If you can't work night shift then you must stay where you are. Stay at home once and that's what they tell you and that's what happens. (Coloured female floorworker – SFPC)

Where there was engagement with these issues by high-status actors, it came across as being much more driven by “bottom line” concerns, or keeping the organisation in line with employment equity legislation:

... we do a lot around equity – it is the single most important thing that is done with diversity. If you do nothing else, make sure you get representivity. It has been hard in certain areas. The lab has historically been a certain profile, artisans, fork-lift drivers – we need to make these groups diverse. We do mentorship, the [executive assistant] amongst others – people with potential, we take them under our wing and get them to grow. But this is an interim measure – we need to have numbers first. (General manager – LSAM)

Nevertheless, there were instances where it was clear that people in more advantaged spaces in the organisation were indeed aware of how privilege could interfere with their grasp of other people's experiences of the workplace, and that this called for a measure of humility in the way in which these experiences are approached:

We're not able to put our finger on it yet. I can give you my thoughts for now. What happens is that you've got this huge gap between this is level 3 and this is level 4 and then you've got this is level 2 and this is level 1. And it's different lives that we are leading understanding what's going on here. We don't know. I mean we don't know the difficulty that that guy – you know I'm speaking for myself now – that guy who works on the line, we don't know what his issues are ... and it's not answering your question around behaviour but the reason I can't answer it well enough is because you have a management group of people, you get car allowances, you also get other sorts of benefits, you see things from a different perspective and through a different lens and then you get the guys who are – you know, we have different sets of problems and different behaviours and different issues; if we were to delve down deeper we would never have guessed or understood it – you know, because we've never experienced it ... And I think just in terms of behaviours, we don't have that empathy here at a more senior level and we don't know how to do it. So just in terms of the difficulties and the challenges around diversity that exist – is that there's just too big a gap in terms of socio-economic stuff here in terms of us. (HR executive – LSAM)

It would be a mistake, however, to regard the raced and gendered inflection of class as limited to those in the lower echelons of the workplace. The experiences of black people in management, or in professional positions, were also shaped by their entanglement with cultures of whiteness and maleness at those levels in their organisations. This is important as it speaks to the fact that being black and middle class remains a qualitatively different experience to being white and middle class. The power of whiteness was experienced in various processes of “loss of soul”, assimilatory demands, processes of “double consciousness”, self-doubt and excessive pressure to prove oneself under conditions of permanent scepticism. The same applied for all women in management encountering the cultures of maleness, but of course white women do not have the added “burden of race”.

In the beginning I experienced a feeling of loneliness. At times I feel it would be much better to have a black colleague to talk to because of a cultural background, sharing talks, jokes, etc. I’ve learned a lot from my colleagues. Through time, the boundary disappeared. The longer you stay with people with different cultures and race the more you learned to adapt to each other’s cultures. White people find the black people noisy, very slow in doing things, in reasoning, in acting, in doing things. The more you mix you start adopting the white culture. (IHL)

It took some time before I felt that the white students and colleagues accepted me for what I am. I think it was fear of lowering the standard. The first thought they must have had here is a black teacher and they have bad connotations of the quality. They didn’t know how to address me; I had to make them feel at home. There are still issues. I deserve the respect as their lecturer. It’s a constant feeling that I need to prove myself. I’m looking forward to the day not to be judged by my colour but by my character. I am capable to do my job and should not be questioned or judged on my colour. (Black female junior lecturer – IHL)

Nevertheless, those in lower echelons of the organisations, who not only have less positional power but also less social capital generally, remain particularly vulnerable. The odds remain stacked against their being able



to shift understandings within the organisations to reflect their concerns. In these contexts, processes such as diversity workshops – which, when not handled well, open up such issues – may leave workers in an even more exposed position:

It appeared that the workshops added to the dilemma as people were invited to confront issues, but the situation backfired, “a lower-level person has no backing, it is still us and them”. The comments raised during these workshops resulted in vindictive reactions, i.e. letter on personal file, but also left some staff with a fear, “I am too scared to say anything now.” (Jaco van der Westhuizen – CO)

Data also provided evidence of how working in different industries, themselves going through different business phases, may change the experience of particular racialised and gendered groups. In an industry undergoing restructuring, the aging white men who were employed under conditions of apartheid-era “job reservation” found it hard to accept the loss of guarantees previously secured by white masculinity. It was particularly difficult for them that those likely to come into the workplace at their class level were now likely to be black, and possibly better educated.

Qualifications – you don’t have much ... If they can decide to restructure, so we’ve got somebody for the job who’s got qualifications. Remember, every year [LSAM], they will tell you in the technical side, they want ... qualifications and if that person doesn’t have, the chance is that he might not be here the next five years. (Shop floor employee – LSAM)

*(h) An engagement with issues of transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening social justice in all levels of social organisation*

In line with the findings reported throughout this chapter, it appeared that this aspect of diversity literacy, the commitment to changing the unequal status quo, is least likely to be found in the management, notably middle management, and professional levels of organisations.

Middle and top management (except for one) have not asked for any intervention from this office as far as diversity is concerned. Short and sweet, there's been no interest. (SFPC)

More accurately, at these levels there seemed to be resistance to the approaches, attitudes and skills that constitute a diversity literate approach to workplace issues, generally. The resistance sometimes takes the form of a *laissez faire*, disengaged stance towards diversity issues, as this HIV/Aids office bearer reports:

As peer educators we are supposed to work together with management. But they just leave it up to us . . . It's like HIV to [RC] is not important. I don't know if they are ignoring it or what. Maybe they are saying "it's not us". Today you are fine. You don't worry about tomorrow. (RC)

At other times it appears as more active hostility to change processes:

You have rights but as soon as you want to use it, management gets upset and wants to discipline you. (RC)

Pervasive resistance to change initiatives, in different forms and at different levels of aggressiveness, especially from management levels, was the primary finding across all 12 case studies, as was the concomitant frustration among a large proportion of people at lower levels of the organisations, and many women at all levels.

## Conclusion

Critical Diversity Literacy seems to be very unequally distributed within the organisations studied in the DEISA project, and does not follow the lines of formal educational literacy. Indeed, a great deal of evidence for what appears to be a bifurcation in CDL in the South African organisations emerges in the material analysed. The analysis shows a much greater level of CDL amongst those who are in less powerful positions than amongst those in dominant positions, both organisationally and in terms of hegemonic social positionings. It is important to note here that the

issue of Critical Diversity Literacy cannot be reduced merely to a lack of interpersonal or intercultural empathy/competence, while these certainly may be factors at play. While it is to be expected that groups may have a better grasp of the issues that affect them personally, and less interest or concern for those that are affected by issues that they are not, it cannot be enough for those concerned with *emancipatory* social change to leave it at a level of analysis that does not take power inequality into account. The workplace has to be recognised as a site of complex relationships of reproduction and challenge of unequal relationships of dominance, compliance, resistance and change.

What becomes apparent is that those responsible for driving transformation are not likely to be invested in changing the workplace, both at the simple demographic, or employment equity level, or at the deeper, more radically demanding level of organisational ethos and culture, as long as they perceive the changes to be irrelevant or even inimical to their own interests in a society that still constructs group interests as polarised along racialised and gendered lines. As long as this remains the status quo, legislation seems destined not to be able to achieve the sought-after changes in South African society.

It is clear, then, that consciousness and political will need to be cultivated that enable people to see how diversity issues link to broader societal well-being and sustainability, and how the deforming effects of oppression diminish and ultimately threaten us all. A problem for those who wish to promote diversity in the workplace is that the operations of power that maintain the status quo are invisible, and perhaps outside of the conscious behaviour of those who perpetuate and collude with them. This chapter has provided a model, Critical Diversity Literacy, as a lens through which an orientation for transformation can be made visible and amenable to (self) examination. Egbo (2008) has postulated the need for those with organisational power to undertake a personal critical diversity audit as a first step towards successful diversity implementation in organisations. The CDL model provides a means to undertake such audits, both at the individual and organisational level, as well as providing a conceptual tool for teaching and implementing transformation towards more socially just approaches to workplace diversity, even in especially complex postcolonial contexts.

# Small Food-production Company (SFPC)



Based on project report by Claire Kelly,  
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## Introduction

SFPC is a family-owned business producing ingredients for the food industry, including chocolate products, syrups, non-dairy whips and toppings. They pride themselves on their research and new-product development. Established 40 years ago, SFPC experienced rapid growth in the 10 years preceding the study: the number of employees had grown from 22 to 232 people. SFPC is located north of Cape Town on a site that represents the full spectrum of the organisation, including administration offices, research and development, manufacturing and packaging. The company also has sales offices in Johannesburg and Durban.

SFPC claims to operate within a flat organisational structure with minimum bureaucracy, which allows it to respond rapidly to customers' specialist requirements, and thus stay competitive. Their participation in this research indicated confidence in their achievements and willingness to participate and learn; and suggests that they were sincere in their efforts around EE.

Nevertheless, the company mission statement reflected a timid engagement with diversity in a subsection labelled "Sharing", the last in a list of six mission points:

We're personally committed to advancing the skills and capabilities of all employees, inviting and rewarding individual contributions and embracing diversity.

It was unclear how “embracing diversity” related to “sharing” and what the benefit would be to the company’s overall vision of being a preferred supplier. In fact, being the last in a long list of priorities, it seemed that diversity was an add-on, and it was perhaps not surprising that SFPC did not have a policy document around diversity.

Most of SFPC’s 232 employees were either semiskilled or unskilled, and their demographics reflected those of the Western Cape, with a dominance of coloured staff. Before the implementation of any EE intervention at SFPC, more than 50% of black African employees were unskilled workers and none fell in the top three levels of seniority. Coloured employees were also mostly represented in the lower levels of the hierarchy, but had broader representation across the organisation than black African people. Compared to coloured men, there was a greater proportion of coloured women in lower-level jobs and they were not represented in any senior-management positions. Significantly, almost 50% of white males and 40% of white women fell in the top three levels and none were represented in the lowest level. There were, however, fewer women at senior management level than men, and none at top management.

In the few years before the study there had been some movement towards more equitable demographic representation, with an overall increase in women, black African staff and people with disabilities throughout the organisation. The most significant change was a 5% increase in black African employees and a 3% drop in white employees.

Still, recruitment had exhibited racialised and gendered trends: the only recruitment into senior management was white, and all black African male recruitments were into the two lowest levels of the organisation, with 90% in the lowest category. Encouragingly, black African and coloured women had been recruited into professional positions, although most of these appointments still fell in the two bottom occupational categories. By contrast, most white appointments fell within the top four categories.

Thus, the racial and gender distribution of power had remained unaltered, and in the year of the study, white males’ stake in senior management had in fact increased from 25% to 45% of senior-management

positions, with the only coloured male in senior management no longer in this position. SFPC's successes in increasing representation overall were undermined by the fact that women, black African people and people with disabilities were still underrepresented in positions of authority.

Promotions figures echoed the dominance of white employees in senior management – the only demographic to feature at this level. Disciplinary actions and terminations remained racially skewed and the former had been increasing, suggesting a higher level of disruption and unhappiness amongst the staff. Coloured males dominated resignations and terminations, including dismissal through misconduct, followed by coloured females and black African males.

## Organisational environment

Organisational culture refers to the broad values and beliefs that pervade an organisation (Hicks-Clarke and Iles 2000), leading to assumptions about “clients, employees, mission, products, activities ... that have worked well in the past and which get translated into norms of behaviour, expectations about what is legitimate, desirable ways of thinking and acting” (Andre Laurent cited in O’Hare-Devereaux 1994: 43).

Organisations “are never an isolated site of racial or class conflict, but rather, they are expressive of the conflicts existing at the social/political level of society” (Kersten 2000: 45). They are thus not “private” spaces, but rather sites for the intersection of larger social phenomena (Deetz 1992). Being defined by those with power, both within the organisation and the broader socio-political context (Mills 2002), “organisations are never politically neutral” (Deetz 1992: 55). A managerial or gender advantage is normalised through routines and discourse where “privilege is treated as natural and neutral” (*ibid.*), and privileged groups are often unable to see the implicit values they perpetuate in their practices, talk and experiences (*ibid.*: 56).

The rhetoric of almost all SFPC employees reflected a hierarchical divide, with frequent use of terms such as “us” and “them”, “the people”, “the floor”, “management”, “down on the floor”, “up there” and “from top to bottom”. Given the demographics of the company, this job-level hierarchy was also a racial and gendered one.

The physical environment entrenched the various social divides. Structural design is linked to the surveillance, supervision and control of those within the workplace (Foucault 1977), and on SFPC's grounds there were no shared spaces to facilitate interaction between staff across the organisational hierarchy. Access to the grounds was through separate entrances designated for factory and administration/management employees. Different eating areas were allocated to management/administration and factory staff, thus naturalising divisions during tea and lunch breaks – the only times employees were likely to integrate across employment level.

During their breaks, employees socialised in distinct race/language groupings. However, in later interviews, the researcher was met with total silence when addressing SFPC's clear social divides, suggesting the accepted "normalisation" of race/culture groups. Management didn't seem to have noticed or taken any steps to educate or create awareness around these divisions, thus allowing "everyday", subtle racism to fester and accumulate (Essed 2000).

Furthermore, workers wore uniforms and coloured hats which marked their role in the company – a system reminiscent of Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel *Brave New World*, in which the assignation of different coloured uniforms ensures that individuals are never mistaken for someone above or below their social standing. Casual employees wore red hats and were sympathetically referred to by permanent employees as "those guys in the red". Foucault (1977) suggests that "marking" people in this way creates a hierarchy of qualities, skills and aptitudes: in this case, casual employees – who were already the most vulnerable in terms of job security, wages and access to organisational resources – were explicitly rendered marginal. On this point alone it could be said that SFPC was encouraging division rather than diversity.

There was, however, a sharp contrast between the experiences of employees working in the factory and those in the administration/management block, and levels of satisfaction reflected this divide. The predominantly white and coloured employees in administration and management believed everyone in the company got on well, whilst many black African employees on the floor reported racial discrimination. As a female black African woman floorworker put it:

... they employed the other people after those people who are coming after me and they till now is not permanent. It's eight years now – that is racist; too much in this company, too much racist.

Two administration workers were aware that while the administration block appears to be non-discriminatory, things were different in the factories.

Lack of communication appears central to this evident divide, and may address some of the claims of discrimination. Reports, job advertisements and other announcements were e-mailed to staff and were theoretically accessible via the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) labs, but this mode of communication favoured employees with computer access and literacy – in the factory, some employees were illiterate or computer illiterate. Language presented another obstacle to communication: an official policy of English-only posters had been adopted by SFPC, bearing further testament to management's assimilatory approach to managing diversity: difference is recognised but ignored through assumptions around linguistic equality (Hayes and Russell 1997, Kersten 2000).

Nevertheless, SFPC's ABET computer labs and related training facilities – which teach basic literacy and computer skills – were a source of great pride to factory staff. Teaching, facilitation and the dissemination of new ways of doing and thinking were central to effective diversity change management (Adler 1997, Ferdman and Brody 1996, French and Delahaye 1996, Hayes and Russell 1997, O'Hara-Devereaux and Johansen 1994, Thomas 2004) – it is crucial for companies to provide facilities and structures through which to groom individuals who may be earmarked for accelerated development (Roosevelt Thomas 1990). Unfortunately, SFPC appeared not to see these structures as developing employees for internal advancement, and as such these resources did not necessarily contribute towards the promotion of designated employees.

Furthermore, the failures in the ABET training revealed important issues in SFPC's culture. ABET course timetables did not take into account the shift patterns of most workers, and trainees were likely to miss classes which fell on their off days. This was seen as evidence of a lack of commitment to education. A white senior manager spoke of learning as a “cultural thing”, which can't be forced upon people whose “discipline is what let them down”. Another white senior manager said:



... invariably this is all non-white people, OK, and I don't mean anything, OK, this is a fact, but because of the lifestyle and the culture and the way they grow up, it's not important, as long as they have a job, that's important, so long as they have money in their pocket, that's the short-term benefits. It's more important than the longer term and I don't know how to bridge the gap to make, to make some of them see further.

The learning landscape took on a racial and cultural dimension, and opened up a space for discrimination and stereotyping. In both cases, the tone taken by senior management was disturbingly paternalistic as they suggested that “non-white” people were not able to study, manage their money and plan their lives. Although the second speaker was aware that this was an inappropriate and racist comment, it was a sentiment that was prevalent in an organisational culture in which management spoke “down” to staff, implying that the (mostly black African) floor were unable to make a valuable contribution. Such an attitude is a function of an organisational and national culture steeped in racist history, and it is the process of engaging, challenging and interrogating this mindset that SFPC needs to engage in. Kersten (2000) notes that organisations which do not engage with diversity in an integrated and socio-politically conscious manner create workplaces which continue to serve the interests of socially dominant groups and remain blind to the existence of racism (and other forms of discrimination) – a situation which resonates strongly with SFPC.

Gender also emerged as a contentious issue. According to an EE report, the broad objective of the EE and workplace skills plan was to “balance the racial and gender mix across the levels”. This was in spite of a clause which stated that “the nature of the work organisation, with significant manual work and the lifting of heavy items, tends to limit the employment of females”. Recruitment figures revealed that SFPC had made a serious effort to hire black African women into senior and technical positions. But with six out of eight recruitments into senior management being white males, it is clear that power structures were still subject to gender.

A casual conversation with a coloured female supervisor revealed that women staff at SFPC must have “strong character”, “prove” themselves and “show” what they can do. This inherent undervaluing of female

staff's contribution has tangible consequences. Some women floorworkers believed that men were favoured over women in the granting of permanent positions:

Mansmense word meerder permanent gemaak as wat vroumense permanent gemaak word. [Trsl: *Men are more often made permanent than women are.*] (Coloured female floorworker)

The issue of maternity revealed clear discrimination against female employees:

In 1999 I went on maternity leave. Then I came back, then I could only take a month leave, a straight shift, but they know it's not easy when you have a baby and the baby needs care and that. They don't see to give you any longer, maybe two months, or three, just back to the day shift. They force you, if you can't work the night shift, then you must take your things and leave ... so in that regard they don't help women. So here you have to be afraid to have a baby, because when you come back, then there is no work for you, or they tell you: If you can't work night shift, then you must stay where you are. Stay at home once and that's what they tell you and that's what happens. (Coloured female floorworker)

Another employee who was unexpectedly hospitalised during her pregnancy was told she had to report to work to hand in written notice before staying at the hospital – as she only received this information once in hospital, this was clearly impossible. In an environment that was hostile to women, the worst experiences were reported by female black African and coloured floorworkers.

There was also evidence of a culture of silence over staff issues. An administration staff member commented: “If I speak my mind I'm going to get into trouble – I'm going to become a marked person”. The reason for this lack of engagement appeared to be the fear of victimisation. The following administration worker's fear of getting into trouble came in response to a question about the research process itself, suggesting an overarching climate of adhering to the accepted status quo:

Ag, people are afraid, man, people are afraid. Like, I always tell them here, it's not a democracy. It's like a – how do you call it there where the general takes over and you must just now obey? Like communism or something to that effect, man, where you must just obey everything that they say. It's not like you can have your say, because if you have your say, it's like they're not physically killing you but mentally they do so. The people are like afraid, man ...

## The intervention

The diversity intervention named by the HR manager was the EE Training Committee (EETC). This had been formed five years prior to the study by the HR manager, who was employed with a directive to initiate an EE and skills development plan.

The EE Committee (EEC) was elected after consultations were held with staff of all levels about the content of the Employment Equity Act and the importance of employee involvement. It was intended that committee members – including those from the union – would be representative of all company levels and categories, as well as designated and non-designated groups. The EEC then took on the mandate of training, which resulted in the change of name to the EE Training Committee (EETC). Presentations to the committee outlined the requirements of the Skills Development Act and a sensitisation workshop on gender and race stereotypes was held.

The EETC had four main roles: to develop the EE plan; to compile annual EE reports; to have EE meetings; and to deal with EE-related issues, notably employment. Various analyses were conducted on commencement of the EE plan, including a review of policies, practices and working conditions, a workforce profile obtained by self-declaration of employees, and a workforce audit, which formed the basis for remedial action to be included in the EE plan. The audit highlighted some important issues, including the existence of sexual harassment, preferential treatment, and racial and gender discrimination.

According to the EETC minutes, recruitment and selection policy and procedure received most attention in the meetings. Nevertheless, SFPC had battled with finalising not only the policy but also appropriate procedures for recruitment. The second most discussed topic was the process

of filling existing vacancies. Training and skills development received ad hoc and inconsistent attention, and there were no overall strategy, goals and plan of action. While the EETC prided itself on the fact that “the equity committee covers both employment equity and skills development as an integrated process, which is quite unique from other companies,” the minutes indicated that attention given to training and skills development had not been strategic and integrated at all. The EETC had also failed to develop an integrated response or plan of action in relation to any of the annual EE Reports. Although numerical data was updated each year, there had been little movement of a qualitative nature.

Of course, the EETC is a body which is legally required by the EE Act, and SFPC had met most of its legislative requirements, though with varying degrees of success.

In line with Section 19 of the Act, SFPC had conducted an analysis to identify barriers that adversely affected people from designated groups. At the time of the study, little to no progress had been made in removing the barriers that had been identified five years previously. As prescribed in Section 20, SFPC had developed an EE plan, a major component of which was skills development: in response, SFPC had implemented ABET and learnerships.

The company had appointed a senior manager to take responsibility of driving EE. Interviews with the manager revealed that she was provided with the necessary authority and means to fulfil her functions, in line with the requirements of Section 24. Section 25 places a duty on employers to inform their employees regarding EE reports, minutes of the committee meetings and other relevant information. This was published on the company’s network, and all employees had access via the ABET café. However, people who didn’t know how to use computers didn’t have alternative sources to access this information.

One exception in terms of the legal requirements of the EETC was that it had not been nominated by staff, and had also not displayed a robust and active consultation process. These factors had a number of implications for the committee’s credibility, and contributed to poor information dissemination of committee activities and poor engagement with employee concerns.

Although the company had their EE plan in place, there was no formal policy around AA. Targets were not supported by explicit measures on how the company would achieve them. There was also no single code of

good practice that the company referred to for assistance in its EE initiatives. At a policy level, the foundation on which SFPC's diversity management was built was unstable.

## Evaluation

The very fact that the EETC was identified as the diversity intervention is problematic, because it conflates diversity with EE. This is not uncommon in the South African context where proactive engagement with diversity is largely underdeveloped. Nevertheless, EE and diversity require different depths of intervention: EE creates the foundation for valuing and managing diversity, and diversity, by extension, goes beyond compliance to engage positively and proactively with a diverse workforce.

By dealing with diversity at a compliance and EE level, SFPC's involvement was one of self-preservation and the protection of current patterns of interest. Discourse around diversity (focusing on EE) was shaped by management, with a focus on "getting the numbers right" through employment and promotion strategies. There didn't seem to be any notion of diversity being something positive to capitalise on as an organisational strength: in fact, diversity was seen as a "problem" and there was evidence of the negation and minimisation of difference. SFPC also had no policy around diversity and did not integrate the idea into its core business. "Embracing diversity" was included in the vision and mission yet the management team did not understand the value of a diverse workforce and no link was made as to how "embracing diversity" would drive strategic objectives. Without proactive, strategic and integrated leveraging on diversity as core business, "embracing diversity" is little more than a PR statement.

Kersten (2000) notes that many American companies appeal to their "diversity projects" in order to project a face of social responsibility to the public while internally usurping democratic processes. At SFPC, the EETC as the only body for the exercise of democratic processes since the unions were not functioning in their full capacity. However, the EETC was not seen as being representative, and management's dominance of this democratic structure had undermined its functioning: its legitimacy had been questioned and staff had withdrawn from this "democratic"

process. The year before this study, the majority of staff had passed a vote of no confidence in the EETC.

In order to ascertain employees' experiences of the EETC and diversity in SFPC, focus groups and interviews with staff, management and EETC members were conducted.

Stakeholders felt that the EETC had achieved success in some areas and failed in others. In many cases the failures could be ascribed to problems in functioning. In evaluating its own effectiveness, the EETC gave the following account of its achievements:

- All employees have a far greater awareness of matters regarding equity
- Employment of disabled person
- Formalised and revised recruitment policy that embraces equity principles
- Integration into one forum of organised labour, management and shop floor on matters regarding equity and development
- Establishment of a formal platform to deal with staff complaints regarding sexual harassment, hate speech, discrimination, favouritism/nepotism, etc. The committee is empowered to recommend disciplinary steps if required
- Buy-in and full support of directors

In the interviews, staff agreed that awareness about EE had increased, although they expressed how intangible their awareness was:

I think everybody is much more aware that there is this thing called Equity. (EETC member)

For me, and this is more intangible, it's the awareness factor. I don't know what the spin-off is going to be in the long term but everybody is so much more aware and informed about matters pertaining to equity. (EETC member)

Critically, however, many employees revealed that they did not know about the EETC at all. Awareness of the EETC occurred along hierarchical lines, with administration and management staff being better informed about the EETC than the floorworkers:

... so I don't really know about the committee ... I see them having meetings: management, shop stewards, people in the factory. That's all I see. (Floorworker)

RESEARCHER: Have you heard of the Employment Equity Committee?

RESPONDENT: No, not really. Can you tell me about it? (Floorworker)

Some issues – particularly disability – had seen increasing levels of awareness. An administration worker believed that because of the EETC, the company has become more cognisant of the needs of the disabled:

I think it's successful, because even if I can just perhaps mention [member of staff], who has a disability. In no time, railings were put up in the toilet, to ensure that she's comfortable and that was almost immediate, when she'd started, we didn't have anything like that before. (Administration staff)

Staff sentiments also concurred about the EETC being “a formal platform to deal with staff complaints” – although, significantly, both of the following respondents were in management:

It is a forum where somebody's decisions can be challenged. (Senior manager, EETC member)

... I do believe that people have a voice. By having a voice you can in actual fact say what's on your mind. To me that was the greatest achievement. It's when you go to management or you go to the directors and you say this is the fault: we've got a policy on this or we've got an agreement on this and it's not falling in line with equity. (Senior manager, EETC member)

The one achievement of the EETC that was mentioned by almost every committee member was recruitment, and the policy, procedures and facilitation of individuals applying and being fairly considered for positions:

The major issue is recruitment. ... Recruitment, yes! Because we have this report that the company submitted to the Department of Labour. (EETC member)

While it was the EETC's role to transform through EE and meet racial quotas, there are still perceived problems with recruitment. Changes made to the recruitment process were understood in terms of legislative compliance ("because we have this report"), once again confirming SFPC's lack of strategic engagement with diversity. There was also some resistance to the new recruitment policy, with some white employees experiencing it as a threat to their livelihoods and the quality of the organisation:

When I needed a specific person to fill a specific position in my department, I don't know if this is the right thing to say, but I don't think I could take the best person for the job ... You have to get a person because he's black or coloured. No matter whether it's the best person for the job. (White administrative employee)

There is absolutely no security because they need to look for a black person to fill that position – so that has [meant] they have not dealt with me, really is not looking after me even though I have the experience, prepared to commit to them, prepared to work ... I have not been acknowledged as a result of that and my frustration is with the company. (White administrative employee)

These comments reflect typical white South African discourse around EE and AA (Steyn 2001). Johnson (1997: 111) notes that for privileged classes, the slightest deviation from their privilege is experienced as a "profound loss", and Gardenswartz and Rowe (1997: 37) go on to say that "as long as one person's gain is perceived as another person's loss, fears of reverse discrimination will provide resistance to diversity". Most commonly this discourse hooks into ideas that equate EE candidates with not being "the best person for the job" (Steyn 2001) – a reactionary sentiment (such as those above) that flourishes in an environment in which narrow and superficial transformation initiatives are aimed only at meeting racial quotas. Grimes (2002) names this resistance, specifically by white people, as a major reason for many diversity initiatives failing or remaining at a superficial level. Roosevelt Thomas (1990: 117) notes then that before



you can manage diversity “you must first have a work force that is diverse at every level”; thus AA is an important and necessary step in the journey towards a truly inclusive and diverse organisation. AA is, however, not enough, and must be integrated into a more holistic and strategic approach to diversity that articulates the benefits for everyone.

In the interviews, staff also named successes which had not been defined by the EETC. Most people interviewed saw one of the EETC’s greatest achievements as the increase in available training:

I want to study further – to go study fitting. I went to the manager to tell her: Look here, I want to study further ... then she tell me she must go to the equity committee ask them what they think about it and they decided for me to go study further I must come work in the workshop ... and I’m studying now fitting and turning.  
(Floorworker)

The following floorworker, however, spoke about training that “ander mense” [*other people*] go on, as if it were not relevant to him:

... ons het gehoor van training wat aangaan wat die EETC begin het: daar’s die ABET en die ander training wat mense kan gaan ...  
[Trsl: ... *we heard about training going on that the EETC started: there’s the ABET and other training that people can go on ...*] (Floorworker)

Some EETC members perceived that the training had not been as successful as it should have been because there was a lack of interest from the people who were supposed to benefit:

There’s not enough passion and maybe it’s because of the lifestyle that we’ve had and invariably, this is all non-white people OK, and I don’t mean anything, OK, this is a fact, but because of the lifestyle and the culture and the way they grow up, it’s not important. As long as they have a job, that’s important; so long as they have money in their pocket that’s the short-term benefits, it’s more important than the longer term and I don’t know how to bridge that gap to make, to make some of them see further. (White manager)

This perceived lack of interest took on a racial dimension and it is highly problematic that management perpetuates this racist discourse while at the same time driving transformation initiatives (Gardenswartz and Rowe 1997, Hayes and Russell 1997): unexamined racism undermines even the most well-intentioned plan (Grimes 2002, Kersten 2000).

In the same minutes that document SFPC's successes, the following failures were noted:

- Equity distribution throughout the company levels was not yet representative.
- The committee was not assertive enough to have a major influence on management decisions.
- The promotion of different South African languages was not happening.
- Feedback to constituents/workers was not regular.
- Discipline records were skewed among the racial composition of employees.

In meetings over a period of five years, the committee had further noted that:

- Staff were unhappy with recruitment procedures.
- Unhappiness was expressed with the progress being made with recruitment.
- Staff were suspicious of the EETC and complained about the slow progress by the EETC and at SFPC generally.
- Staff had taken a vote of no-confidence in the EETC because it had been seen to be ineffective.

In the interviews, staff raised similar concerns to those identified by the committee. The greatest of these was the perception that the EETC was not interested in issues affecting staff and was not responsive to workers' concerns. A floorworker commented:

Niks. Hulle is dood nou vir 'n hele jaar. Dis seker die tweede jaar wat dit nou begin het en ons het niks gehoor nie. Jy hoor nie eers hulle gaan meer in meetings nie. Wat is die meeting se naam? EETC – as ons vir hulle vra wat se goed doen hulle ... dan sal ons nie weet nie want niks het voor ons – niks nie – hulle stel nie eers belang aan jou wat hier onder is nie. [Trsl: *Nothing. They have*

*been dead for a year now. It's the second year that it's happened and we've heard nothing. You don't hear that they are having meetings any more. What is the meeting's name? EETC – if we ask what sort of thing they do ... then we won't know because nothing happens in front of us – nothing – they are not interested in you down here.]*  
(Floorworker)

The floorworkers expressed the greatest number of concerns in areas related to equity and diversity. They reported recruitment, selection and promotion practices that were inconsistent and unjust; experiences of racism, and favouritism, particularly toward coloured staff; inconsistent practice with regard to making individuals permanent and “bad treatment” of casuals; gender-insensitive practices; concerns about the implementation of performance management.

While the EETC were aware of many of the problems raised by staff, they were unable to deal with them in a satisfactory manner. The vote of no confidence in the EETC was a culmination of the difficulties the EETC was experiencing. The reason for these difficulties can be found in the committee's functioning, and this was partly to do with the EETC's internal processes, and partly the result of the context of SFPC.

The EETC had clearly struggled to institute consistent and democratic internal processes. Meetings were held irregularly and ranged from one to 13 meetings in a year. The 15 committee members included two senior-management members, two middle-management members, two shop stewards, seven administrative and technical staff, and two floor staff. The members were nominated rather than elected, which led to the accusation that it was unrepresentative and dominated by management – and thus not operating in the interests of the staff. While management did not make up a numerical majority, they were perceived to be dominant, which had resulted in deep distrust by, especially, the factory workers:

I don't know if the people trust the equity committee. (Senior management, EETC member)

There's such a lot of suspicion at this stage, that this is why people question any moves that we make, because it shows me that they don't have any respect for the committee at this stage. (Senior management, EETC member)

The following comment expresses some of the staff's frustration:

... and one thing now in the committee if we vote, they outvote us because we are so little people from the shop floor. There are more managerial positions so we are outvoted there – so that's the reason why we putting the vote of no confidence. And we even went as far as to ask them to dissolve everything and start from scratch again for new committee – people to get elected by the people, not like now where management elect whoever comes and sit on the committee ... (Floorworker, EETC member)

The lack of effective feedback mechanisms resulted in staff across all levels feeling that the EETC members did not communicate adequately. A floorworker commented on the intranet system where EETC minutes were posted:

... click on dinges [*things*], open our files there you see because then the committee talk about what happened, who's absent and all that ... it's in the minute ... so you know what's happening – just the people don't want to use the computer.

Management realised that communication was a problem, but put responsibility on the shoulders of the EETC members:

... the other problem is that even issues that need to go down to the staff which we ask for representation on the equity committee: "Please will you now go and tell the people why this person is coming in on a contract for three months, or why this person is doing this" doesn't get down to the staff members either. We have a communication issue with the information getting from the equity committee down to the staff, so we're looking at ways of, of getting things down to the staff. (Senior management, EETC member)

Communication was clearly perceived as a top-down process, with the EETC operating as messenger for management rather than a body representing staff. Problems were seen to lie with the members, rather than with EETC systems, which was often experienced by staff and management as a lack of EETC members' commitment:

There are one or two people in the committee that's committed to wanting to drive this whole thing but the make-up of the committee – I don't think there's more people on the committee that's committed enough to actually drive this thing much further. (Senior management, EETC member)

Die mense van die committees, jy kan na hulle toe gaan, hulle is besig. Nou wat is die use? As iemand my nie kan help nie, dan waarvoor is hy daar? Hy might as well maar alles los. [Trsl: *The people of the committees, you can go to them and they are busy. Now what's the use? If someone can't help me, then why is he there? He might as well just leave everything.*] (Floorworker)

... she was also involved in the employment equity, so if we discuss something then we present it to her and then she goes and presents it there. Either she doesn't come back with an answer and then we ask her why; she said, no, the issue was rephrased or they didn't even talk about it. (Floorworker)

The last quote suggests that some EETC members were not able to raise certain issues, and that some EETC members' voices were marginalised. There is also a sense of favouritism on the EETC, where members would only help those they liked. According to one floorworker:

Ons weet nie waar om te gaan nie, want gaan jy na mense toe, hulle help net sekere mense help hulle met probleme. As hulle nou van jou hou, dan help hulle met die problems. As hulle nie van jou hou nie, dan word dit nou doodgeloop. [Trsl: *We don't know where to go, because when you go to people, they only help certain people with their problems. If they like you, they help them with their problems. If they don't like you, then it's a dead end.*] (Floorworker)

The perceived favouritism and lack of commitment may have been a direct result of confusion around the role of the EETC as well as of individual EETC members – they literally didn't know what to do:

We don't actually have roles. We don't have like departments or anything. (EETC member)

I am only a member. I don't have a specific role. (EETC member)

Actually, the major thing is that the equity – us as the committee must be trained and must be educated on what is the aim of the committee, what we do want to achieve and set objectives for ourselves. Currently we're floating about because we have to have a committee on the books. (EETC member)

Very little was spelt out in relation to the EETC's role, responsibilities, governance issues and terms of reference, but the EETC was understood in terms of legislative compliance: "we have to have a committee on the books". In one of the earliest committee meetings brief reference was made to the EETC's role: "to represent staff views and aspirations; to present management with proposals as to how to implement the transformation process". This came under discussion again only four years later when membership status, a code of conduct and the constitution of the EETC was an item on the agenda.

A general lack of understanding around the role of the EETC pervaded the interviews, with many staff not knowing what the EETC was supposed to do, or not having heard about it at all. Others saw the EETC as a top-down communication forum from management. Some employees (both floorworkers and management), however, did see the committee as representing the interests of the people on the factory floor. Those staff that believed there was no need for the EETC expressed that they felt sufficiently empowered to address issues directly with management. This response was polarised, however: administration staff felt racial discrimination was not prevalent at SFPC, while factory staff felt very differently.

Some staff felt marginalised on the basis of whether they were permanent or casual employees. In response to whether her concern had been addressed by the EETC, a casual administration worker replied: "no, it hasn't because I'm a contract worker, I'm not a permanent worker, so I've had nothing given to me."

Most of the responses were aligned to the hierarchical nature of SFPC, and the varying levels of engagement with and access to the EE Report were no exception:

We were also very instrumental in putting together that report. We had enough chances to give our input as well. (Management, EETC member)

You see, I tried at the end of this or last year to check the report of the equity but they told me they send an e-mail to FAWU for us, that is the people who are under union, but there was nothing which came to us. (Shop steward, union member, EETC member)

That lack of common ground extended to the role of the unions, with management believing the efforts of the EETC were thwarted by obstructionist, “politically” motivated union members:

... we also have a union here and there’s a lot of underlying trouble-making, just for the sake of making trouble. (Senior management, EETC member)

The label “troublemaker” is often a flag for considering relationships within organisations (Kersten 2000). In many cases those who are labelled “troublemakers” pose a challenge to those who are in power: the label serves to make their concerns less legitimate. Communication difficulties at SFPC suggested that challenges to management were not effectively facilitated. Those challenges that did arise were often out of frustration, and the staff who raised them were seen as “causing trouble” – which in turn discouraged staff from speaking up.

Organisations are not private spaces but rather sites where larger social phenomena play out (Deetz 1992) – they are microcosms of the larger political context. As Kersten (2000: 245) points out, organisations “are expressive of the conflicts existing at the social/political level of society”. The dichotomy between management and the workers, and the difficulties of communication between them, in many ways reflects the difficulties between the “previously advantaged” and “disadvantaged”. The following quote is a good example of this dynamic:

That’s the sort of stuff that one always has in these big factory environments, is that you’re going to have people who just, just want to stir trouble for the sake of stirring trouble. But as I say, there is a younger set coming in and a group which is not so jaded by the

past of the country ... I don't want to get into the whole political thing. I want to look at things from who can do the job, who can't do the job and who wants to do the job. And not just for the sake of, you know, shame, they're previously disadvantaged, I'm going to have to make an exception. (Senior management)

In this manager's perception the troublemakers have an agenda based on South Africa's political history, a reality he is uncomfortable engaging with. Of course, the workplace is already political (Deetz 1992, Kersten 2000) and historically located, and management must be willing to grapple with it as such if they want to "get the job done". It is imperative to transformation and productivity that the unions are fully functional.

At SFPC, the unions themselves have contributed to a breakdown in communication by not operating effectively, thus forcing the EETC to take on the union's responsibilities. The value of a diverse workforce can only be harnessed when basic labour and systemic issues are addressed or they will derail any efforts towards equity or diversity (Gardenswartz and Rowe 1997, Hayes and Russell 1997). In SFPC's case, labour issues dominate the EETC, a structure meant to deal with equity, and unresolved issues have caused resentment, hostility and a serious breakdown in communication.

The EETC's functional problems were significant but not insurmountable. Although an analysis of barriers to diversity had been conducted at the formation of the committee, EETC members had little to no knowledge of the results and no effort had been made to eradicate these barriers. Neither had follow-up analyses been conducted. One member of the EETC said:

In the time I've been here – it's only 11 months now, that I have been on the committee – we haven't done specific analysis where statistically we could prove certain things ... And homed in on the problem.

Similarly, there was a flawed assumption that monitoring and evaluation of EETC's activities was not necessary, and that feedback to the staff performed the same function:



The fact that the committee consists of all levels of people is already a guarantee that information and all get to the right people. (EETC member)

Oh yes! We get regular feedback sessions. What I normally do is after a decision-making sessions, we come back and we get the groups together on different shifts and we feed back to them what has happened and what is going to happen. (EETC member)

One of the greatest impediments to the successful functioning of the EETC was the failure of individuals to participate in EETC activities and processes, which was attributed to lack of training, clarity around the roles of the EETC and members, poor communication and a lack of commitment from staff members.

## Conclusion

SFPC's participation in this research suggested that they were committed to developing their capacity around diversity. Their intentions around transformation appeared sound and they were making progress in various areas, like the recruitment of black African women into professional posts and a disabled receptionist. These successes were undermined, however, by the failure to address deep-rooted problems typical of most South African organisations, the origins of which are historical and social.

The major problem with diversity at SFPC was that it was equated with EE. The naming of the EETC as a body for the engagement of diversity was the first indication that SFPC was not operating beyond the legislative imperative as required by the Employment Equity Act. As a result, diversity was very narrowly conceptualised and engagement was limited. The only way in which transformation can be driven is if a diverse workforce is seen as a positive asset and capitalising on that asset is driven by a strategic imperative of core business. At SFPC, there was an obvious lack of strategic imperative and no indication that a diverse workforce was an asset that could provide a competitive advantage or be leveraged for business advantage. Thus, there was no policy on how diversity would be used as a business strategy and, conversely, no policy in support of diversity. Transformation was also not viewed as a core business function

and was thus not integrated into operations – rather, it was ghettoised as a function of HR.

Because it was a body for implementing EE, the EETC fell short of proactively engaging diversity. The EETC did experience success, especially in the areas of recruitment and training, but there were major impediments to its functioning as a democratic structure and as a body for “embracing diversity”. The EETC’s difficulty in fulfilling its role extended well beyond the internal functioning of the committee itself: the organisational culture at SFPC was characterised by racial and gender discrimination, a divide between management and “the people” and a lack of willingness or capacity to engage these issues. This culture is unhelpful to an organisation trying to “embrace diversity”, although it reflects a broader social and historical context that is not unique to SFPC. The problem at SFPC was that the social and historical legacies of racism and sexism were not being addressed proactively: diversity was being engaged in response to legislation and in many cases avoided and denied.

# Case study: SFPC



Small Food-production Company (SFPC) was a family-owned business based in Cape Town, employing 232 members of staff.

SFPC's structure was highly hierarchical, and this division was evident in the environment. There were different entrances and eating spaces for management and floorworkers. Temporary workers were compelled to wear red caps to differentiate them from the rest of the staff. Employees' language reflected the different classes of workers, with phrases such as: "us and them", "the people", "the floor", "down on the floor", "up there" and "from top to bottom". These divisions operated in racial and gender lines, reinforcing "naturalised" racial division.

The vision and mission stated that the company intended to "embrace diversity", but no policy existed to show how this would be done. Instead, the organisation had in place the basic requirements of the Employment Equity Act which included an EE plan. A consultative process was followed in the implementation of the EE plan (through workshops with staff) and a management statement of intent was signed and displayed on notice boards. But while the broad objective of the plan was to "balance the racial and gender mix across the levels", it was not clear how this was strategically advantageous.

Significantly, the EE and training committee (EETC) was put forward by HR as the company's only diversity intervention – an indication that SFPC was engaging only to the legislative imperative implemented by government. The committee's main mandate was to develop an EE plan, conduct an analysis of barriers, and prepare annual EE reports for the Department of Labour, and it was also tasked with skills development.

Most discussion time in EETC meetings was spent on recruitment and selection procedures. Management regarded the EETC's successes as: the development of the recruitment policy based on EE principles; having the buy-in of directors; being a platform to deal with sexual harassment and hate speech and empowering employees to "recommend" disciplinary action; the integration of organised labour, management and shop floor into one forum; and the employment of disabled persons.

Despite these perceived successes, respondents outside of management (including committee members) spoke mostly of the shortcomings of the EETC. These included the EETC: not being assertive enough to have major influence on management decisions; giving inconsistent feedback to constituents/workers; dealing with labour issues, which is the purview of trade unions; operating in an ad hoc and reactive manner; having vague terms of reference; members being unclear about their duties; and meetings being dominated by management, which saw them as forum to communicate “down” to staff and resulting in experiences of silencing.

A combination of these issues, as well as irregularities about who was on the EETC, resulted in staff not considering the EETC as serving their interests, but rather those of management. The EETC was highly dysfunctional due to management dominance and a general climate of mistrust. As a result, the staff had taken a vote of no confidence against the EETC.

This step is not surprising, however, given the prevailing attitude towards EE, which was illustrated by a senior manager (and member of the EETC):

That’s the sort of stuff that one always has in these big factory environments, is that you’re going to have people who just, just want to stir trouble for the sake of stirring trouble. But as I say, there is a younger set coming in and a group which is not so jaded by the past of the country ... I don’t want to get into the whole political thing. I want to look at things from who can do the job, who can’t do the job and who wants to do the job? And not just for the sake of, you know, shame, they’re previously disadvantaged, I’m going to have to make an exception.

Where being “political” is equated with being “jaded” or a “trouble-maker” restitutive measures are delegitimised and reduced to exercises in sympathy, rather than exercises holding legitimate social or economic weight or making “business sense”. It is highly unlikely that someone with this attitude is going to drive EE in any meaningful way, which will have obvious consequences for its success.

There were other indications that the EETC was not operating effectively: higher job levels were not representative; language and illiteracy were not being dealt with in any meaningful way; disciplinary records showed a racially skewed pattern; and no follow-up plans had been made

on improving consultation, awareness of EE, analysis or developing a plan of action.

While SFPC had recently appointed a disabled receptionist, this was largely a function of it being a category in EE reporting. Long-term gender discrimination was rife. Despite alleged efforts to employ black African women at senior level, the researcher observed that black African women were the most silent among the workers. A coloured female supervisor pointed out that women must have “strong character”, “prove” themselves and “show” what they can do at the company. Men were perceived to be more easily appointed to permanent positions. There was blatant discrimination on the basis of maternity and pregnancy, with women moved to new positions or losing jobs while they are on maternity leave. Fear pervaded the organisation:

Ag, people are afraid, man, people are afraid. Like, I always tell them here, it's not a democracy. It's like a – how do you call it there where the general takes over and you must just now obey? Like communism or something to that effect, man, where you must just obey everything that they say. It's not like you can have your say, because if you have your say, it's like they're not physically killing you but mentally they do so. The people are like afraid, man ...  
(EETC member)

The fact that many staff members did not know about the EETC was an indication of its effectiveness. The researcher had to spend much of her time explaining what the EETC was and what it did, especially to factory floorworkers:

RESEARCHER: Have you heard of the employment equity committee?

SFPC RESPONDENT: No, not really. Can you tell me about it?

This was in spite of the HR manager's confidence in communication structures and the assertion that all staff would be able to comment on it.

A second indication of haphazard implementation was that there was no coherent plan or clear idea of what the intervention was expected to achieve in the first place (outside of EE targets). Neither was there a

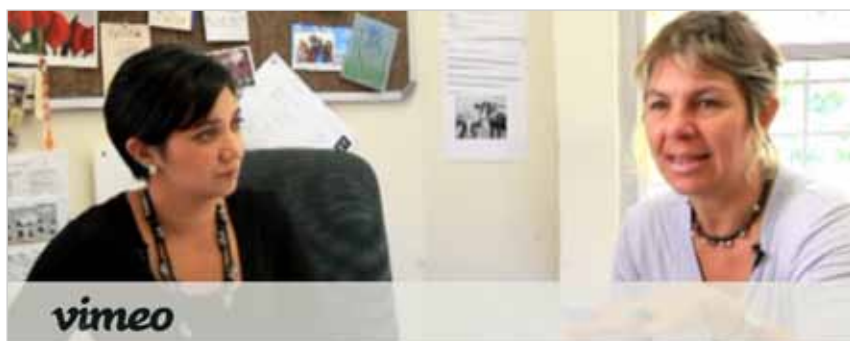
means of meaningfully monitoring the impact of the EETC. One member of the EETC said:

In the time I've been here – it's only eleven months now, that I have been on the committee – we haven't done specific analysis where statistically we could prove certain things ... And homed in on the problem.

There were nevertheless mixed feelings about the success of interventions across different groups within SFPC: management claimed the EETC had been successful whereas staff had taken a vote of no confidence because of slow change and were especially unhappy with inconsistent recruitment processes. Floorworkers expressed the most concerns about the EETC's functioning and lack of responsiveness to concerns like favouritism, unfair promotion, inconsistency in making temporary workers permanent, gender-insensitive practices and problematic performance-management implementation. These experiences of the hierarchy at SFPC are inherently racialised: coloured and white employees at higher levels believed everybody got on well, while black African employees on the factory floor were generally unhappy about management practices.

## Questions

- What is the implication of the EETC being named as the only diversity intervention?
- At the start of the research, SFPC management were proud of their diversity initiative, while there was clearly a huge amount of unhappiness in the factory. What does this say about management's understanding of diversity?
- Discuss the consequences of not having a representative EE committee, as was seen in the case of SFPC.



Small Food-production Company (SFPC)  
*Interview with Réjane Williams and Ilze Olckers, EMBRACE*

# The South African Police Service (SAPS)



Based on Masters thesis by  
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## Introduction

Since 1994, the South African Police Service (SAPS) has faced transformative challenges on a scale far larger than most organisations in the country. Racially diverse yet structurally lopsided, the South African Police force (SAP) of the apartheid state oppressed civilians as well as those within its own ranks whose skin was not white: the orders of black African officers carried no weight with white subordinates, nor did they garner respect from those whom they policed. Women struggled in an organisation which was dominated by a masculine, patriarchal culture. Human rights was a foreign concept, with random arrests, torture and assassination common at times. From being the strong arm of the oppressive elite, the SAPS has had to rearticulate its function while simultaneously attempting to maintain law and order.

As the country shifted towards democracy after the 1990 release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of political parties, an amalgamation of police forces from South Africa and its former homelands became inevitable, as well as a blending of military and resistance (previously “terrorist”) forces. Men and women who had been indoctrinated against each other were told to unite and bear weapons against new threats



to the fragile democracy. In 1994 the “Force” became the “Service”: the South African Police Service.

The SAPS of the mid-90s had a mammoth task on its hands. In addition to suppressing the rise in violent crime and preventing political backlashes, the organisation required major internal reflection and restructuring. After 1994, orders uttered by black African officers *did* carry weight with white subordinates, black African managers occupied positions previously unheard of in the organisation and room for more black African appointees needed to be made. Many of the most powerful and high-ranking SAP officers were persuaded to retire. The SAPS was faced with converting to a human-rights-based police service.

Considering its history, the SAPS makes for a fascinating site for the study of diversity and transformation management in South Africa. One of few national police organisations in the world, the SAPS is a vast bureaucracy. Being in the public gaze, it has been in the government’s best interests to transform the police into a service representative of, and catering to, the entire population. But the process has been difficult.

At the time of this research, only one region<sup>1</sup> in the country was implementing diversity training. Grootland<sup>2</sup> is a vast, largely rural police zone comprising over 60 towns and police stations. The town of Hemel houses the Grootland area’s offices and a court house.

Census data for Hemel suggests that most residents are white and coloured Afrikaans speakers; the majority of Hemel police station members adhere to this demographic. While at a glance this data appears valid, the registration of place names means that it neglects the large number of black Africans living only kilometres from the town limits. Despite this, the local black African population did not meet qualification requirements and the SAPS had been forced to recruit black African members from outside the province. In far smaller numbers, Indian members were also recruited from elsewhere. It seems that both groups had had immense trouble adjusting to the new environment where Afrikaans was the dominant language: a prevalence of sick-leave taking, requests for transfer and

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1 At the time of research the SAPS jurisdictional spheres were broken into national, provincial, metropole, area and station zones. The “Grootland area” refers to the jurisdictional zone into which the station of Hemel falls. It is also used to describe organisational positioning, for example “area director”.

2 Names of stations and districts have been changed.

even suicide attempts was attributed to an inability to adjust to a job far removed from family, friends, and cultural and linguistic familiarity.

This, along with an increase in complaints of racism in the area, suggested a need for a diversity intervention, and it is at Hemel station that we will see how intersections of language and race and their relation to both the workplace and national space form some of the most complex challenges facing the SAPS and the nation as a whole.

## Organisational environment

In most police organisations – but particularly one as large and centralised as the SAPS – the flow of power is hierarchical and work is segregated. The building of Hemel police station was a physical manifestation of these conceptual divides: community service centre (CSC) shifts, crime-prevention shifts, detectives, human-resource staff and administrative staff all worked in different parts of the five-storey central block, and court and mortuary officials were located in buildings separate from the main station. At work, different units were unlikely to have much contact with members outside their own unit, and members tended to remain loyal first and foremost to their immediate colleagues – an “us” and “them” mentality which links closely to the themes of solidarity and secrecy in international police literature (Skolnick 1976; Reiner 1985; Brodgen, Jefferson and Walklate 1988; Brown and Campbell 1994; Manning 1997 and Crank 1998).

Nevertheless, the CSC was clean, spacious and attractive. A large, shiny new SAPS star marked the public entrance with “Community Service Centre” written in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa, and similar trilingual signs mark the counter. A display of HIV/Aids-awareness pamphlets and posters covered a table and wall. Along with plaques of achievement, posters informed the public about children’s rights and steps being taken towards ending domestic violence, while others expressed support for the farming community and people with HIV/Aids, and outlined the ethical principles of the SAPS.

An electronically locked door marked the point beyond which only SAPS members may pass. This led to a foyer with a big blue notice board on the wall opposite the lifts. The board held important station notices, including identikits for suspects, notices about voluntary HIV/Aids

testing, a list of members through which the Grootland EE plan could be accessed and a copy of Batho Pele principles.<sup>3</sup> Posters included a summary of the Employment Equity Act and one that proclaimed: “SAPS embraces disability”. Working up to other levels of the station, there wasn’t much conformity among notice boards and unlike in the CSC and the main foyer, notices were dominated by English, Afrikaans and English-Afrikaans bilingualism while none offered an African language. And indeed, language was perhaps the greatest obstacle to the smooth running of a diverse SAPS; it was the single topic every member at Hemel has something to say about.

Organisational culture is a manifestation of learned thinking patterns within an institution (O’Hara-Devereaux and Johansen 1994; Hicks-Clarke and Iles 2000) and if organisations strive to create a norm among employees (Foucault 1977), then it appears that the workforce at Hemel was conceptualised as being very different from the community it served. Trilingual posters in the CSC recognised client diversity, while mono- and bilingual notices within the SAPS-only section reinforced the idea of cultural homogeneity while alienating those who didn’t identify with the dominant languages.

The recruitment drive for black African members from the Eastern Cape had developed tensions strongly linked to language. In the words of a black African constable who’d recently transferred to Hemel to take up an affirmative action promotion:

Send me to home where I can work with people who I can understand, they can understand my language and I can understand their language ... Then I can leave the people here alone. The people they want someone who’s to say in Afrikaans.

The isolation of Xhosa-speaking members that had led to despondence, ill health and suicide is better understood when framed by the words of a young coloured constable who stated that “This is *our* home. *They* are all from different provinces”, while a white diversity trainer asked a black African workshop participant, “Every time *you go home to your people*, you’re happy, right?” These comments suggest a conceptual difficulty with

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3 “Batho Pele” means “People First”. Eight Batho Pele principles were developed to serve as acceptable policy and legislative framework regarding service delivery in the public service – see <http://www.dpsa.gov.za/batho-pele/Principles.asp>.

accommodating Xhosa-speaking black Africans in the largely Afrikaans-dominated Hemel area. And yet an unofficial discourse existed in which managers were aware of the need to meet quotas, even if they didn't necessarily believe in the need for black African members at Hemel. The HR manager for the area acknowledged that while there was a service-delivery component to affirmative action policies, in the end it was about getting the numbers right.

The official SAPS discourse on quota requirements and their commitment to transformation was evident in that an applicant's race, gender and rank were the first questions asked when considering them for promotion and transfers. This did not rest well with everybody. For coloured members<sup>4</sup> – the demographic at Hemel most likely to be replaced by black African members – the feeling was that AA poses a serious threat to their livelihoods. And ironically, transfer requests by black African members very often couldn't be accepted because their presence was required to fill quotas – in this case, causing more distress than reward to the very people whose lives the system was designed to enrich.

A black African detective who'd transferred explained how black African members from the Eastern Cape were often perceived as a threat:

Some they even say that “these people are coming to take our posts”. I mean, even some African people here in the Western Cape ... who started their careers here ... if they don't get the post, they will blame you from the Eastern Cape: “You fly from the Eastern Cape, come and take our posts here.”

Comments by black African members of community ostracism and job stealing suggested that Eastern Cape, Xhosa-speaking black Africans were seen as a threat to Hemel's structure. This threat was felt most strongly by those deemed by the dominant group to belong: white and coloured. Two coloured members hinted at resentment with AA policies in the station:

Sometimes [we joke] but this is not in a bad way ... one of them [the white members] will come in and say, “Yup, we boertjies,<sup>5</sup> we are really getting screwed here” ... The coloureds will also get

.....  
4 According to the station's EE quotas and future targets, taken from their EE Plan

5 Boertjies: Afrikaans for “young farmers”, but here referring to white Afrikaans men

involved and we'll end up by saying, "No man, the blacks get all the nice jobs. We get the shit end of the stick." That's when we're sitting in the parade room and everybody will laugh about it.

But humour can only do so much to hide perceptions of threat. In researching the effects of AA in the United States, Hochschild (1997) found that far more people were affected by the fear of affirmative action than were harmed by the practice itself. At Hemel, few individuals had been personally affected by it, but the fear of demographic transformation had become one of the learned ways of thinking in the organisational culture.

It is worth noting that the unhappiness some black African members were experiencing was not purely to do with the culture inside the station. A constable suggested that he experienced more negativity from the community than from his colleagues:

You see ... they [the community] think SAPS is for those people they can speak Afrikaans ... it's not right, especially in the Western Cape.

A black African constable expressed his thoughts on demographic transformation:

... maybe by next year in one shift maybe plus/minus five Africans ... Then we can see the equity is working. But one per shift or two, it's not enough ... Because the community they must know if they are going to find that those people there in front [in the CSC] may be Xhosa-speaking people, they are going to be forced to speak English ... Then they know they must accommodate us.

Another black African constable, who was stationed at a rural station in the area, revealed similar thoughts:

Sometimes they get drunk and still use those old names. It's the community that needs this [diversity] training.

These hopes illustrate how community realities will change as the public face of government and private workforces change: a community that

understands that they might have to speak English or interact with black African SAPS members will perhaps be less antagonistic in their interactions with non-Afrikaans members.

While no black African members named or hinted at racism within Hemel, citing that it was language that posed the greatest problem, this does not mean that racist mechanisms weren't at work (Erasmus and De Wet 2005). A coloured inspector recounted his time in the station in the 1980s: he talked about a mess hall where coloured members had to stand and eat while white members sat, and of being locked out of the station's bar while his white colleagues drank after a successful street operation. Many members who experienced racial subjugation in the old SAP (notably senior management as well as a number of older inspectors) continued to work at the SAPS – an environment that lent itself to fostering long-term tensions and lingering feelings of superiority by or anger towards those who used their power to harm other members under the apartheid system.

Explicit reference to racism was rare by white members but coloured members were more vocal on the issue. A coloured sergeant explained that racism was particularly alive and well between black African and white members in the station, but confessed to participating in race-based humour within his almost entirely coloured unit, believing it did not have a harmful effect on individuals. But it is clear things aren't that simple; Van Dijk (2004) notes that racist disclaimers simply attempt to absolve the speaker of any part in the system he/she is critiquing.

A white cleaner at Hemel unearthed one of the more powerful apartheid-constructed notions being challenged by the changing nation. A captain at Employee Assistance Services (EAS) revealed: "We've got a white female cleaner at Grootland and we tell the other police stations about it and they say, 'Really? Do we have those in the police?'" Speaking of her white superior, the cleaner said in an interview:

She comes from her place and, because I'm a white person, she said, "I can't see you as a cleaner". And I tell her, "Why? I don't steal my money. I come here and I work for my money". And she said, "No". She tried to kick me out of here.

But it is not only her superior who had trouble repositioning a white body in South Africa's traditional race/class structure. An inspector volunteered:

We have one white female cleaner. And I get angry because the coloured female cleaners are nasty with her. It's not nice. I've already talked to them. In the olden days you didn't get cleaners, white people ... She forgot she was white.

Wallerstein (1991: 84) notes that "The constructed 'people' – the races, the nations, the ethnic groups – correlate so heavily, albeit imperfectly, with 'objective class' [that] a very high proportion of class-based political activity in the world has taken the form of people-based political activity". In South Africa this is perhaps the ignored essence of race relations: class-based politics is reduced, in daily discourse, to race-based politics. At Hemel – and probably within much of South African racialised discourse – it seems that the markers "white" and "cleaner" are still mutually exclusive (Philips and Jorgensen 2002).

Mare's (2001) argument is for a more multifaceted approach to AA and race counting – one that takes into account class, gender, sexuality and other factors that shape our lived experience. Like language and race, the culture at Hemel suggested an internalisation of prescribed gender roles. Only 37% of Hemel's personnel were women and there was a prevalence of men in traditional policing positions (73% in CSC, court and crime-prevention) while women tended to occupy administrative positions (80% in HR, finance, logistics, administration and communication). Women were well represented in the rank hierarchy, though few were involved in street-level policing. Those few tended to change positions if they fell pregnant, and it appeared that maternity leave was sometimes used to reshuffle personnel – a situation which the women accepted, since office hours are more accommodating for a mother. Nevertheless, more than a year after giving birth, a constable explained how she was struggling to return to her job on the shifts – though she didn't feel her superior's reluctance to take her request seriously was discrimination. With approximately six out of the station's 89 women falling pregnant each year and taking advantage of the paid maternity leave, there seemed to be a generally positive approach towards pregnancy, although it appeared that women's positions were compromised by their status as mothers.

While all work places are open to sexual banter, flirtation and sexual interaction, institutions like the SAPS are notably dominated by masculinity and machismo (Skolnick 1976; Reiner 1985; Brodgen, Jefferson and Walklate 1988; Brown and Campbell 1994; Manning 1997; Crank 1998). A constable who was the only woman on a shift of 12 noted that the men on her shift would sometimes not let her do certain kinds of manual work because she was a woman, or would stop a conversation with the words, “Come guys, we have a lady present”. In this gendered environment, it was perhaps not surprising that while notice boards are filled with posters pledging support to all manner of causes, there was no evident support for gays and lesbians. Members recognised that there were both male and female gay members within the station and suggested that while they personally were accepting of gay members, the station as a whole wasn’t. Gay jokes, like race-based jokes, were told in the presence of gay members but, ostensibly, all parties knew where to draw the line, before anyone was offended.

To the only disabled member at Hemel – a blind, white male switch-board operator in his early thirties – it was clear that the organisational culture needed to change. His view was that people interacted with him in a similar way as they do with anyone they are scared of – he named people of colour as an example. While he felt valued by his colleagues, he also recounted the immense effort he had put into acquiring a computer: after battling with management for six years, he bought his own computer, which he then took home at the end of each work day. He, too, appeared to have internalised prescribed notions of disability: he did not mention concerns about the fact that he worked in a type-cast position, nor that he had held the same post for 15 years.

## The intervention

Initially, requests for the SAPS to identify a diversity intervention proved difficult. National administration passed the task on to provincial administration, and after weeks of miscommunication it became evident that most SAPS management were not aware of any kind of intervention having taken place in recent years. Eventually, a manager from the Western



Cape provincial training office, along with the provincial EAS<sup>6</sup> were able to provide a sketch of the SAPS's recent grapplings with diversity.

According to them, the SAPS had sent a task team to various countries in 1996 to assess diversity management in other police organisations. It was felt that few lessons could be learnt from the USA, Australia and Britain, where the political and economic elite represented an ethnic majority and where diversity related to management of minorities. As it turned out, it was Malaysia – where huge disparities exist between rich and poor and where religious diversity echoes the racial and linguistic diversity of South Africa – that eventually proved most interesting.

Next, in the mid-90s, the organisation decided it needed a home-grown intervention and commissioned an independent diversity provider to conduct a “Train the trainer” course – a disaster which ended in the SAPS and the provider suing one another. According to the diversity providers, police members hadn't been ready for the process, while an SAPS participant later reflected on the course as a great success. Regardless, the trainers were never put to use as it seems there hadn't been enough “seriousness” from senior SAPS members at the time.

In the Western Cape, the provincial training office then decided to implement station-level diversity-training workshops throughout the province. Workshops were completed at the provincial offices and at three stations, but the project was dissolved halfway through the fourth station-level workshop. A 1999 Human Rights Commission enquiry into allegations of racism at another police station recommended the restructuring of management and the need for improved accountability all the way to a provincial level (Pityana, Tlakula, Wessels, Mabiletsa and Geldenhuys 1999), but a more structured diversity intervention wasn't considered.

A few years later, diversity-training workshops were introduced into one of Cape Town's areas, independent of the provincial offices. Training was provided by local Holocaust-museum facilitators and highlighted the manner in which difference was manipulated and exploited in Nazi Germany. Despite rave reviews of the programme, an assessment by provincial command found it to be overtly emotive and Eurocentric. An attempt

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6 Made up of chaplains (*dominees*), social workers, psychometrists (psychologists with a three- rather than four-year degree) and one psychologist, the EAS consists of 16 staff who provided daily training at police stations. Standard courses included HIV information and testing, training on money management, colleague sensitivity (but not with a focus on diversity issues) and other life skills.

to tailor the course to reflect the South African experience by bringing in a South African political-history museum and a therapeutic debriefing failed when a Muslim member complained about being forced to enter the Holocaust museum – and the programme was abandoned almost as soon as it had begun.

No other diversity initiatives were introduced in the Western Cape or at national level (and most provincial management believed there hadn't been any in the country) until the area director of Grootland gave an instruction to HR to provide diversity training to every area member within a six-month period.

The aim of the diversity training was to “sensitise” members, and workshops were to be rolled out to all 4 559 members at 60 stations. Due to budgetary restrictions, the HR superintendent had been unable to employ external diversity providers, but looked to EAS as a resource of trained professionals to take the programme forward. She'd tracked down one of the SAPS members who had received the controversial original diversity training and requested that he train the EAS staff. As it turned out, that “training” consisted of a meeting at which potential workshop materials were presented – drawn from a three-day workshop which the SAPS trainer had been taught to instruct – following which the EAS staff selected exercises they thought might suit their goals. Importantly, the trainers received no additional or specialised diversity training themselves, and the point must be made that as members of the SAPS they were likely to be locked into the same paradigms around diversity issues as the people they were trying to change.

The EAS did not have any additional budget to run the diversity programme, nor would they be able to remove members from work for three days at a time. Thus, the three-day programme was broken into a two-day workshop to be presented to senior management, and a one-day workshop for the remaining members and employees. The one-day workshops were effectively half a day's duration. They generally catered to between 15 and 30 members drawn from two to five stations; personnel from different stations were combined in order to expose members to new people and a greater number of diversities.

Arrendo's (1996) detailed, thorough and long-term strategy for researching, designing and implementing successful diversity-management initiatives involves:

1. educating leadership around diversity issues and allocating part

- of senior management to oversee the intervention;
2. creating vision and mission statements relevant to the intervention;
3. building knowledge by assessing diversity-related needs in the workplace;
4. developing goals and strategies based on needs;
5. implementing strategies;
6. educating and training;
7. evaluating progress and change, identifying enablers and pitfalls; and
8. modifying strategic plans.

The only clear component of Arrendo's blueprint that the SAPS intervention had met was educating and training members, and Arrendo warns that this type of stand-alone intervention will have low impact (1996: 126). She warns against "off-the-shelf", short-term methods and stresses the importance of context-specific training; at the SAPS, training should be tailored to each station and related to its organisational culture. The Hemel programme had not only been taken off the shelf after 10 years, but had been whittled down to meet time constrictions. The resulting programme made no attempt to address institutional power in the organisation (Harro 2000, Hardiman and Jackson 2000) or disparities of power across groups (Pharr 2000), to tailor objectives towards the culture of the station or SAPS culture as a whole (Crank 1998), or to integrate legal- and service-delivery objectives into its framework (Roosevelt Thomas 1990, O'Hara-Devereaux and Johansen 1994, Hays and Russell 1997, Kersten 2000, Thomas 2004, Smith 1999, Adler 1997, Ferdman and Brody 1996, Lorbieki and Jack 2000, Dupper 2004).

## Evaluation

"Those who are darker than dark, can I call you 'African'?" began one of the diversity workshops. The question was met with blank faces. The black African social worker continued, "Can I call some of you 'white'?" Again silence, a sideways glance. The facilitator continued, "We've also got coloured, not 'so-called coloured.'" He chuckled to himself, then rhetorically: "Do we have any Indians here? Unfortunately not."

Despite appealing to essentialist South African types, the facilitator's questions at least reveal an awareness of the contestable nature of race labelling. The silence with which he was met, on the other hand, suggests the participants' compliance, and perhaps it is not surprising that less than two decades after the end of apartheid, the official classification of the population is still a given.

Facilitators felt that the most successful workshop activity was that which dealt directly with stereotypes. One of the most popular exercises was designed to highlight commonality beyond race and gender: members stood in a row or circle and stepped forward if they were a first born, an inspector, a father, a Christian, and so forth. Another popular exercise involved breaking the participants into groups and asking members to write down stereotypical ideas about other race groups or genders. Groups were then rearranged by race (a division over which there was no contestation), with each group responding to the stereotypes. While instructors and participants stressed the importance and success of this latter exercise, one might posit that it lends itself to an essentialisation of race, threatening to concretise, rather than challenge, stereotypes. A worrying occurrence was when a white male facilitator contributed his view that taking initiative is part of who whites are.

The manner in which racial and gender identities were left unchallenged (and even reinforced) by facilitators was worrying, and the results of the workshops speak for themselves: no participant believed they had changed as a result of the workshop, though some acknowledged they had learned something new. Written feedback suggested that while discussion of culture and race was beneficial, the topics were not dealt with thoroughly enough for members' needs. It is worth remembering that two of the most significant learned patterns of thinking and doing (O'Hara-Devereaux and Johansen 1994) at Hemel included the threatening aspect of AA for white and coloured members, and the notion that Xhosa members from the Eastern Cape destabilise the existing culture of the station. While it was the affected members' deep discomfort that prompted the diversity intervention in the first place, it is unfortunate that the workshops had so little impact. The question remains: Is the continued compliance to racial categories sufficient? The diversity workshops' failure to interrogate these assumptions was one of its major failings.

The AA and diversifying process is bound by its use of apartheid-constructed identities while striving for equitable ideals. While govern-

ment policies like the Employment Equity Act aim to empower “designated groups” – defined as “African people, women and people with disabilities” – they still use “black people” as “a generic term which means Africans, coloureds and Indians” (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998). On the one hand, there is an attempt to amalgamate black African, coloured and Indian under the single term “black” (echoing the 1980s rhetoric of Black Consciousness), but on the other, the act refers to multiple categories. Quota systems such as that used by the SAPS explicitly states the ratio of black African, coloured, and Indian members required in each station.

Mare refers to this prevalence of race labelling in the daily discourse of South African life – including South African census, tax forms and birth certificates – as the “banality of race confirmation” (2001: 76). Nobels (2001) reminds us that counting by race suggests that there is something to be counted, and highlights the discourse-making power of government institutions such as census bureaus, which should be neutral and scientific. Such is the contradiction of the “new South African” discourse that in its attempt to rearticulate notions of citizenship and flatten old race hierarchies, it continues to employ racial categories. Mare calls for an end to this approach, both with a mind to ending essentialist notions of race, and for fear of redressive policies missing deserving targets who might not fall neatly into existing categories.

The voices at Hemel SAPS hinted at an everyday discourse that blended racial essentialism and colour blindness. An optimistic coloured female constable in the detective unit said:

I have this joke, my own joke, I say “What do you have that a black brother doesn’t have? What do I have that a white sister doesn’t have?” The only difference is our pigmentation so there’s no difference, there’s no difference at all except the mindset. And if only people can see other people for who they are, you know, see them for their character ... You will not see colour if you see character.

This was among the most liberal views offered from Hemel, but the constable went on:

The coloureds, for example, let’s take how they celebrate New Year. We believe that you come together as a group of friends and fam-

ily and there's lots of alcohol and you just party the night away whereas white people in general, they are very different in that aspect. They spend it with very close people, you know, only with their relatives and they have this traditional Christmas tree and they exchange gifts whereas exchanging gifts is not important for us really ... Whereas the Africans ... for some it means something, for some it's just a time to share and to live ... Just being together.

It was clear that the young constable did see colour after all. Her vision of the world was still broken into racialised compartments of meaning which she failed to scrutinize. This is what Balibar means when he states that racism provides an explanation "to men about their own nature and their own birth" (1991: 55): things just *make sense* in relation to race labels and racialised bodies – a notion which the workshop fails to interrogate.

Examples abound in which Hemel members denied seeing race, or participating in a racialised system. But it was clear that even in doing so individuals reaffirmed and connected themselves with racialised categories:

We don't actually have race issues here ... I don't need this [diversity workshop] 'cos I don't have a problem with the white guy or the coloured or the black guy, you see?

I don't think I have a problem with anyone so I don't need to change anything [but at the station there are] racial problem[s].

Race never had any effect on me. I was like, I couldn't care a damn what colour you are ... I wasn't brought up to mix with blacks but when I grew up I decided this is what I want to be, you see? Because some of *our* coloureds are also very racist, they don't want to mix with blacks.

Erasmus (2004) summarises what she calls the denialist and recognition approaches to race. Simply put, the denialist approach would be one (such as occurs in Brazil) where race is officially said not to exist, can thus not be an influencing factor in citizens' lives, and is thus left unaddressed while lighter skinned people maintain dominance. The recognition approach, on the other hand, would be something akin to what is

happening in South Africa, where it is believed that race-based redress is necessary to mend the damage done in the name of race.

Yet while the official national discourse attempts to follow the recognition approach, the voices above appeared to merge the two, being aware of a racialised reality while simultaneously denying their participation in it. The national approach becomes ambiguous as it filters down to those struggling to reconcile equality with apartheid classification. Merely accepting all races does little to engage the power dynamics that hold members in particular positions. In fact, this disguises the existing power positions and leaves them in place (Steyn, 2001).

## Conclusion

“One thing, we’re all proudly South African.” So ended one of the diversity-training workshops at the Hemel training college. As members shuffled papers and started standing to leave, the instructor who shouted these words didn’t likely consider herself part of a grand nation-building system. Nevertheless, her statement suggests some awareness of her role in unifying a previously divided people. More importantly, it recognised the racial, linguistic and cultural differences among members in the room, and appealed to them to unite under a national label.

The Hemel SAPS had missed an opportunity to take up the challenge of rearticulating race meaning and scripting in its workplace. Nevertheless, it should be commended for its attempts to tackle diversity-related challenges, particularly on such a large scale. Without any additional funding they had managed to put in motion a programme targeting over 4 000 members. There were, however, hints at the Hemel station that what was once an argument over incompatible races was simply shifting to one of language.

A well-designed training programme, supported by management, policy and other organisational structures, has the potential to rearticulate the way citizens see one another and themselves and is a fundamental to the foundation on which this country is built. As a government body whose application of the law has great influence over the lives of South African citizens, the SAPS was most definitely an organisation in which more rigorous diversity-related interventions would go a long way to healing and building the new nation.

# Case study: SAPS



The South African Police Service (SAPS) was formed in a socio-political context very different from today. With South Africa's move to a constitutional democracy, the SAPS had to change from being the security force of the pre-1994 elite to a service that caters to a new articulation of the South African population. The shift from apartheid had brought with it a plethora of questions concerning nationhood and citizenship. However, even with national EE targets in place, diversity-related training had only been conducted in pockets of the SAPS and never in a systematic manner. This study analysed diversity-training workshops that were conducted at a particular station in the area of Grootland in the Western Cape, and examines whether police members are changing as a result of this intervention. (Area and town names are fictitious.)

Like most urban centres in South Africa, Hemel was a racially and class-stratified town in which income disparities were great. The 2001 South African Census revealed a majority population of coloured Afrikaans speakers followed by white Afrikaans speakers. Notably, data excludes a large black African population living only kilometres from the town. Demographics at Hemel SAPS were closely linked to those of the town (excluding the black African population), but very misrepresentative of the nation.

Most Hemel and Grootland management would argue that mirroring local demographics is more important to service delivery than mirroring national demographics; this unofficial discourse resisting transformation is contrary to the official SAPS discourse and requires further consideration at a national level where equity strategies are developed. Nevertheless, in an effort to align themselves closer to the national quota, the Hemel SAPS had been forced to recruit black African members from the Eastern Cape since the local population did not meet qualification requirements.

New Xhosa-speaking black African recruits experienced an Afrikaans-saturated work environment and animosity from an unsympathetic Afrikaans-speaking public. In addition, they were seen as a threat to



those (mostly coloured and white) police members deemed to “belong” to the Grootland area. These challenges had resulted in stress and pressure on black African appointees, as well as on those white and coloured members who felt threatened by them.

Although this was a relatively recent development, race-based frictions had existed in the Hemel station for many years. In particular, long-term tensions had been fostered by white and coloured members who had had very disparate access to power in the police force under apartheid. While these members now worked alongside each other, there had been little attempt at redress, particularly amongst those members whose colleagues had previously used their power to harm them. Newer members suggested that senior members from the station’s pre-1994 days would need to be removed as their mindsets could not be easily changed.

In this environment, some Hemel members made light of what is seen as race-based competition for work, while others showed serious resentment and disillusionment. Many coloured and white members expressed concern over displacement due to quotas and the effect AA might have on their careers. While it is likely that the threat of displacement is more commonplace than the practice itself, this fear had become a learnt aspect of the station’s organisational culture.

No black African members named or hinted at racism at the station, and most suggested it was language that posed the greatest problem. Within the discourse of political correctness permeating the country, it is likely that what was once an argument over incompatible races had simply shifted to one of language. A similar political correctness seemed to drive the members’ rejection of racial differences while still relying on essentialised notions of racial groups. The result at Hemel was an everyday race scripting that was simultaneously locked in employing apartheid race labels while attempting to deny their relevance – a conflation, then, of pre- and post-apartheid nation-building discourses. Members’ struggles with new intersections of race and class were highlighted in their battle to contextualise the presence of a white cleaner, suggesting continued reliance on apartheid race logic.

Other aspects of the organisational culture at Hemel included the fact that it remained stratified along gender lines. While 30% of the station’s personnel are women, a breakdown of job positions revealed that they were generally excluded from street-level policing positions and concentrated in administration. There was also evidence suggesting that those

women who did front-line policing were removed – possibly permanently – from their positions if they fell pregnant. While there didn't seem to be any disharmony around women's positions in the station, some cases revealed gender biases and an internalisation of gender roles by both men and women.

There was evidence in the station that while members were tentatively tolerant of homosexuality – although gay men were less tolerated than gay women – they are not sufficiently sensitised to a level at which gay members could be open about their sexuality. In terms of representation of disability at Hemel, the single disabled member had clearly not been afforded equal opportunities: he had worked in a type-cast position for 15 years and had to spend his own money to acquire the computer necessary to perform his duties.

It is in this culture that the director of Grootland, the area into which the Hemel station falls, issued an instruction to the HR manager to provide members with diversity training. Motivation for running the workshops appeared to be linked in particular to retaining black African employees in the area, along with the more general hope of creating an accommodating environment for all members. However, while there were hints of a moral- and service-based motive behind the workshop, ultimately it seemed driven by legal obligations to meet demographic quotas. Budget and time constraints meant that the manager had to make use of SAPS resources: she approached an SAPS member who had been trained in a controversial diversity-training programme in the mid-90s, who in turn presented the SAPS Employee Assistance Services (a group of social workers, psychometrists and chaplains) with material from which they might assemble a diversity-training programme. Importantly, these trainers received no additional or specialised diversity training themselves.

The workshops ran for three to four hours but were called “one-day” workshops, perhaps in order to look more acceptable on paper. Exercises were designed to highlight commonalities between individuals but tended to engage only superficially, and facilitators did not encourage participants to engage more deeply with issues, or to engage at all if they were silent. The workshops also failed to examine any notion of institutional, intergroup or interpersonal power disparities in the organisation or in South African society. Its brevity made it easy for members to simply pass the hours without grappling with issues. While most of the exercises were decently designed and implemented, single-pronged

training strategies are not going to bring about organisational change. Facilitators hinted at but failed to interrogate members' understandings of South African races; and while rearticulating of the nation and the shifting of power structures are key to the shifting of racial meaning in South Africa, these ideas were left unexplored. In the end, most members had something positive to say about their experience of the training, but few believed it would result in any permanent change either in individuals or in the station: the general belief was that individuals need to change themselves if the organisation is to change. While their impressions were valid, members' understanding of individual and organisational change being grounded in personal agency ignores the socialising power of the employer.

Despite the director's good intentions, the Grootland diversity workshops were not approached in a manner that was likely to be effective – particularly as they were the sole attempt at dealing with diversity-related challenges. Diversity issues are too fundamental to be brushed over in a light morning's discussion, and both the voices of members and the related literature speak to the insufficiency of this approach. The Hemel SAPS missed an opportunity to rearticulate race meaning and scripting in its workplace: the workshops' failure to interrogate assumptions about race, its parallels with class, and the manner in which we unconsciously appeal to race to order our worlds is perhaps one of its greatest failings. Interestingly, members' perceptions were changing, but this had little to do with the diversity workshops and far more to do with the gradual rearticulation of nationhood being propagated in other forms throughout the country.

It might be argued that a nation cannot exist without security forces that buy in to the political power's national ideals; and police members endowed with the discretionary powers that can make or break a citizen's life should have a sense of belonging to the community propagated by a democratically elected government. While print and television media, Proudly South African campaigns and school syllabi contribute to shifting minds, sensitive, intelligent diversity training potentially adds a context-specific, intra- and interpersonal aspect to nation-building. A well-designed training programme, supported by management, policy and other organisational structures has the potential to transform the way citizens see themselves and one another.

## Questions

- What structures would be necessary to support a successful diversity-training workshop and how could this be articulated in an EE plan?
- What are the implications of using SAPS employees to implement the diversity training? What additional resources were needed to avoid this situation?
- How did Hemel station's unofficial discourse on quotas intercept with the official SAPS discourse? What factors had contributed to the development of this station-level discourse?
- Discuss the impact that station-level diversity training might have on the community it serves.
- Some police members who worked at Hemel during apartheid had remained at the station. Given the complexity of their pre- and post-1994 experiences, what additional attention might be required to maintain healthy relationships?

# Large Industrial Company (LIC)



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## Introduction

Large Industrial Company (LIC) is a large manufacturer of steel products supplying both local and international markets. Now part of a family-owned multinational organisation, LIC's South African operation has experienced phenomenal growth since its establishment as a state-owned organisation in the early part of the 20th century.

The company was founded by an influential, Afrikaans-speaking, white South African male. With its first operations in Pretoria, LIC was established with two main objectives: to manufacture commodities, and to create employment opportunities, mostly for whites. Production began in 1934, and wartime needs for the local manufacture of numerous steel commodities brought about a sharp increase in demand, soon forcing LIC to expand its operations. In 1943 the board of directors executed the production of a second plant in Vereeniging to deal with immediate wartime needs. This plant later formed part of a large, integrated steelworks, which was officially opened in 1952. Major expansion schemes followed throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with the older plants modernised to supply new and higher quality products.

In 1969, in order to decentralise industry away from the Witwatersrand complex and to promote industrial development in Natal, the

South African government erected LIC's third fully integrated steelworks at Newcastle. With an adequate supply of labour, Newcastle was also situated on main rail and road routes between Johannesburg and Durban, essential services such as water and electricity were already well catered for, and the town had a basic established infrastructure with a settled community.

The 1970s saw the largest expansion period for the Vanderbijlpark works, with facilities extended and modernised, and a whole new works established at the site. By 1981, LIC had made important decisions on future strategy: it was decided to phase out the Pretoria metallurgical plant, which was now old, uneconomic and caused pollution, thus reducing the plant's overall steel-making capacity.

During the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, the world steel industry entered a crisis period with a widespread recession – local demand for steel decreased and a worldwide oversupply saw prices fall to uneconomic levels. During 1982, LIC was forced into the early closure of the two oldest blast furnaces at the Pretoria works, as well as the closure of the Newcastle works, which had been operating under LIC's name for only a decade.

In 1989 LIC was privatised, and after the first democratic South African elections of 1994, the organisation started looking at better ways of doing business by benchmarking its processes against similar companies, both locally and abroad. The inevitable consolidation of the global steel industry forced LIC to join forces with a strategic equity partner so as not to lose market share, and in 2001 plans were put in place to become part of a large multinational organisation. Two decades of workforce restructuring had led to a drastic reduction in the workforce: in 1989 LIC had employed 60 000 people and by the time of this study the number was just over 9 000. Despite this, LIC showed promising financial results.

Today, LIC's South African operation includes plants in Pretoria, Vereeniging, Newcastle and Saldanha, with its flagship operation based in Vanderbijlpark – this site encompasses administration offices and a shared-services centre as well as the manufacturing plant. Significantly, this predominantly white Afrikaner town experienced large-scale unrest during the apartheid era, and is just a stone's throw from Sharpville, Bophelong, and Boipatong (and just a little further from Soweto) – all sites of notorious political unrest, violence and racially motivated killings in the turbulent decades before apartheid's demise.

The nature of the steel industry raises many challenges in terms of environmental, safety, quality and HR issues. Given its context in post-1994 South Africa, the “people” challenges facing LIC were unique when compared to its global counterparts, although they were sometimes benchmarked with their global partner in Mexico, another developing country.

More than 50% of black African, coloured and Indian people employed by LIC were in non-management positions with very little decision-making powers, and none fell in the top three levels of seniority. Black Africans were mostly represented in the lower levels of the hierarchy, but had broader representation across the organisation than coloured and Indian people – only one coloured person was in senior management. Significantly, 36% of white males fell in the top three levels and only 1% was represented in the lowest level.

LIC’s total female representation was only 8% of the total workforce, of which women in designated groups represented only 2%. In senior-management positions, there was no representation of coloured or Indian women, and there was a greater proportion of coloured women in lower-level jobs. White women were better represented, with 26% occupying positions within the top three levels. There were, however, fewer women in senior management than men, and only one in top management. In the whole company, only 35 people with disabilities were employed – a number that had not improved despite revised disability equity and disability management policies.

Recruitment statistics exhibited similarly racialised and gendered trends. While there had been some effort to recruit skilled Indian and black African people into senior positions, only 3% of recruited designated males were appointed at mid- to senior-management levels, with one Indian male at senior-management level and none at top management. There was a definite trend for white people to be recruited into more senior positions.

Designated males and white females dominated terminations; a proportion of these were due to better packages being offered by competitors. Many designated employees had experienced frustration at not being able to obtain promotions and some had experienced discrimination, resulting in low morale. The inability of LIC to retain these skilled employees had resulted in a revolving pattern of hiring followed by termination.

Disciplinary action had increased over the preceding years, suggesting a higher level of disruption and even unhappiness amongst staff. Black

African males dominated cases of disciplinary action, followed by white males, then coloured males, then Indian males. Very few incidents of disciplinary actions were taken against females of any racial group.

## Organisational environment

To ascertain the employees' experiences of diversity, interviews, questionnaires and focus groups were conducted, and employees were observed in different group situations. The respondents' comments indicated that some employees were fully aware of the advantages and urgency with which diversity management needed to be addressed, monitored, measured and managed, but the majority, especially non-management staff, revealed unfamiliarity with the word and even the concept. Generally, employees did not seem very comfortable with the topic; instead focus-group members preferred talking about general workplace concerns, with salary in particular being a major issue.

Nevertheless, a number of diversity issues did emerge – many, worryingly, about discrimination and the fear of victimisation. About the former, employees had the following to say:

... when white employees complain about not getting a management post due to restructuring or rationalisation or for whatever reason and then stops complaining all of a sudden and starts working harder ... shortly thereafter he buys a new car ... this must mean he got an increase, but if we blacks complain, we get told nothing can be done and that we should just continue applying for vacancies. I know this is not going to happen because all the posts have been earmarked for whites.

Discrimination is the most important problem that I have because we get discriminated when it comes to training.

[There is] favouritism and discrimination.

There seems to be “cliques” that enjoy certain advantages.



Depending on the area one functions in, there seems to be a dominant group, who because of their large numbers or their authority, do things for the benefit of the majority, irrespective of policies.

Some employees who had in the past taken their complaints to management expressed that they had subsequently been victimised and their jobs put on the line. Informal conversations revealed that people were afraid to complete questionnaires about diversity that were part of this research – despite the fact that confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed – as they did not want to be implicated and harassed. Fear and suspicion were evident in employees’ general reluctance to voice opinions about management, but those who did suggested the following:

You raise your concerns and you risk being victimised and sidelined.

You have rights but as soon as you want to use it, management gets upset and wants to discipline you.

... one has to be wary of victimisation.

... there is an autocratic management style: “You do this or else ...”

When asked what suggestions they had to improve diversity and equity in the workplace, employees’ answers touched on key issues:

Increase number of non-whites on management level.

[We need] people in senior positions from disadvantaged groups to make us feel their presence by being vocal and guide us with facts as to how we could grow in a diversified environment now that they have risen to the top.

Equity is non-existent. Senior black managers need to be appointed to drive equity. Equity reports need to be made available to every employee.

Responses were varied when employees were asked what recent changes they had seen in terms of diversity – respondents claimed discrimination towards designated employees, although one employee suggested the opposite:

No change as far as diversity is concerned. It is not even encouraged and is not tolerated. I am treated differently from my white counterparts, very bad with no trust at all.

... you start suffering from a complex because you start believing you're inferior ... nothing has changed since the apartheid days here at LIC ...

[They] only put the blacks in higher positions and don't investigate if the person can do his job because there is a white person to help him.

Either way, the perception by some employees seemed to be that race still played an important role in their experiences at LIC:

We are still treated according to our colours.

[I] will not get a better upgrade because of my colour.

One respondent in particular picked up on the issue of power disparity that was evident in LIC's racial distribution:

I see more disadvantaged groups growing. I am yet to see them controlling key areas. I feel those that are in key areas are not vocal enough to ensure that their being there brings the fruits of diversity that everybody is talking about.

Generally, employees commented on racial equity. With women so underrepresented, it is perhaps not surprising that there was relative silence on issues affecting women (as well as those of other diversities). Nevertheless, two voices made the following points regarding opportunities for female employees:

[There is] gender inequality in my present environment.

There is a clear imbalance in opportunities.

The dominance of males in the workforce, it was suggested, was due to the nature of LIC's work as an industrial manufacturer, with the supply of women employees in this field being limited apart from those working in administration. This did not appear to be a matter of concern as little communication during the course of the research explicitly dealt with gender equality at LIC. Interestingly, there was also no explicit sexual harassment policy, a document which at least recognises the dynamics of a more gender diverse workforce.

Emerging as probably the most important and fundamental source of problems in cross-cultural work groups was the issue of language, and this was a multifaceted debate. Some employees felt the need for representation in other indigenous languages as well as English: "Only English [is spoken] and there is 11 languages." Some, however, had problems when indigenous languages *were* spoken:

Some of the employees give instructions in their own language, not English.

Often people need to be reminded of the official business language of the employer [English].

Some employees had problems when English was spoken instead of Afrikaans:

I am Afrikaans speaking but most times when doing courses it is presented in English and I don't understand big parts of it.

Others had problems with the continued use of Afrikaans:

Language still favours Afrikaans ...

Only the discriminatory language is used; that is Afrikaans.

It was observed that Afrikaans was often used as the language medium, in some cases without establishing whether all the individuals in the discussion were conversant. It was clear that language fluency inhibited communication.

Another important point that became clear was that LIC was product driven rather than people driven. In order to retain its competitive advantage in this cyclical business, LIC was forced to continuously undergo cost-saving exercises. While these had benefited the organisation financially, they had caused much unhappiness from a people perspective. As one employee said:

I also deserve better treatment. To be treated like a human being, not a machine. To be treated like a professional, not a school kid. To know that I also deserve to be remunerated better, like my co-workers.

On analysis, it became clear that certain measures to safeguard the interests of LIC's employees were missing, and the employees' concerns were reflecting this. In particular, there was no explicit policy to ensure the prohibition of unfair discrimination. Staff were unhappy with the company's grievance procedures as they felt their complaints would be held against them. They also indicated fears that use of the whistle-blowing policy would result in victimisation.

Significantly, LIC had not placed value on diversity beyond the numbers it needed for EE representation, as determined by South African legislation. In other words, LIC had not proactively engaged with diversity: there was no policy around diversity (as opposed to EE) and there was no recognition of diversity as a core business activity in the vision and mission. The company's ambivalence was communicated by an employee who reflected:

I think LIC provided a platform for growth. As to how my being as a black man will affect my progress, I do not know, but yes I still maintain diversity is not driven with that vim and zest I would like to see. I do not even know if the company has taken time to identify benefits of being diversified. We should know the benefits. We should know the losses of not being diversified. Maybe there are none and this is why this is not spoken about more often.

## The intervention

The HR function at LIC had undergone major changes since the passing of legislation like the Labour Relations Act, No. 66 of 1995 and the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998. Nevertheless, there had been hindrances to the transformation process. During a crucial time in the early 2000s, the HR executive director had been headhunted by another company and the position had remained vacant for a year. Other changes within the HR department had hindered processes and it was only towards the end of 2003 that LIC started relooking at its social responsibility and transformational issues.

These initially took the form of modest new EE targets which coincided with LIC's strategic planning cycle. At the same time, occupation levels were restructured and consolidated into clusters to facilitate career-path development and more opportunities for multirole positions. Thereafter, a consultative process was followed to implement LIC's comprehensive EE plan, as required by the Employment Equity Act. Consultation covered measures to: implement AA; attain numerical EE goals; identify and eliminate EE barriers; further diversity the workplace; eradicate all forms of discrimination; and make the workplace friendly to people with disabilities. Stakeholders included trade union representatives; senior managers; the assigned sponsor (HR executive director) and representatives from non-designated and designated groups. Representatives were elected onto the EE committee (EEC) and a management of statement of intent was created.

Two diversity interventions were named and examined at LIC. The first intervention was a review of the policies, guidelines and standard operating procedures relating to diversity and equity at LIC. The second intervention was the appointment of a BEE manager in accordance with the Broad-based Black Empowerment Act of 2003.

The policy review was performed by an HR consultant employed by LIC. Again, there were delays: his review was unfortunately interrupted after he was involved in a serious accident, and the process was put on hold until he resumed his duties a year later. Finally, the revised policies were presented to the board, but most only received final approval the following year, two years after the intervention had begun.

The main thrust of the reviewed EE strategy was to increase the representation of previously disadvantaged employees at selected levels. Vari-

ous initiatives were launched to increase numbers of EE candidates in technical, supervisory and managerial levels. These included:

- improving the intake ratio of designated apprentices in the artisan pipeline;
- providing non-permanent production and industrial learner technicians with experiential training with a view to employing them on completion of the programme;
- increasing the ratio of EE candidates receiving university bursaries with a view to them entering the engineering pool;
- as well as designing development opportunities at management level.

The overall recruitment procedure was geared towards the targeted sourcing and appointment of external EE candidates, rather than appointing internally available non-EE candidates. Accordingly, every shortlist was to include suitably qualified internal or external EE candidates. LIC also undertook to establish a database of all good performing former EE employees with the view of recruiting them back as soon as suitable positions or opportunities were identified.

While recruiting and appointing EE candidates would go some way to LIC achieving its EE targets, it was also imperative that existing EE employees were developed, promoted and granted opportunities to grow within the company. In the hope that LIC would be able to retain the bulk of its existing EE candidates, preference was given to those living in the area as it was felt that they were more likely to stay.

Another focus of the reviewed strategy was on developing a talent pipeline. To procure the best candidates in the market, LIC committed to continue sourcing EE talent externally and identify suitable positions for their placement, and also to fast-track EE talent by giving special attention to reviewing and planning their careers. Personal-development programmes would be established for top-performing EE talent in the higher occupation levels, including further study programmes, multirole positions, project involvement and job rotation. Mentors would be formally appointed to coach and support EE candidates' development and the CEO would meet with them regularly to ensure progress. It was intended that LIC would eventually have five to six top-calibre EE managers who would be developed as future general managers.

Finally, provision would be made during the annual pay review for the payment of a retention premium for top-performing EE talent, as was done for other scarce skill categories. This would ensure that remuneration remained aligned with market forces.

In addition to these measures, general managers and functional directors would establish EE forums (EEFs), the purpose of which would be to monitor and audit compliance with management intent as expressed in the EE strategy. It was anticipated that the forums would play a key role in highlighting possible frustration and discontent among the EE talent quite early in the process.

The second intervention was the appointment of a BEE manager who would be responsible for establishing procedures to support and enhance implementation of the revised BEE policy. This would include developing a database of prospective BEE vendors and setting annual targets in respect of BEE spend.

## Evaluation

Two years after the strategy review, there had been some movement towards more equitable demographic representation at LIC. Overall, there were more women, black people and people with disabilities represented throughout the organisation and LIC was trying to meet its EE targets. However, the distribution of power remained the same as it was, with white males still dominating senior positions.

Despite continued headcount reduction during the period in which the new EE strategy was implemented, LIC managed to retain its level of EE representation by rigorously applying its AA recruitment practices. It did not achieve the numerical goals as set out in the EE plan, however. Reasons included the continued high turnover of EE employees, productivity improvement through labour-cost containment and the unattractive geographical location of the Saldanha and Newcastle business units.

Nevertheless, in the first year of implementation, 84% of engineering bursaries were allocated to EE candidates, the technician intake was 100% EE, and 50% of those attending executive development programmes at international institutions were EE candidates. It was hoped that these developments would contribute to achieving future targets as well, particularly as good candidates were promoted through the various

levels, and it was anticipated that results would be seen in the following two to five years. Other successes included a 60% improvement in the promotion of EE middle managers, professionals and supervisors and a 14% reduction in the termination of EE supervisory staff. In terms of the review of policies, guidelines and standard operating procedures relating to diversity and equity (the first intervention), LIC's results appeared to be positive.

Not all aspects of the reviewed strategy showed the same promise, however. Two years after commitments in the revised EE strategy had been made, there was still no evidence that EE managers had been appointed in key roles with an intention of being fast-tracked into senior management positions; instead, two black male managers had resigned. One of them cited personality clashes with white male counterparts and his struggling with Afrikaans as reasons for him seeking employment elsewhere. Worryingly, it was also found that white employees were being appointed on a temporary or contract basis with these costs being allocated to other expenses to camouflage their presence in the EE data.

Results of the policy intervention also varied amongst LIC's different plants. At one plant, targets were both met and exceeded at operational levels, whereas at management levels targets were not met. At another, the only level where targets were not met was at the technical level. At two plants, targets were only met at shop floor and operator level and at another, only at shop floor level. Significantly, management targets were met at only one plant.

In terms of LIC's policy, top management had certainly set the tone: where there were successes, these can be attributed to LIC's thoroughness in documenting and implementing their revised HR policies. But little had been done in terms of managing or valuing diversity. In the focus-group sessions, some employees picked up on the discrepancy between LIC's policy and its organisational culture:

There are documents that indicate that LIC values diversity, but the reality is very questionable.

There are policies that address diversity and there have been opportunities as a result of these policies. However, the playing fields are still not even.



... It is hard to accept change. I feel that the company in general has grown and gradually we shall get there, but we need executives who live and drive key processes and provide a platform where these issues are spoken about as company goals. Do we have diversity as one of our key goals at LIC? Who is driving the process? How frequent do we see communication about the subject?

Although the annual reports and other publications promoted diversity issues, LIC was not seen to “walk-the-talk” in terms of the practical implementation of these initiatives. Work pressures, lay-offs, retrenchments and the subsequent non-appointment of staff to replace these employees put pressure on managers, leaving them little or no time to manage diversity issues. Similarly, although diversity service providers (BEE and other managers) had to comply with the revised policies, guidelines and standard operating procedures – and were aware of their impact – the process had not always been driven aggressively enough by top management. As this employee suggested:

... diversity management does not feature high on our scorecard  
... we have more than enough on our plates ... besides, it is a very sensitive issue ...

In terms of the second intervention, the new BEE manager was interviewed to determine whether his appointment had added any value in respect of diversity and equity within the organisation. As with the first intervention, to some extent the impact of the BEE manager would only start to be seen in the coming years as the new practices started bearing fruit. Nevertheless, there had been some developments, including the approval of BEE codes of good practice.

The BEE manager also confirmed that he had held a workshop with top management and obtained their much needed buy-in on the EE process. Also, while many employees had previously had little knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of the BEE manager, this information would, in future, be communicated company-wide.

Overall, according to the revised EE policy, monitoring and evaluation of the EE plan was the responsibility of all stakeholders and was to be done on a regular basis. In instances, like the talent pipeline, where progress was unsatisfactory or it was established that flaws had emerged in

the plan, the plan was to be revised. In reality, however, the EE committee did not meet regularly because EE matters were not prioritised, leaving insufficient time to get “back on track”.

When, for the purposes of the research, stakeholders were asked to evaluate LIC’s progress, they noted the areas in which LIC had succeeded or failed. Successes included the fact that: employees had generally developed a greater awareness of matters regarding equity; there was increased employment of EE candidates, including disabled people; certain employees had been made aware of the legislation around HIV testing and treatment of people with HIV; equity and diversity management now had the buy-in and support of most managers; and there was some awareness of the appointment of the BEE manager. The increased awareness and communication of staff issues were also seen as a positive step forward – interestingly, this was a success that stakeholders identified but which management did not.

Overall, however, these successes must be seen in light of the fact that many people did not know about the interventions at all. Furthermore, stakeholders noted that there were generally more failures than successes. In many cases these failures can be ascribed to problems in functioning. These included: equity not being representative throughout company levels; the EC not being committed enough to influence management decisions; English not being promoted as the language of business; there was no regular feedback to constituents/workers; awareness and communication of the interventions was low; employees were unhappy with recruitment procedures; and employees had also expressed dissatisfaction with progress being made on the interventions.

In particular, designated employees reported little progress and numerous problems in many areas related to equity and diversity. These included: a belief that recruitment and selection practices were inconsistent and unjust, and that people were not fairly promoted; many having experienced racism and observed favouritism toward white staff; gender insensitive practices; and concerns about the implementation of performance management.

It is notable that the EEC were aware of many of the problems raised by staff, especially the unhappiness with recruitment and promotion procedures.

## Conclusion

While LIC had formal policies in place, employees suggested there was a gap between policy and practice. In particular, there was little sense that management valued diversity in the workforce beyond the fact that it was a legislated necessity.

Nevertheless, the effect of individuals with diverse backgrounds bringing their wide-ranging knowledge and expertise to the table had already benefited LIC – proving that companies that embrace diversity management are in a better position to engage a changing marketplace (Smith, 1999). The year after LIC's strategic equity partner had obtained a majority interest in the organisation, LIC's headline earnings had risen by 417%. Knowledge-integration programmes had been encouraged and held between companies in the group, and individuals from different parts of the globe had gained tremendously when they had had the opportunity to integrate their knowledge and experiences. Of course, South Africa had only relatively recently joined the competitive global market, and the major changes in the local political and social arena might have resulted in the focus being on competitiveness rather than on transition in the workplace.

Nevertheless, through the diversity interventions, it seemed – on paper at least – that LIC was prepared to move beyond EE to managing diversity. The drive to comply with EE targets was still eminent, but intentions for the future were well aligned to take the company from EE compliance to managing diversity. These two processes ran concurrently and were a huge challenge for management, who had to grapple with many obstacles. The process was further hampered by the company's operational focus, the change of CEO, high rates of resignation and changes in the company structure. Still, HR's revised policies and procedures specifically aimed at changing the way in which LIC management and employees treated each other, and although they were not very descriptive and measurable in terms of achieving diversity, they did ignite a new way of dealing with people.

Internally, however, it appeared that LIC was not yet embracing diversity in the sense of incorporating its diverse workforce into creative recognition to achieve business success. The positive side of diversity – and an emphasis on *valuing* diversity – had not been explored and the implementation of the interventions were slowed down because of other

priorities. Overall, the process had lost momentum and LIC was in need of a more drastic corporate culture change to meet the demands of their ongoing restructuring, re-organising and changing environment.

A serious factor appeared to be the lack of training for managers. A significant number of managers had field experience in their respective disciplines, but lacked managerial knowledge and the skill and experience to manage people, and, by extension, diversity amongst their staff. In addition, lack of rewards presented to managers who excelled in diversity management and the fact that it did not feature high on their scorecards were two factors partly responsible for the low level of interest amongst managers. There were no consequences for not adapting and complying to diversity-management requirements, and this condoned the actions of some managers while allowing discriminatory behaviours to continue. Middle- and lower-level managers were also not incorporated into the diversity process, which impacted on their level of buy-in. Such managers failed to inform staff of the transformation process and motivate them accordingly. In essence, this lack of commitment by line managers reflected the poor communication within the company as a whole.

In particular, given the feedback about victimisation, management should have encouraged use of the whistle-blowing policy without employees fearing being intimidated or harassed. It is imperative that employees who feared standing up for their rights were mobilised to engage management on diversity-related issues and demand answers.

A supportive organisational culture is required to promote diversity. Management needed to play a more visible role in committing to transformation and actively managing diversity. In particular, the mission, vision and values should recognise and promote diversity at LIC. Formal policies were also needed in respect of sexual harassment, religious requirements policy and language.

# Case study: LIC



Large Industrial Company (LIC) was established as a state-owned enterprise by a white Afrikaner in 1934, and is now part of a multinational organisation, a global giant in the steel industry. In its time, LIC has survived – and even thrived – through world war, the sanctions of apartheid, global recession in the late 1970s, privatisation and unprecedented technological advancements.

This history was as important to its present context as its current mergers and restructures: the transformation from apartheid parastatal to privately owned multinational is deeply significant as its former incarnation was one of the apartheid government's major instruments to generate jobs for poor whites. Such organisations became populated by a particular group of people inside of a particular entitlement, and today these employees are often still there – in senior-management positions. Furthermore, industrial work (in general) is highly gendered: factories, mines and construction are not seen to be the appropriate domains for women. Some diversity and equity initiatives are not going to sit easily in these organisations, located as they are in particular ideological paradigms.

Nevertheless, LIC was no stranger to change and had experienced drastic restructuring, especially in the few years immediately preceding South Africa's democracy until the present. Most significantly, the workforce had been reduced to less than a sixth of its original size during two decades of ongoing downsizing. But like all South African companies, LIC had been faced with the need to comply with EE, as well as the additional challenge of embracing diversity. To this end, the company committed to two interventions which were under review in this study: first was the revision of all policies and procedures to bring them in line with the Employment Equity Act; the second was the appointment of a BEE manager in accordance with the Broad-based Black Empowerment Act of 2003.

As part of the first intervention, new equity targets were set and initiatives were launched to recruit and retain EE candidates, both immediately, and in the future by granting bursaries and undertaking training.

In addition to this AA recruitment and retention policy, a fast-tracked development pipeline for talented EE candidates was undertaken. In terms of the second intervention, the BEE manager was responsible for establishing procedures to support and enhance implementation of the revised BEE policy, including developing a database of prospective BEE vendors and setting annual targets in respect of BEE spend.

The data suggested that while these interventions had had some success in making representation more equitable, they had not succeeded in LIC reaching all or even most of its EE targets. At LIC's various plants, equity targets were met mostly only at shop floor level. It was also found that retrenched white male employees were being re-appointed on a temporary or contract basis to camouflage their presence. The lack of success in reaching targets was most evident in management profiles, which remained unchanged, resulting in an imbalance of power. One respondent reported an improvement in representivity but expressed doubt over the choice of EE candidates and the extent to which they actually had any real power:

I see more disadvantaged groups growing. I am yet to see them controlling key areas. I feel those that are in key areas are not vocal enough to ensure that their being there brings the fruits of diversity that everybody is talking about.

As a result there was very little trust of the processes, which were seen to be circumvented and of little use as “all the positions are earmarked for whites” anyway:

... when white employees complain about not getting a management post due to restructuring or rationalisation or for whatever reason and then stops complaining all of a sudden and starts working harder ... shortly thereafter he buys a new car ... this must mean he got an increase, but if we blacks complain, we get told nothing can be done and that we should just continue applying for vacancies. I know this is not going to happen because all the posts have been earmarked for whites ...

The interventions had also not brought much change to the organisational culture in which designated employees still experienced discrimination

and were frequently unhappy enough to terminate their employment at LIC. Language, too, remained a bone of contention with complaints about English and Afrikaans being used to exclude black African staff. Regarding gender, a respondent stated that there was “a clear imbalance in opportunities”.

Overall, there seemed to be a disjuncture between stated policies, which supported diversity, and practice, in which barriers to EE remained. Although the EE plan in particular was a thorough document, certain other policies were missing altogether: there were no explicit documents addressing diversity, language, religion or sexual harassment.

One of the most obvious barriers seemed to be management’s commitment to diversity, and especially the priority and time allocated to managing diversity. Due to the work pressures, lay-offs, retrenchments, and the subsequent non-appointment of staff to replace these employees, managers had little or no time available to manage diversity:

Diversity management does not feature high on our scorecard ... we have more than enough on our plates ... besides, it is a very sensitive issue ...

Yet the role of management is crucial in the success of diversity interventions. A lack of commitment by management for transformation processes at LIC minimised the chances of the diversity interventions delivering the desired results. In addition, LIC had an autocratic management style, with a high fear of discrimination and victimisation. Communication was top-down and management was intolerant of new democratic entitlements:

You have rights but as soon as you want to use it, management gets upset and wants to discipline you.

LIC was yet to include mention of diversity in its vision and mission statements, and it did not appear on its list of values. While the company’s interventions had gone some way in terms of EE, there was room for deeper transformational processes that would contribute to a more inclusive organisational culture.

## Questions

- In two decades, LIC had lost 50 000 employees due to restructuring. What are the obstacles to managing diversity in this environment? How do you meet EE targets when you are retrenching more staff than you are hiring? Did LIC pay enough attention to this contextual reality?
- In your opinion, were LIC's diversity interventions adequate?
- Discuss the role communication could have played in changing employees' experiences of the interventions at LIC.
- What steps could LIC take to leverage diversity as a core strategy?
- What are the merits of LIC using an external diversity consultant?
- Discuss the role of women and disabled workers in a heavy industry such as that of LIC.



# Institute of Higher Learning (IHL)



Based on Masters thesis by  
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## Introduction

Institute of Higher Learning (IHL) is one of the largest residential higher-education institutions in South Africa. With more than 50 000 students, IHL has 11 faculties and offers more than 100 degree courses. The institution boasts various well-equipped campuses spread throughout a major city as well as campuses in other regions, with some courses being duplicated at different locations to ensure accessibility to learners. As such, it is well positioned to meet the needs of diverse communities.

IHL is a “new” institution in the restructured higher-education landscape of South Africa, taking its present form after the merger in January 2004 of three institutions. Two of the institutions had served previously disadvantaged learners and were situated in the historically black communities they served; the third institution had served predominantly white learners and was situated in a historically white community. Along with other South African higher-education institutions, the merger was part of a country-wide transformation steered and coordinated by the state to integrate the previously fragmented system.

Following the merger, IHL was facing numerous HR challenges as it shifted towards cooperative governance, state and stakeholder accountability, a new focus on consultation and negotiation, social redress, HR

development and the production, acquisition and application of new forms of knowledge.

Repercussions of the merger were being felt at all levels. To some extent, strategic issues at the highest levels had overshadowed other aspects of integration, and this lack of attention was being felt by staff on a personal level: staff were adapting to the new structure, but there was a culture of uncertainty and instability. IHL was not blind to these challenges, however, and most issues had been anticipated and addressed in statements and lengthy policy documents.

IHL's motto was to "Empower people". Its vision publicly committed IHL to becoming the leading higher-education institution in southern Africa: its entrepreneurial ethos promoted knowledge and technology, and it aimed to provide professional career education of an international standard relevant to the needs and aspirations of southern Africa's people. In support of this vision, their mission included (amongst others) a commitment to generating knowledge through cooperative, professional career-education programmes for learners, and to serve and empower society by meeting southern Africa's socio-economic development needs.

If there was a shortcoming in IHL's documentation it was that no clear distinction had been made between equity and diversity, and the vision and mission statements failed to mention diversity or make it a priority. Nevertheless, the integration of diversity and equity into all policies had already been carried out. In doing so, IHL had recognised the critical importance of institutions of higher learning being leaders in diversity interventions and management. Similarly, IHL had recognised the diversity of its population of learners, as well as the diverse industries for which they are to be trained. With a moral imperative – and in the heavily racialised context of merging institutions with vastly differing historical legacies and ideologies – diversity at IHL now had to be engaged.

Due to the size of the institution, this study focused on the staff of one faculty as well as IHL's EE officer.

## Organisational environment

Higher-education institutions are generally grounded in traditions that are by their very nature elitist and hierarchical. While there was a vast difference in how different IHL employees experienced their immedi-

ate environment and the wider organisation, most cited separation from management as an issue that left them unclear about their roles and uncertain about the future.

Most employees had both positive and negative comments to make about their work environment. Some were looking forward to the benefits of working in a changed institution as a result of the merger, but were concerned with the lack of transparency and urgency in affecting change:

I feel positive about the opportunity for a new vision, but the slow pace of decision-making causes a lot of frustration.

... From management you get the idea that they make decisions without consulting the staff.

These candidates felt comfortable, accepted and valued by their immediate colleagues but they had the opposite experience with regard to the broader organisation and specifically towards top management.

Other employees were generally more positive about their experiences, stating that they enjoyed their jobs, felt accepted, valued and appreciated in their own departments, were satisfied with relationships with their supervisors, and found their immediate colleagues to be supportive and fair. Many did acknowledge, however, that they relied on self-motivation and felt responsible for their own happiness.

The merger had had a profound effect on some employees' experiences of stability and belonging, however, and these employees had an overall more negative view: they were frustrated and unsure of what was expected of them due to the constant changes. The majority of whites felt they no longer knew where they fitted in and what the institution expected of them. One respondent summarised her feelings by saying: "It feels as if I am in the middle of the Red Sea that can close at any time." These employees felt uncertain and helpless, and saw no progress. Other employees complained about a lack of decision-making at management level, and noted that although plans had been drawn up to aid integration, nothing seemed to have changed: "We are promised things that never happen."

Many staff members felt that management ignored employee problems. This frustration was exacerbated by poor top-down communication and a sense of uncertainty about the future direction of the institution:

It is difficult to find your footing and there are too many things changing and some of the things happening you, you don't have control over. Changes are not always communicated in time.

Right now it's a nightmare. You don't know where you're heading to; it's stressful with the changes. No answers from supervisor.

I have lost all trust in the organisation. I am here because I have to earn an income and not because I want to.

Working for the organisation it is like swimming in a very big ocean, because at IHL you do not know if you are coming or going.

These employees did not trust management or other groups: one respondent compared preparing for meetings to preparing for war owing to pre-conceptions, misconceptions, prejudice and stereotyping.

While distant or absent senior management was a pervasive aspect of IHL's organisational culture, it was by no means the only one. Institutional barriers to individuals' careers were indicated by experiences of discrimination, reverse discrimination and differential treatment; lack of support, common goals and resources; fighting for survival; interpersonal conflict; contributions not being valued; poor quality; incompetence; insecurity; hidden agendas; and lack of decisiveness. In particular, some employees referred to demotivating experiences of passive and active racism and reversed racism. It was clear that race was an issue that had not been resolved.

Although employees tended to perceive their colleagues along racial lines, they were guarded and careful when answering questions about the way (mostly racial) groups had developed. Most white respondents asked the researcher to clarify the term "group", and avoided referring to race at all – an indication of their uneasiness with race-based descriptions and their awareness of the need to be politically correct. In contrast to their white colleagues, most black African employees answered without reservation when asked about groups, and explicitly referred to their experiences as members of a black African group. Only one respondent mentioned gender as a criterion for identifying with a group – a male who indicated that he preferred working with females. A few respondents felt that they did not belong to any group.

Nevertheless, race was by far the greatest indicator of identity amongst the staff. Comments by black African respondents indicated that changes in attitudes were superficial, and discriminatory behaviour was well entrenched. They indicated that most whites treated them as less competent and questioned the quality of their work. One black African respondent complained about being talked to as if she was a child. The despondency of a black male senior manager was palpable in the following quote:

When I do something in a “white environment” they will always ask me, “Where are you from? Are you from X?” Which I don’t think is relevant. I will give you an example of an assessment workshop that I have attended: When they wanted input and I give my input it was OK, and then somebody else (white) says the very same thing I have said then all of a sudden it was a brilliant idea. That made me feel that I’m not expected to say anything of value so I kept quiet after that.

To constantly battle against racist assumptions of your capability and to go unheard or unrecognised in meetings is demotivating. Experiences of this kind had served to silence and quash this individual’s contribution – hardly drawing on him as a “strategic resource” as was intended in IHL’s policy documents.

Clearly, the faculty was in danger of losing the benefits of a diverse workforce through this form of exclusion and effective silencing of members from different groups. A black African female junior lecturer, who had experienced racial prejudice, described her experience of “belonging” to a racial group at IHL:

In the beginning I experienced a feeling of loneliness. At times I feel it would be much better to have a black colleague to talk to because of a cultural background, sharing talks, jokes, etc. I’ve learned a lot from my colleagues. Through time, the boundary disappeared. The longer you stay with people with different cultures and race the more you learned to adapt to each other’s cultures. White people find the black people noisy, very slow in doing things, in reasoning, in acting, in doing things. The more you mix you start adopting the white culture. It helped me a lot to work according to the plan –

delivery dates – black people have a culture of relaxing and that is one of the things that slows the process.

For this employee, pervasive racial stereotyping had cast black African people as lazy to the extent that she felt she had to become “white” to be productive and effective in her work environment. And while she referred to people adapting to “each other’s culture”, it is in fact she who had adopted what she saw as “white” culture – and not the other way round.

Race had permeated all forms of interaction in the faculty. Since lecture schedules did not provide for tea and lunch breaks, and most academic staff worked flexi-hours, staff rarely shared their breaks with colleagues and therefore had little time to socialise at work. In an attempt to overcome this, employees met daily for morning coffee and tea sessions before the academic programme started. When a group of diverse individuals met, the conversation tended to be polite and covered neutral topics. More meaningful conversations seemed to be kept for when individuals were in homogenous groups. White and black African staff seated themselves in such a way that the two groups could have separate conversations – often, whites were on one side of the tearoom and black Africans on the other.

The same behaviour was observed at meetings and official functions where seating patterns and language appeared to maintain these boundaries. It was mentioned that when employees went on overnight workshops, sleeping arrangements were made in such a way that people of the same race shared a room.

There were two farewells during the research period, one for a coloured employee and one for a white employee. All members of department were invited to the farewell for the coloured employee but only black African staff attended. The white employees who arranged the farewell for their white colleague did not invite the black African employees to the function. Anecdotal evidence suggested that this was common behaviour beyond the work environment – in particular, when staff members invited each other to their children’s parties. On asking one faculty member why she thought this occurred, the reply was:

It shows that people have decided that they can do the effort at work [ie, conform to the new reality] but they do not want to feel

uncomfortable at home [ie, outside working hours]. They want to stick to their own at home.

Language also appeared to be a divisive element. The white staff in the faculty were predominantly Afrikaans speakers while many black African members did not speak the language. A number of whites would speak in English when a black African person entered the tearoom, but the majority continued speaking Afrikaans and therefore excluded other groups from taking part in the conversation. As a black female senior lecturer, who was an immigrant from another African country, shared:

The Afrikaans language is a problem. In meetings there was Afrikaans people and was not considering the fact that I didn't understand. It is still going on. I don't understand Afrikaans at all.

The same behaviour applied to a large proportion of the employees who spoke African languages.

While the use of Afrikaans sometimes excluded Africans from discussions, the use of English also created difficulties: the respondents were all second-language English speakers and voiced concerns that their use of English would convey unintended messages or altered emotional value.

Finally, employees' references to "them and us" indicated that there was no shared organisational identity – employees still had a strong affinity towards the original three institutions that had merged. A common opinion was that "when we were still X, we were fine; these others came and created problems". Some disconcerting comments during interviews with faculty members indicated that frustration and anger were building up and had the potential to spill over into conflict:

... some groups think they are better than others.

If you belong to a specific group they would expect me to be in conflict with the other groups.

... I can't be myself at work ...

... people have a perception that I am aggressive ...

They disregard my decisions ...

People feel threatened ...

To further gauge racial perceptions, employees were asked what they wished other groups knew about them or their groups. Interestingly, most respondents identified themselves as a representative of a group rather than as an individual – and generally the responses were similar within race groups. Black African respondents acknowledged they felt under pressure to prove themselves; needed acceptance, support and honesty; felt isolated; were human, hard-working and concerned about quality; accepted change; and were sensitive to words like “you people”. White employees wanted others to know they were unintentionally resistant to change; were individualistic, private and saw the importance of personal needs; had no hidden agendas; did not want to disadvantage others; were knowledgeable, focused on quality, academically orientated, dynamic, enthusiastic and not superior; and wished to help other groups. They also felt that “rules are rules”; that “others don’t appreciate the whites’ contribution”; and that they valued diversity but also independence. Coloured employees felt that they were not taken seriously although they had a contribution to make.

It is perhaps not surprising, given IHL’s internal struggle for identity, that the institution’s public image had been tarnished. Bad publicity as a result of strikes and unrest had overshadowed any positive aspects of equity and diversity. Disappointingly, informal discussions with learners at the institution revealed that both designated and non-designated groups felt that the services they were receiving had deteriorated since the workforce had become more diverse.

IHL was in a unique position. As a tertiary institution, it had access to a wealth of theoretical know-how in terms of drafting and implementing a far-reaching diversity initiative that could potentially affect deep cultural change. The question was whether the diversity interventions would be felt in this vast organisation that was just beginning to settle after a period of turbulence.



## The intervention

IHL's four-year institutional operating plan (IOP) was a comprehensive document informing all decisions and activities at the institution. The plan highlighted achieving race and gender equity in line with the demographics of the country as a means for IHL to alter its "cultural dimension". IHL aimed to develop the potential of all its staff, and the plan described its HR management strategy as being "focused towards EE". Listed amongst the institution's values of quality service, professionalism, integrity and excellence were equity and "unity in diversity".

Like all South African organisations, IHL needed to meet the requirements specified by the Employment Equity Act – thus, national equity targets would be achieved according to IHL's EE plan, which included a recruitment strategy that valued both excellence and equity. The EE strategy committed IHL to: continuing with AA until the targets set in the EE plan were achieved; implementing a mentorship programme; developing the next generation of leadership, with a focus on building black leadership; identifying staff development priorities that would ensure the succession, retention and performance of blacks and women, especially at senior levels; and ensuring continuous upgrading of the competencies and skills of blacks and women in the context of the Skills Development Act and the Workplace Skills Plan. In addition, IHL had identified "culture-bearing principles" and recognised that organisational culture manifests itself in the dimensions of communication, HR management, leadership, customer focus, participation, decision-making, conflict management, fun, organisational goal integration and innovation. IHL's EE documents included a statement to guide the merger process, in which the promotion of staff equity was foregrounded.

In an effort not only to comply with the Employment Equity Act but also to create a culture where all employees were valued, the institution had implemented a variety of diversity and equity interventions. As stated in the IOP, these interventions included:

- commitment, cooperation and public support by the vice-chancellor and executive management committee (EMC);
- an EE and training committee;
- mandatory AA;
- a "Building black leadership" programme; and
- staff development and training.

Cracks began to show when the EE officer identified only the awareness campaign by the VC and EMC as a diversity initiative, and then added diversity-management training and a survey on employee satisfaction that was currently being conducted. On a theoretical level, then, there was already a disjuncture in stated policies, which forewarned of the confusion that employees were feeling on the ground. Furthermore, in conversation with the EE officer it became clear that these interventions were implemented as a result of instances of conflict along race lines – and were thus reactive in nature. She also indicated that the diversity activities were merely compliance related.

On a more positive note, certain important steps had been taken in order to implement the original diversity initiatives. The EE office had enlisted the unions to take part in the transformation process (and they had been more cooperative than many of the other parties). IHL had also identified a senior manager, the principal, who was responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of the equity plan. As is necessary for the successful implementation of a diversity initiative, this had been included in the principal's key performance areas (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield, 2006). In a welcome letter on IHL's official website, the vice-chancellor and the principal had made the "business case" for diversity, stating that a key aspect of becoming the leader in higher education is to manage the strength of diversity as a competitive advantage and not merely to strive to reflect the demographics of society.

In addition to setting numerical goals, the institution had revised all major policies that affected equity and diversity. New policies on EE, racism, people with disabilities, gender equality, unfair discrimination and AA had created a near-perfect policy and documentary support structure for promoting a truly multicultural organisation.

Despite these steps, obstacles to the smooth running of the initiatives were evident. In a report to management, the EE officer had stated that the equity office was underresourced and lacked support. The task of monitoring progress was nearly impossible with only two staff members, a situation that needed to be urgently remedied.

## Evaluation

The institution had made its intention clear concerning the need to improve diversity. The motto to “Empower people” and the declarations made by the principal bore evidence of this, as did the wide range of policy documents that had been drafted in support of a diversity-intervention drive. However, this intention had not succeeded in trickling down to lower levels in the organisation and the success of specific interventions had been variable.

The VC’s awareness campaign had had little impact. Even though the VC had stated his commitment to a diverse institution in various publications and on the institution’s website, employees indicated that they felt management’s inaccessibility countered any advantage this intervention might have offered. And indeed, many employees were still unaware of diversity initiatives at IHL, saying:

I don’t know about attention given to diversity management.

I have not seen or heard from top management; it seems that they occupy themselves with paperwork.

I have no interaction with middle and top management and I have never met them.

Senior management is distant.

Management is not transparent in decisions and [there is] no involvement from staff, no opportunity to make input.

The EE officer herself was distraught about the lack of inspirational leadership as far as equity issues were concerned; even the dean had no idea of the objectives of EE. Management was consequently asked to take action by sending out visible signs to the IHL community, which included: a presentation to council on the status of diversity at IHL; an urgent policy statement outlining and reinforcing IHL’s commitment to EE (and senior management’s commitment thereafter being regularly and continually communicated); and a senior-management member being tasked with championing EE.

According to both the EE officer and the dean, the EE and Training Committee had proved to be dysfunctional and had achieved nothing. The faculty had nominated a representative to the committee who had attended one session of training before the matter had ended. Reading between the lines, a major problem was that some divisions had nominated representatives specifically to oppose the implementation of diversity and equity interventions – thus nipping it in the bud. Significantly, none of the interviewed employees made any mention of the EE committee; they referred instead to AA recruitment when asked about diversity interventions.

One of the more successful initiatives was the drive towards mandatory AA. The well-prepared AA policy was firmly in place, and its impact had been felt in just two years, after numbers of black African male employees had increased from 1 662 to 2 160 and those of females from 1 207 to 1 606. While this was encouraging, it remained a concern that these changes were not reflected at higher levels of the organisation. In this sense, the merger had had a huge impact on the effectiveness of the AA programme as very few new appointments had been made at the academic and middle-management levels.

In contrast with the focus on AA, the promised “Building black leadership” programme seemed to have slipped by the wayside. There was no evidence that this programme had been implemented at all.

There was substantial material in the IOP on the necessity for staff development and training, both for the personal and professional growth of employees. The IOP stated that:

Lifelong learning ... will be used as strategic tools ... to improve quality and performance ... The holistic development and empowerment of staff is a priority for IHL.

Specifically taking into account the reaction to the merger, the IOP went on to say:

Individuals should undergo behavioural changes to overcome the merger divide, such as changes in attitudes (personal qualities) and skills, and enhanced understanding of related issues.

Addressing the needs for change management, the IOP went even further:

Change management and change leadership training are critical ways of affecting the culture-change strategy at IHL. Staff development opportunities will ensure the timely development of a multi-tiered training strategy. A new type of leader is required. The leaders have to be able to cope with challenges and to manage change constructively. Training will have to empower leaders to facilitate and manage the dynamics of the change processes; understand and support the development of the new organisational culture; and develop supportive, customer-focused teamwork within their teams.

With so much justification and awareness of the need for staff training, it seems strange that none of the respondents in the faculty had in fact attended any training programmes. The dean and the EE officer felt that the voluntary nature of these training sessions was a matter for concern. A staff member suggested that because there was no monitoring of people's attendance of workshops, the training had become a tool for "conflict management":

We have diversity-management training that is on a voluntary basis. It is not part of management's key performance areas to attend training or to ensure that staff is trained. The training is on a voluntary basis and originates from conflict situations, so management sees it as a conflict-management intervention. That conflict is usually along race lines. Training is reactive, not proactive.

Notably, many middle and line managers were not implementing transformation processes because, quite simply, they didn't have to – the processes were not linked to their key performance areas. A lack of strong and clear direction from top management compounded the problem, and there were even members of top management who openly rejected the whole idea of transformation, which in itself was a huge obstacle. As a member from the transformation office noted:

Middle and top management (except for one) have not asked for any intervention from this office as far as diversity is concerned. Short and sweet, there's been no interest.

Looking at IHL as a whole, a disturbing trend was noticed in the attendance of workforce skills-development programmes. For black African males and females, coloured males and Indian males, attendance had dropped by as much as 30% in a single year, while the decline in attendance of white males was even more drastic at 60%. This can be ascribed primarily to lack of trust and low morale, both of which were common themes in interviews with employees.

Overall, the dean of the faculty admitted that interventions have not been successful in achieving the envisaged outcomes:

In our case, as a new faculty established during an interim period, honestly speaking the impact has been limited. Except for being one of the few being completely integrated and having at least a team-based approach – even though there will be varied comments as to the successfulness thereof – many of our strategies could not even be implemented.

Very few employees in the faculty were aware of the policies and fewer still of the content. The academics identified discrimination, differential treatment, lack of support, interpersonal conflict and reverse discrimination as some of the obstacles that they experienced on a day-to-day basis. And these serious issues were not restricted only to the staff body. During an off-the-record discussion, a black African lecturer complained about the racism she had experienced directed at her from white learners. Although she had reported this to her supervisor, she believed that no steps had been taken to address the perpetrators. Another respondent related a case of racism where the perpetrators were black Africans and the victim a white female – similarly, while this incident had been witnessed by a number of people, no action had yet been taken. Clearly, IHL still needed to demonstrate that it would act decisively against incidents of racism. The policies had provided IHL with teeth, but it had not been prepared to bite – a situation which rendered the comprehensive set of documents inactive and worthless.

The EE officer expressed hope for an understanding of IHL's real situation, and that management would take a stand and become champions of diversity. This was echoed by employees' repeated comments that they didn't know who management were or what they were involved with.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, even though IHL had excellent documentary support of diversity and equity, the interventions had remained at the top levels in the organisation. The workforce was unaware of and unaffected by them, with the result that the interventions did not penetrate the organisation, nor alter the deeply entrenched culture. While the institution's documents stated that IHL intended to do more than merely comply to legislation, there was no evidence that this had actually happened. Various systems and structures needed to be addressed to help IHL achieve its vision of an empowered and changed society: most specifically, diversity needed to be actively engaged and implemented into the core activities of everyday business.

The principal needed to show decisive leadership by building a relationship with the workforce and becoming part of their working life. He needed to champion the aims of diversity and confirm repeatedly that the organisation was interested in more than mere compliance. The message that individuals and their diverse opinions were valued needed to be clearly communicated. The EE office needed to be made a priority for the supply of resources. The appointment of change agents would assist in altering the organisational culture, and they would need to be acknowledged for their essential contribution.

Documentation needed to be revised: specifically, the vision and mission should prioritise diversity and equity. Diversity activities should be prioritised in the annual faculty report, and diversity management needed to be included and rewarded as key performance areas of middle managers.

Management development training for designated groups linked with individual career planning needed to take place as a matter of urgency. The decline in attendance at training and development courses should be investigated and addressed.

Employees needed to be made aware of the importance of their contribution to the organisation. From interviews it became apparent that employees were willing to adapt to a new organisational culture – they wanted training on diversity issues such as equity, racism, active and passive resistance to change, the negative implications of assimilation and were prepared to develop a deep understanding of diverse groups. Respondents also wanted more sustained engagement of the issues dealt

with at workshops, as well as more informal opportunities to discuss differences and learn from each other. They felt that timeous and in-depth follow-up would help, as would a training situation in which group members had to be dependent on each other in order to facilitate learning. Some cautioned against superfluous interventions, which they had experienced in the past. The lack of trust in management needed to be addressed, since employees would not be prepared to embrace diversity if they felt it was a threat to their job security or career.

IHL was in a unique position of influence in the diverse communities it served. It was hoped that with thorough planning, IHL would achieve the vision it had laid out.



# Case study: IHL



Institute of Higher Learning (IHL) is one of the largest residential higher-education institutions in South Africa. Offering more than 100 degree courses across 11 faculties to over 50 000 students, IHL boasts a number of well-equipped campuses in different locations and is certainly well positioned to meet the higher-education needs of a diverse group of South Africans.

Higher-education institutions are generally grounded in “legitimate” traditions of knowledge construction that are historically heavily racialised, and are by their very nature elitist and hierarchical. At the time of this study, IHL was at the end of a complicated restructure as the result of a merger between historically black and historically white institutions, each of which had their own social and political history. Within this ideological context, IHL had taken its current form – and the process had been characterised by great uncertainty.

Unhappiness after the merger was a powerful mitigating factor in developing IHL’s diversity and EE policies, and the documents were exhaustive in addressing these issues. IHL’s institutional operating plan (IOP) contained an HR management strategy that was geared at EE as a means to change its “cultural dimension”. The IOP included achieving racial and gender equity in line with the South African demographics through recruitment as well as staff development. It also committed itself to: promoting the Employment Equity Act; implementing an EE strategy; and having mentorship and “Building black leadership” programmes. It aimed to change the “culture-bearing principles” and address the organisational culture, which included: communication; HR management; leadership; customer focus; participation; decision-making; conflict management; fun; organisational-goal integration; and innovation.

Due to the size of the institution, a single faculty was chosen as the focus of this research. The core values at IHL were: “equity” and “unity in diversity”, along with professionalism and excellence. Their EE plan identified diversity as a source of strength and a powerful key to success, and stated that the focus was on people (staff as well as students) as a

resource to achieve its strategic goals. The plan also identified numerous benefits of managing diversity: achieving strategy; national and international academic acceptance; increasing government support; favourable publicity; attraction and retention of internationally recognised academic staff; meeting demographic targets; attracting high-calibre learners; and attracting donors, sponsorships and other stakeholders.

However, despite both IHL and the faculty's theoretical commitment to diversity, there were mixed responses by staff as to whether IHL valued a diverse workforce. Those who were positive about signs of improvement based their comments on the increase in the number of black African people in positions such as management and because they "can see different cultures working together". Those who saw no signs of improvement said the EE plan was not effective or "I see a lot of white people; it doesn't show me that there is any change".

The employee culture revealed that deep racial divides existed between employees. In the staff tearoom there was a noticeable absence of social mixing between individuals of different races, and respondents reported that social invitations outside the workplace also stuck to racial lines. Indeed, race and racism presented as the most salient diversity issue for respondents: both black African and white staff perceived instances of differential treatment, and while black African respondents reported pressure to prove their competence, white respondents complained about "reverse racism".

Subtle, everyday exclusion and undermining took many different forms. A black African woman said:

In the beginning I experienced a feeling of loneliness. At times I feel it would be much better to have a black colleague to talk to because of a cultural background, sharing talks, jokes, etc. I've learned a lot from my colleagues. Through time, the boundary disappeared. The longer you stay with people with different cultures and race, the more you learned to adapt to each other's culture. White people find the black people noisy, very slow in doing things, in reasoning, in acting, in doing things. The more you mix, you start adopting the white culture. It helped me a lot to work according to the plan – delivery dates. Black people have a culture of relaxing and that is one of the things that slows the process.

It is clear that she had internalised racist narratives of black people being lazy, and felt that in order to be effective in her work environment she had to “start adopting the white culture”. She problematically equated black culture with “relaxing” (ie, laziness), and white culture with meeting “delivery dates” (ie, productivity). In addition, while she referred to people adapting to “each other’s culture”, it is in fact she who had adopted what she sees as “white” culture – and not the other way round. The effect was that this employee could not see herself as black and productive – rather, she felt she had to become “white”. The despondency of a black male senior manager was palpable in the following quote:

I will give you an example of an assessment workshop that I have attended: When they wanted input and I give my input it was OK, and then somebody else (white) says the very same thing I have said then all of a sudden it was a brilliant idea. That made me feel that I’m not expected to say anything of value so I kept quiet after that.

Experiences of this kind had silenced individuals’ contributions and negated the potential for drawing on diverse staff as a “strategic resource”, as was intended in IHL’s policy documents.

Language also emerged as a divisive issue. Black African staff reported how white Afrikaans speakers deliberately spoke their language so that black African staff – who largely did not speak Afrikaans – would not understand the conversations. A black female senior lecturer, who was an immigrant from another African country, shared:

The Afrikaans language is a problem. In meetings there was Afrikaans people and was not considering the fact that I didn’t understand. It is still going on. I don’t understand Afrikaans at all.

Unhappiness amongst the faculty staff was further exacerbated by distant or absent management and an evident lack of decisiveness, insecurity, “passive and active racism” and the sense that contributions not being valued (“I feel insecure and that I’ve being look down upon, I’ve been treated if I don’t know anything”).

The specific diversity interventions identified at this IHL faculty were the EE and Training Committee (EETC), mandatory AA, a “Building

black leadership” programme, and skills development and training. However, taking the organisational culture into account, these interventions – except for the AA programme – had had little impact.

Both the EE officer and the dean indicated that the EETC was dysfunctional: the faculty had nominated a representative to the committee who had attended one session of training before the process had come to a halt. An unspoken but significant obstacle to the functioning of the EETC was that some divisions had specifically nominated representatives to oppose diversity and equity interventions – thus nipping it in the bud.

IHL’s commitment to its other diversity programmes was also questionable. There was no evidence that the “Building black leadership” programme had been implemented at all. Despite lengthy statements in the IOP on the strategic importance of staff development and training programmes, including how this intervention was a priority for IHL, none of the respondents in the faculty had attended any training.

By contrast, the AA policy was in place and was a well-prepared document. The impact of AA had been seen in the increased numbers of black African male and all female employees – however, the fact that these changes were not reflected at higher levels in the organisation remained a concern.

After the interventions had been initiated – to a greater or lesser extent – interviews with the staff confirmed that the faculty was still far from an inclusive environment. Black African respondents still wanted white people in general to know that they: were under pressure to prove themselves; felt isolated; were human, hard-working and worried about quality; needed support; were sensitive to phrases such as “you people”; and were accepting of change. White respondents wanted black African people in general to know they: were unintentionally resistant to change; were individualistic; had no hidden agendas, did not want to disadvantage others; were knowledgeable and focussed on quality; were private, academically oriented and not superior; wished to help other groups; felt that “rules are rules”; that “others” don’t appreciate the whites’ contribution; and that they valued diversity but also independence.

Clearly, diversity was not being managed effectively at the faculty. In their documents, IHL had attempted to engage diversity at a level beyond EE, and even made a “business case” for diversity. Yet despite claims of the strategic imperative of diversity in IHL’s core business, it had shown a rhetorical commitment which amounted to little more than compliance

to government-legislated EE. The EE plan claimed that “diversity is far more than the race and gender profile of [IHL]” but emphasis had remained on “getting the numbers right”. Thus, while there had been an increase of black people in certain positions such as management, without an enabling environment there was little chance of leveraging the benefits of their increased range of talents.

It was evident that merely “getting in” black people and women did not automatically generate a climate where diversity was valued and effectively leveraged. A black African respondent reported: “Sometimes I am seen as a black face and not as an academic and because of that, we can use her.” Another said: “I would like people to know that I have the content and character to do the job – not because I am black.”

The faculty dean admitted that the impact of the equity intervention had been limited. In fact, many staff members did not even know about it. IHL had not developed a coherent plan of action to ensure its success. It had not been prioritised, and management had not been held accountable for its failure. A respondent pointed out:

If it is not linked to performance appraisal and performance management, it’s a dead duck in the water. You cannot do it. If it is not linked to the vice-chancellors, why should the dean and why should the HOD? It should be performance-management driven.

There was a need for systems and structures to integrate diversity into the core activities of everyday business. Many middle and line managers were not implementing transformation processes quite simply because they didn’t have to.

An employee noted that the EETC needed more resources to be effective and that the voluntary nature of diversity training meant that management rarely attended. A staff member suggested that because there was no monitoring of people’s attendance of workshops, the training had become “reactive” and a tool for “conflict management”:

We have diversity-management training that is on a voluntary basis. It is not part of management’s key performance areas to attend training or to ensure that staff is trained. The training is on a voluntary basis and originates from conflict situations, so manage-

ment sees it as a conflict-management intervention. That conflict is usually along race lines. Training is reactive, not proactive.

Respondents also wanted more sustained engagement of the issues dealt with at workshops, as well as more informal opportunities to discuss differences and learn from each other. They felt that timeous and in-depth follow-up would help, as would a training situation in which group members had to be dependent on each other in order to facilitate learning.

Finally, there were those in top management who openly did not buy in to the whole idea of transformation, as a member of the transformation office noted:

Middle and top management (except for one) have not asked for any intervention from this office as far as diversity is concerned. Short and sweet, there's been no interest.

Ultimately, despite excellent policy, the lack of commitment from management had translated into half-hearted implementation of the diversity interventions, in which not enough time or money had been allocated and where there was little motivation from staff to participate.

## Questions

- The values of the institution, as listed in the IOP, included the term “unity in diversity”. Although that may seem a positive intention, what are the potential pitfalls in this kind of policy?
- Discuss the role HR could have played in ensuring the application of policy in all levels of employment at IHL.
- Discuss the voluntary nature of the training and what the pros and cons are of this approach.



Institute of Higher Learning (IHL)  
*Interview with Dr Dorrian Aiken, PROCORP*

# Financial-services Company (FSC)



Based on Masters thesis by  
Jacob Jaco Malgas, supervised  
by Prof Stella Nkomo, Unisa

## Introduction

Financial-services Company (FSC) is a leading financial services group in South Africa and is listed on both the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and the Namibian Stock Exchange. Established in the early 1900s, the company now has assets in excess of R350 billion and employs more than 8 000 people. The head office is situated in Cape Town, and there are FSC offices in all major towns across South Africa, catering to a diverse clientele.

FSC's call centre is a division of the Personal Finance business unit, and was established in 1998 to provide a comprehensive after-sales service to FSC's clients. At the time of the study, the call centre employed approximately 745 employees, of which 550 were based in Cape Town and 195 in Pretoria.

The call centre unit had consistently won achievement and excellence awards, and was rated as one of the top four best large call centres in South Africa as well as the company with the highest client satisfaction in the insurance industry, according to the Department of Trade and Industry. The call centre effectively handled between 6 000 and 7 000 emails, faxes, letters and web queries daily, and between 7 500 and 10 000 phone-calls daily, dealing with approximately 30 000 clients per month.



At the time of the study, the call centre workforce consisted of 47% white, 41% coloured, 10% African and 2% Indian employees. In the preceding two years, black representation had increased by 9%, 4% and 2% respectively for clerical, unskilled and junior management job levels but, significantly, black representation had dropped by 4% in middle management. At 73%, the vast majority of the call centre's staff was female.

The everyday experiences of the staff are often underpinned by the ethos of a company as conveyed in their policy documents. As a division of the parent group, the call centre followed decisions, policies and management practices prescribed by FSC, who were able to provide a comprehensive set of documents directly related to their diversity activities. These included an EE policy, an EE plan, a language policy, various barrier-analysis reports, reports for the Department of Labour, a transformation report, the workforce profile, newsletters, memos and minutes of meetings.

The EE policy required “absence of all forms of discrimination; affirmative action; equal opportunities; and valuing diversity”. The policy stated FSC's EE goals, which included:

- strategically positioning the company in a shifting macro environment;
- supporting the company's vision of creating a working environment that is conducive to attracting, training and retaining skilled people from all sectors of society;
- ensconcing an organisational culture valuing diversity and respecting the inherent dignity and worth of each individual;
- establishing a diverse workforce to best meet the company's business objectives;
- broadening the company's skills base;
- giving effect to South Africa's Constitution, the Employment Equity Act and the Promotion of Equality Act.

Having effectively conveyed the value the company placed on diversity, the EE policy went on to stipulate the parties responsible for its implementation as well as the rights of the both the employees and the employer.

Encouragingly, FSC had a stated code of practice to end racial harassment and unfair discrimination and was aimed at achieving an enabling environment for all. This document was well written and unambiguous about desired employee behaviour. According to the code, the company

was willing to “take disciplinary action in respect of any violation of this code”, and violation was regarded as serious misconduct.

The language policy acknowledged the multi-linguistic background of FSC’s employees. Recognising that language differences can become an inhibiting factor in employment, the policy attempted to prevent conflict, discrimination and exclusion. The HIV/Aids policy clearly stipulated how employees with HIV/Aids should be treated in the company. The adoption of such a policy indicated FSC’s commitment to treating all its employees with dignity and ensuring that employees with HIV/Aids were protected from unfair discrimination and stigmatisation and that all employees had access to training, information and counselling services.

Whilst race and gender have been the focus of the equity drives of most South African companies, people with disabilities are often hardly mentioned, although the Employment Equity Act clearly indicates people with disabilities as one of the designated groups that need to be affirmed as part of the EE process. FSC’s adoption of dedicated guidelines for people with disabilities signified its intention to address the general lack of knowledge about and prejudice towards people with disabilities. FSC’s guidelines took cognisance of the following causes for the high unemployment amongst people with disabilities with a view to improving its disability equity:

- low skills levels due to inadequate education;
- discriminatory attitudes and practices by employers;
- past discriminatory and ineffective labour legislation;
- lack of enabling mechanisms to promote employment opportunities;
- inaccessible public transport;
- inaccessible and unsupportive working environments;
- inadequate and inaccessible provision for vocational rehabilitation and training;
- high levels of unemployment in the non-disabled community;
- the fact that menial labour is often the only option for poorly skilled job seekers;
- inadequate access to information; and
- ignorance in society.

It is interesting to note how FSC had reflected its cultural mix in its company documents. Where there were documents showing photographs

of people, there tended to be more representations of white people than black people. In FSC's internal magazine there were 172 pictures of people of which 73 were men, 99 women, 120 white and 52 black. Both the photos and the accompanying articles indicated that white males dominated managerial positions while photos of black staff represented them either as having just graduated or attended a conference. In the same magazine, all the articles were in Afrikaans. In the transformation report, however – which was intended for investors and other external stakeholders – the majority of photographs were of black people. This report explicitly stated FSC's commitment to BEE, EE and community involvement and indicated that FSC had an estimated 20% black shareholding. The report mentioned that EE was a business imperative because of a shifting client market, and also advertised the importance of diversity training to all of FSC's staff.

## Organisational environment

Interviews were conducted with the head of the call centre, the HR manager, the financial manager, as well as FSC's current and former EE managers and the diversity-training service providers. In addition, focus groups were conducted with 40 Cape Town-based call centre employees who comprised a representative cross section of the workforce.

The most common description by employees of the call centre's organisational culture was one in which people accepted and respected each other. One participant stated: “ons het nie probleme met mekaar nie” [Trsl: *we don't have problems with each other*]. Generally, people felt free to talk, and it appeared that good interpersonal relationships existed amongst staff: many participants referred to “our team” and talked of feeling comfortable within this group.

The physical layout of the call centre strongly supported the team-orientated environment. The office was a compact space, divided into many small cubicles. Cubicles were colour coded and located close to each other, providing a number of work stations for small teams. In turn, the work stations were grouped into bigger teams. It is interesting to note that people in smaller teams appeared to communicate easily with each other irrespective of their race or gender, although this was not the case with the unit as a whole.

Most participants acknowledged that the company environment was quite pressurised, which is typical of a call centre. Nevertheless, the vast majority of participants (80%) indicated that they were proud of being part of productive working environment: staff were required to maintain high levels of productivity and effectiveness. Rigorous management of individual as well as company targets did, however, contribute to the staff's perceptions that managers cared less for individuals than for the company.

A small number of participants felt FSC was only productivity driven and did not recognise employees' needs. Examples were mentioned of supervisors who queried sick-leave requests and who showed little interest or support after employees had returned from leave after taking care of loved ones who were ill. The participants indicated that these supervisors were only interested in employees getting back to their work and catching up what they had missed. In contrast, other participants described the company culture as one that recognised and accommodated staff needs. They cited examples in which the company had allowed Muslim staff to take time off on Fridays to go for prayers at the mosque, and allowed them to make alternative arrangements to attend assessments if they were scheduled on Fridays.

Despite the fact that no major conflict amongst groups was uncovered during the study, and that employees claimed to respect and get on with each other, there was a suggestion by some participants that insensitivity towards others, lack of respect and lack of understanding sometimes resulted in certain people forcing their opinions on others. It was noted that there was still a lot of prejudice and stereotyping of various groups, and that this could easily lead to discrimination.

Similarly, observation of the staff's social interactions painted a less rosy picture. During lunch break in the cafeteria, employees tended to interact mostly with the people from their own race groups. People who spoke the same language tended to greet each other more often than they did people from other language groups. As Wentling and Palma-Rivas (1999) note, the barriers to valuing diversity often come from the working environment and the employees themselves.

Language also appeared to be a divisive issue. While FSC's language policy promoted English as the company's business language, some employees regarded this as an attempt to not acknowledge their home languages. Other employees had limited ability to communicate effectively

in English and sometimes insisted on communicating in their home language. The fact that the company was started by a group of Afrikaners, that the majority of its employees are based in the Western Cape and that its clientele is largely Afrikaans speaking meant that Afrikaans was often the unofficial and preferred business language.

## The intervention

There was difficulty amongst most of the participants in describing FSC's definition of diversity and what they understood diversity to be – in fact, most of the participants asked the researcher to explain the term. Of those who attempted to define diversity, the majority described it as differences amongst employees. After further probing they elaborated; their perception of diversity can be best summarised by one interview participant, who said:

It is the difference of people in terms of race, religion, culture, language, gender, etc. The value system of the company should be one that respects and tolerates these differences.

Other descriptions included:

Dit gaan nie net oor wit en swart nie. Dit sluit verskillende fasette soos kultuur, geslag, ensovoorts in. [Trsl: *It's not just about white and black. It includes different facets such as culture, gender, etc.*]

It is the diverse culture of people. Black, white, religion, individual differences such as older/younger, male/female, social background.

Culture and race, disabled, age. People's culture determines how punctual and loyal they are, what holidays they celebrate, the importance of birth date and how they conduct funerals.

Given the diversity indicators the staff mentioned (race, gender, culture, language, age, belief, customs, habits, etc.), it would appear that they had a good general idea of what diversity is. In all cases, however, this explanation was gained after much probing by the researcher, suggesting that

despite its documentation, a formal definition of diversity and its meaning in the company had not been communicated to the staff.

The majority of participants identified EE as the most important diversity initiative to have been implemented at FSC – EE was understood to be a deliberate attempt to open the company to a diversity of people and appreciate what they can offer. As one participant said:

The company is realising that people are important. They have to invest in people. The success of the company depends on the cooperation of everybody. A diverse workforce makes it necessary that we have to try to understand each other.

Nevertheless, no staff believed FSC's good intentions alone were driving the diversity initiative. Instead, there appeared to be a divergence in opinion. At the junior levels, staff believed that legislation (in the form of the Employment Equity Act) was the most important factor influencing the company's diversity initiatives. As a staff member said: "volgens wet moet ons sekere teikens behaal" [Trsl: *according to law we must achieve certain targets*]. However, at managerial level, most staff were of the opinion that the main factor driving FSC's diversity initiatives was the business imperative arising from a shifting market.

In addition to EE, employees named various other initiatives that they perceived as being aimed at diversity. A few employees mentioned a diversity-training initiative that had been conducted for the whole call centre. Although a few people had no recollection of the training at all, the EE report revealed that diversity training had been conducted three years prior.

According to the HR manager, black employees had been sent on accelerated-development and management-development programmes in an attempt to create a broader skills base. She also explained that line managers and supervisors conducted exit interviews with staff who had resigned in order to uncover their reasons for leaving the company, thus also playing a role in the implementation of EE. One employee added that the head of the call centre was a leader who supported diversity: the head discussed diversity at management conferences and held monthly meetings with all staff to discuss progress with EE.

On a less formal note, employees added that the call centre enjoyed "cook days" during which employees could bring food from their

respective cultures – the idea was to expose staff to a variety of cultures and traditions. “Diversity days” were also part of the calendar, when employees were invited to dress in clothes that reflected their own culture or one they admired. By portraying different cultures in a positive way, it was intended that the cultural richness of the organisation would be celebrated. Cultural debates also attempted to increase staff knowledge of other cultures. The diversity-training provider indicated that the objective was to help employees understand what diversity is and what valuing diversity means, address cultural ignorance and deal with stereotypes.

Wentling and Palma-Rivas (1999) have found that organisations are using a broad range of initiatives in their efforts to manage diversity in the workplace, and the variety of initiatives at the call centre certainly shows this to be the case. The complete list of diversity initiatives at FSC included:

- senior management commitment;
- diversity training;
- AA recruitment;
- EE plan and targets;
- EE committee;
- “diversity days”;
- “cook days”;
- cultural debates;
- management conferences;
- level meetings;
- exit interviews; and
- training and development.

Despite all these, three participants from the mailroom stated that they had never been involved in any diversity initiative nor received any diversity communication.

While employees themselves had initiated and implemented “diversity day” and “cook day” events, they all agreed that it was management who had initiated EE and that it was their responsibility to ensure compliance with legislation. Managers were held accountable by:

- measuring their progress against set EE targets;
- looking at KPAs (key performance areas) which include employment outputs;
- reflecting numbers of black appointments;

- conducting internal electronic opinion surveys amongst staff;
- noting results of external surveys such as “Best company to work for” and “Investors in People”; and
- analysing exit interviews from employees who had resigned.

## Evaluation

The majority (80%) of the interview and focus-group participants indicated that the call centre had made good progress with regards to EE. One employee elaborated: “die call centre moet mos FSC se equity vir hulle ook doen” [Trsl: *the call centre should also do the equity for the whole of FSC*] – implying that, by comparison, progress at the parent company had been slow. Women in particular had always been well represented in the call centre: their representation had increased marginally from 73% to 75% in the two years preceding the study. In the same period, representation of designated groups in the call centre had increased from 46% to 53%. By comparison, female and black staff constituted 55% and 31% respectively of staff at FSC as a whole.

However, despite this positive perception of EE at the call centre, on closer inspection it became apparent that the majority voice encompassed mostly white and coloured employees. Black African participants, with their relatively small numbers, were not so satisfied with the call centre’s progress. One black African employee explained:

I don’t work on the telephones. But sometimes I am called to answer the phone because I am the only one who can talk an African language.

In fact, not only did the call centre demographic not reflect that of the Western Cape – black Africans in the call centre constituted a mere 10% of the workforce, effectively half the proportion of the black African population in the province – but black African representation was dramatically less than the national demographic. While progress had been made with the employment of coloured staff, the recruitment numbers of black African staff had been disappointing.

Neither had there been any significant change in the distribution of power. At the call centre, designated staff in the clerical and unskilled



job levels had increased by 9% and 4% respectively in the three previous years. However, designated representation in middle management had in fact declined from 18% to 14%, and there was not a single designated employee in senior management, a situation that had remained unchanged in three years. Female representation in middle management grew from 36% to 43%. However, once again, there was no female representation at senior-management level.

Evidently, despite black employees and women being targeted for recruitment, accelerated-development and management-development programmes, they remained underrepresented in middle and senior management. Both black and female representation on the junior-management level had remained the same over the preceding three years, suggesting that the accelerated development had been unsuccessful. Clearly, much more needed to be done to claim that progress had been made with the employment of all designated groups at all levels within the company.

With EE, diversity training, team building, “diversity days”, “cook days”, exit interviews and training, amongst others, the company appeared to be keeping busy with its diversity interventions. However, having many diversity initiatives did not ensure that diversity was valued at FSC. The call centre’s workforce profile was still skewed in favour of white and coloured employees, designated groups remained in the middle and lower occupational levels in the company, and Afrikaans continued to be the preferred language, thus excluding individuals from certain groups and undermining efforts to improve diversity.

Ultimately, FSC’s many initiatives were not effective enough and didn’t deal with the deep issues of prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination and ignorance. It must be remembered that diversity must be broadly defined (Arredondo 1996; Griggs and Louw 1995; Leach et al. 1995; Thomas 1996): diversity encompasses more than just EE, yet it is clear that many participants conflated EE with diversity. In fact, the diversity training that had been implemented three years prior had been the only initiative that dealt with diversity in its purest sense.

Certainly, FSC’s focus had fallen mostly on EE. Of the 25 company documents that were collected from FSC, 72% dealt with issues related to EE rather than diversity. Furthermore, these indicated that race and gender were by far the most significant EE areas to receive attention: progress reports on workforce and staff movement (recruitments, pro-

motions, exits) were compiled according to race and gender; training and development decisions, especially for accelerated-development and management-development programmes, took regard mainly of race and gender. Other diversities were largely ignored in the call centre's EE drive – despite the company's excellent documents on employees with disabilities. One participant cited an incident where her partner's service had been terminated because he was regarded as medically unfit after he had become very ill; in her opinion, he could have remained in employment if a suitable job had been found.

## Conclusion

A number of conclusions can be drawn as to why the diversity initiatives had had limited success at FSC. Firstly, it appeared from the participants' lack of confidence in talking about diversity that not enough time had been spent on engaging staff in diversity training. The training providers indicated that the diversity training had been inhibited by various factors. In a stipulated four-hour session, trainers had been asked to focus only on four areas, namely (1) What is diversity?; (2) What is valuing diversity?; (3) Stereotypes and (4) Cultural ignorance.

The provider recalled that there had been no management commitment to diversity beyond the training programme itself. They had struggled to distribute a diversity report to all employees after the training had taken place because none of the managers wanted to accept responsibility for it – managers had insisted that they merely coordinated the logistical arrangements. A diversity-training provider also mentioned that the call centre had gone through a restructuring that had seen the manager who had originally contracted them move to another business unit.

Thus, secondly, support from the call centre's leadership was lacking, with the exception of the call-centre head, who had made a point of discussing diversity issues (although, it appears, there was no direct outcome from this intervention in terms of changed strategy). Nevertheless, it appears that responsibility was measured for the purpose of performance management, and executives and senior managers continued to receive incentive bonuses irrespective of the slow progress made with diversity. To encourage managers to pay sufficient attention to diversity,

performance should be incorporated into executives' and senior managers' performance contracts and linked to their incentives.

Thirdly, the EE committee itself was largely ineffectual. The committee predominantly discussed issues related to EE such as progress, recruitment, assessment, barrier analysis, feedback to staff and staff EE concerns. The chairperson – a white male who was also the most senior member in terms of job level – dominated discussions, and it was observed that while some of the black attendees sometimes appeared critical of the chairperson's views, they never challenged him.

Finally, the HR manager, a white female, was responsible for coordinating EE. Research by Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) indicates that white employees often experience feelings of unfairness when EE is implemented. Perhaps some consideration should be given to the question of whether a white person should be tasked with championing EE.

A number of changes needed to be made to the call centre's approach if they were to see real, positive results. The call centre should develop and implement a clear diversity strategy that is strategically linked to the company's business strategy. Ad hoc, fragmented and employee-initiated diversity initiatives are not sufficient to root out deep-seated prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination. Thomas and Robertshaw (1999: xi) noted:

While numerical target setting and related strategies of affirmative action will need to be implemented, the organisational environment of the companies will also need to be prepared to be receptive to such initiatives.

In light of the call centre's size, the challenging nature of EE and diversity and to ensure that it receives enough attention, it is recommended that responsibility be assigned to a senior manager as their primary function. Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) found that an EE co-ordinator with a higher status in the management hierarchy (relative to other administrators) is more likely to mobilise resources and influence change in the racial and gender composition of senior positions. At the same time, due consideration should be given to whether the person who is assigned this responsibility should rather be from a designated group.

Thus, sufficient budgetary resources need to be made available to develop and implement a new, and complete, diversity strategy. Enough

time should be given to allow all employees to attend diversity training and other initiatives that explore existing cultural ignorance, stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory practices at FSC.

# Case study: FSC



Financial-services Company (FSC) was established in the early 1900s and is now a leading financial services group in South Africa, listed on both the Johannesburg and Namibian Stock Exchange. With a head office in Cape Town, and satellite offices in all major towns across South Africa, FSC employs more than 8 000 people and caters to a diverse clientele.

The call centre is a division of the Personal Finance business unit, and was established in 1998 to provide a comprehensive after-sales service. At the time of the study, the call centre employed approximately 745 employees, mostly based in Cape Town. The unit had consistently won achievement and excellence awards, and was rated as one of the top four best large call centres in South Africa, as well as the company with the highest client satisfaction in the insurance industry, according to the Department of Trade and Industry. The call centre processed between 6 000 and 7 000 emails, faxes, letters and web queries daily, between 7 500 and 10 000 phone calls daily, and dealt with approximately 30 000 clients per month.

As a division of the parent group, the call centre followed decisions, policies and management practices prescribed by FSC. In relation to diversity activities, these included an EE policy, an EE plan, a language policy, various barrier-analysis reports, reports for the Department of Labour, a transformation report, the workforce profile, newsletters, memos and minutes of meetings.

The EE policy required “absence of all forms of discrimination; affirmative action; equal opportunities; and valuing diversity” and included goals which, amongst others, sought to strategically positioning FSC in a shifting macro environment and create a working environment that was conducive to attracting, training and retaining skilled people from all sectors of society.

To back up this document, FSC had a well written and unambiguous code of practice to end racial harassment and unfair discrimination. The language policy acknowledged the multilinguistic background of FSC’s employees but attempted to prevent conflict, discrimination and exclusion. FSC’s HIV/Aids policy clearly stipulated that affected employees

should be protected from unfair discrimination and stigmatisation and that all employees had access to training, information and counselling services. FSC had also adopted dedicated guidelines for people with disabilities.

Given the extent to which diversity was addressed and communicated in FSC's policy documents, it is interesting to note how the company *visually* reflected its cultural mix. In company documents showing photographs of people, there tended to be more representations of white people than black people: in an internal magazine, there were 73 pictures of men, 99 of women, 120 of white and 52 of black staff. Both the photos and the accompanying articles represented white males in managerial positions while black staff typically appeared as recent graduates or conference attendees. In the transformation report, however, the majority of photographs were of black people, while at the same time explicitly stating FSC's commitment to BEE, EE, community involvement and black shareholding.

Staff at the call centre seemed fairly content and no major conflicts were uncovered during the research period. The physical layout supported a team-orientated environment, and generally people claimed to feel comfortable with their colleagues, and especially their teammates. While work at the call centre was quite pressurised, most participants felt proud of being part of productive working environment. Nevertheless, a few participants indicated that insensitivity and lack of respect had led to prejudice and stereotyping of various groups, which could easily lead to discrimination. Small numbers of participants felt FSC was only productivity driven and did not recognise employees' needs, although these views were countered by examples of managers accommodating the needs of divergent religions. Socially, however, the staff tended to interact mostly with the people from their own race groups and those who spoke the same language.

Language did appear to be a divisive issue. While FSC's language policy promoted English as the company's business language, some employees regarded this as an attempt not to acknowledge their home languages. Other employees had limited ability to communicate effectively in English and sometimes insisted on communicating in their home language. The fact that the company was started by group of Afrikaners, that the majority of its employees were based in the Western Cape and that its

clientele was largely Afrikaans speaking meant that Afrikaans was often the unofficial and preferred business language.

There was difficulty amongst most of the participants to describe FSC's definition of diversity – most asked the researcher to explain the term – but finally the diversity indicators of race, gender, culture, language, age, belief, customs, habits, etc. were mentioned. The majority of participants identified EE as the most important diversity initiative at FSC. At the junior levels, staff believed that legislation (in the form of the Employment Equity Act) was the most important factor influencing the company's diversity initiatives, but at managerial level most staff were of the opinion that the main factor was the business imperative arising from a shifting market.

Other diversity initiatives included diversity training, accelerated-development and management-development programmes, exit interviews, diversity discussions at management conferences and monthly meetings. Management was seen as being responsible for these initiatives. In addition, employees themselves had implemented cultural “cook days”, during which employees could bring food from their respective cultures, and “diversity days”, during which employees were invited to dress in clothes that reflected their own culture or one that they admired. In both cases the idea was to expose staff to a variety of cultures and traditions in a positive way, thereby celebrating the cultural richness of FSC. Cultural debates also attempted to increase staff knowledge of other cultures.

Eighty per cent of participants indicated that the call centre had made good progress with regards to EE – by comparison, the parent company was seen to be behind. Women in particular were well represented: their representation had increased marginally from 73% to 75% in the two years preceding the study. In the same period, black representation in the call centre had increased from 46% to 53%. By comparison, female and black staff constituted 55% and 31% respectively of staff at FSC as a whole.

Closer inspection revealed that the majority voice encompassed mostly white and coloured employees. The small number of black African participants were not so satisfied with the progress. As one black African employee explained:

I don't work on the telephones. But sometimes I am called to answer the phone because I am the only one who can talk an African language.

In fact, the call centre demographic did not reflect that of the Western Cape: at 10%, black Africans reflected half the proportion of the black African population in the province (and dramatically less than the national demographic). While progress had been made with the employment of coloured staff, the recruitment numbers of black African staff had been disappointing.

Neither had there been any significant change in the distribution of power. At the call centre, black staff in the clerical and unskilled job levels had increased by 9% and 4% respectively in the three previous years. However, black representation in middle management had in fact declined from 18% to 14%, and there was not a single designated employee in senior management, a situation that had remained unchanged in three years. Female representation in middle management had grown from 36% to 43% – once again, however, there was no female representation at senior-management level. Both black and female representation on the junior-management level had remained the same over the preceding three years, suggesting that the accelerated-development programme had been unsuccessful. Much more needed to be done to claim that progress had been made with the employment of all designated groups at all levels within the company.

Clearly, having many diversity initiatives had not ensured that diversity was valued at FSC, and had not effected deep change: the workforce profile was still skewed in favour of white and coloured employees, designated groups remained in the middle and lower occupational levels in the company, and Afrikaans continued to be the preferred language, thus excluding individuals from certain groups and undermining efforts to improve diversity. FSC's many initiatives were not effective in dealing with the deep issues of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and ignorance.

Crucially, it must be remembered that diversity encompasses more than just EE – it was clear that many participants conflated the two. In fact, the diversity training that had been implemented three years prior had been the only initiative that dealt with diversity in its purest sense. FSC's focus had fallen mostly on EE. Seventy-two per cent of FSC's company



documents dealt with EE rather than diversity. Furthermore, EE was narrowed down and focused primarily on race and gender, which were the criteria mentioned in progress reports on recruitments, promotions and exits, as well as training and development decisions. Despite FSC's excellent documents on employees with disabilities, these and other diversities were largely ignored. At the most basic level of transformation, FSC was struggling to successfully manage its EE committee.

A number of conclusions can be drawn as to why the diversity initiatives had had such limited success. Firstly, not enough time had been spent on engaging staff in diversity training. The training had been limited at conception when training providers had been asked to focus only on prespecified aspects of diversity, and it had been stipulated that training should not take longer than four hours. No commitment from management had made follow-up impossible.

Secondly, support from leadership was for the most part lacking, with the exception of the call centre head, who championed diversity issues at certain meetings. Nevertheless, executives and senior managers continued to receive incentive bonuses irrespective of the slow progress made with diversity.

Thirdly, the EE committee itself was largely ineffectual and certainly not sufficient to support diversity at the call centre. The committee predominantly discussed issues related to EE such as progress, recruitment, assessment, barrier analysis, feedback to staff and staff EE concerns.

What was starkly obvious was the complete non-engagement of other forms of difference and inequality, both in the interventions and in speaking to members of the organisations. At FSC, there was limited engagement with culture and, to a lesser extent, religion. The call centre needed to develop and implement a clear diversity strategy that was strategically linked to the company's business strategy. Ad hoc, fragmented and employee-initiated diversity initiatives are not sufficient to root out deep-seated prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination. Responsibility for diversity initiatives should be assigned as their primary function to a senior manager, who is more likely to mobilise resources and influence change in the racial and gender composition of senior positions. At the same time, due consideration should be given to whether this person should him/herself be from a designated group.

Thus, sufficient budgetary resources needed to be made available to develop and implement a new, and complete, diversity strategy.

## Questions

- Discuss the impact that visual representation of designated groups in company newsletters and other documents may have on organisational culture.
- Is the growth in dominance of an already dominant designated group (ie, the increase in female representation from 73% to 75%) a positive step in EE?
- Discuss the role of employee-initiated diversity events such as “cook days” and “diversity days” in changing the perceptions of staff towards other cultures.
- Should the champion of diversity necessarily be from a designated group in order for the initiative to be effective?



# Large South African Manufacturer (LSAM)



Based on Masters thesis by  
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## Introduction

From the moment one walks onto any of Large South African Manufacturer's (LSAM) sites, one is aware of a deep and fierce sense of national pride: from the vase of indigenous proteas on the receptionist's desk, the larger-than-life sculpture by a local artist, the brochure heralding the new South African heritage wing in the office block, to the array of glossy prints in the waiting area, including an edition of *South Africa, The Good News* (Pennington and Bowes, 2003). In the payoff line on the new company logo LSAM attributes all its achievements to the South African nation and its people. In short, LSAM's head office looks more like the National Marketing Council of South Africa than a fast-moving consumer goods company.

Similarly, LSAM is proud of its business achievements since its inception in 1895. According to the company website, in 1897 LSAM was the first industrial company to be listed on the JSE Securities Exchange and the company has paid dividends to its shareholders for the last 108 years in succession. LSAM is today the second-largest producer in its industry in the world.

LSAM operates seven manufacturing sites in South Africa for the production of its core fast-moving consumer goods and five further

manufacturing sites for its secondary products which, together with over 50 of its logistics sites around the country, employ 8 232 people directly. LSAM also boasts its contribution to the South African employment drive and is responsible for creating some 400 000 jobs throughout its product chain in South Africa.

The vision, mission and values of the company clearly reflect the dominant culture that LSAM has created and wants to maintain: a company that values its people, reputation and consumers, and its performance above all else. It is also clearly articulated that the company “values and encourages diversity”. Under the heading “Employee diversity”, one of LSAM’s global strategic guiding principles reads as follows:

[LSAM] companies understand and respect the wide range of human diversity in which they operate and encourage inclusiveness with regard to human resource practices, irrespective of (among others) nationality, race, gender and physical disabilities. The group is committed to an active equal opportunities policy from recruitment and selection, through training and development, appraisal and promotion to retirement. In Southern Africa, there is a special focus on achieving demographic balance across management grades. Within the constraints of local law it is our policy to ensure that everyone is treated equally, regardless of gender, colour, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, religion or trade union affiliation.

Indeed, nation-building was at the very heart of LSAM’s equity plan as far back as 1971, when the then managing director declared that LSAM would embark on a journey to significantly increase the number of Asian and black people throughout the salaried staff ranks to be more representative of the markets that LSAM served. At the time, only 1% of blacks (Asian, black and coloured South Africans) occupied salaried positions.

This early equity plan centred on the development and promotion of black Africans into salaried positions and by 1978, black Africans represented 13% of salaried staff. During the early 1980s the plan was revised with the view to increasing black representivity in technical and managerial positions through deliberate and rapid development programmes accompanied by performance-driven EE targets for managers. By 1985, this equity drive became a strategic imperative and was equally weighted

alongside marketing, productivity and production, with a significant portion of the senior management performance bonus dependent on equity performance. The objective was to achieve a 50% black, 50% white representation at salaried staff level by 1990.

The target was not achieved but by 1992, black employees represented 46% of all salaried staff. At this stage the board of directors launched a new equity strategy that moved beyond merely achieving a demographic balance towards creating a culture of dignity and respect where the vestiges of workplace discrimination could be eliminated. This strategy not only involved affirmative headcount targets, but included deliberate education and training in the quest to eradicate social prejudices and attitudes in the workplace, and included a corporate social-investment programme to redress past inequities. This involved the launch of an integrated management process (IMP) where performance, development and feedback was based on standardised criteria, and which aimed at reducing the possibility of discrimination in performance management. The IMP system also resulted in a set of shared company values, which was measured with an organisational effectiveness (OE) survey. At the same time, a major commercial equity programme saw over 50% of LSAM's logistics operations owned and operated by black businesses.

By 1997, 53% of salaried employees at LSAM were black, the IMP system had been fully implemented and the black-ownership logistics programme had been established throughout the country. However, the OE survey had revealed that human dignity and social integration still needed to be addressed, and in response a new strategic equity plan was launched for the next five years. During this time, the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998) was promulgated, giving even greater impetus to the plan. The new equity plan introduced gender as an AA target, used the words “valuing our diversity” in the strategic model, and was deliberately orientated towards the “business case”. The then MD wanted LSAM managers to understand that leveraging LSAM's human diversity resource would create a globally competitive advantage.

In 2002, LSAM conducted a review of its equity plan and concluded that more deliberate steps needed to be taken towards black representation at management levels; since the legislation of the Employment Equity Act, LSAM had found the market for black management talent had become increasingly competitive. LSAM believed that retaining its existing talent, and attracting and developing new talent depended on

the organisational culture created by its leadership, and so the revised strategy deliberately focused on leadership development. A 2003 revision of the equity strategy included a focus on disability and the performance metrics that would inform the monitoring process. The guiding principles informed LSAM's BEE strategy. Successful implementation of the strategy was directly linked to the bonuses paid to managerial staff.

This research focuses on the nature and impact of the diversity interventions designed and implemented at LSAM's North and South Sites.

## Organisational environment

LSAM's leadership prided itself in having done a sterling job with respect to people management and organisational culture. In fact, the HR director was rather disappointed about the topic of this research:

Why diversity? We have been doing diversity work for years, we have numerous case studies published about us, and we use the best service provider in the country – what's in it for us?

This “we lead the rest” theme was strongly represented in LSAM's organisational culture, and evident in its literature, corporate posters, company-branded calendars, stationery, mirrors and artwork. A key aspect of being “the best” was the creation and maintenance of a “high-performance culture”, which LSAM claimed was based entirely on their core company strategy to retain and attract a disproportionate share of the talent available in the labour market.

Company literature made extensive reference to LSAM's expectation that their staff subscribe to this high-performance culture. The following extract from the website captured this theme:

If the culture of an organisation can be described as its personality, then [LSAM] can be said to have an achievement-oriented character. Our people are characterised by their optimism and passion for our brands and for our company. The people of [LSAM] are energised and innovative. The culture is one of self-belief, with the resolve to achieve what we set out to do. Where challenging goals are achieved alongside our endless capacity to have fun. This

makes [LSAM] a great place to work – allowing teams and individuals to excel and fulfil their untapped potential. Each employee works hard to develop and maintain the organisation’s personality and behaves in a manner that embodies the [LSAM] culture. We strive for achievement; encourage constant improvement; and celebrate our great brands. This culture is driven by our robust performance management system.

On the other side of the coin, LSAM emphasised the role of LSAM employees in maintaining this high level of performance, as embodied in the company’s HR proposition:

Unquestionably, [LSAM] believe in the value of people as a core element of its business success. We assume that people want to accept accountability and influence outcomes that shape the organisation. Furthermore, we believe that employees want to practice self-management in an empowering system that is diverse and unashamedly performance driven ... Our efforts are founded on the value that a diverse workforce brings to the organisation, we endeavour to create an inclusive culture where all employees feel appreciated for their uniqueness and that contributions are respected. This proposition has established our reputation for attracting talented and diverse individuals.

Given this culture and LSAM’s history as being a forerunner in equity initiatives, it is perhaps not surprising that a high and continuously increasing pace of change also characterised the organisational landscape.

How then did employees experience this high-performance and rapid-change culture? Both North and South sites revealed three major themes, namely that participants:

- experienced low personal value;
- felt that business results were valued over the impact these achievements had on individuals; and
- believed that qualified outsiders are more valuable to LSAM than experienced insiders.

When participants answered the question, “Do you feel valued?” the overwhelming response at both sites was “No”:

I don't think in any of the companies right now you valued for who you are, it is about deadlines. Those numbers, it is all about that. It is not about the people any more ... Just that overall target in terms of that business need is looked at and not your individuality, personal or family. (South Site shop floor employee)

If I come to work every day and do my work as required, and most of the time I do much more than I have to, but they never acknowledge that. Even if it is just a word of comment that makes you feel good, and we don't expect a lot from them. (South Site shop floor employee)

... you supposed to deliver and you're supposed to do numbers and you drain these people ... you need to understand the impact that it has on an individual and his life and his family and everything and [LSAM] – it's numbers, numbers, numbers-driven, totally ... the pressure that you can feel in this environment, you either thrive on it and enjoy it or you crack ... you will crack eventually ... we keep piling things on people, I mean not to see when they're going to crack but thinking that they'll say "Enough, I've got to stop now" ... but I think that people don't want to admit that they're not able to cope ... Oh yes, we've had people falling down now, people getting sick ... No, no, they come back, they come back alright, and then they just forge on ahead. (North Site senior manager)

Participants felt that LSAM instead valued individuals who were tough and could handle pressure, despite the fact that LSAM's diversity interventions were designed to create a culture "where all people feel at home, a culture that motivates and retains".

Another significant point of discontent was the idea that qualified outsiders were valued over experienced insiders – a recurring theme that also emerged as a diversity issue. Clearly, participants generally did not feel "at home" within LSAM, instead believing that only tough, qualified outsiders are motivated, retained and valued:

They don't have enough qualifications and so they not taking anybody from shop floor who [we] can see have potential. They not saying let us take these people and we will be taking them for



training for the next two years and then make them a manager or something. They saying they are looking for people outside that are qualified. Even if they take people here in [South Site] and try to improve them, it does not get anywhere anyway because at the end of the day they don't employ those people. So, it is like they are just using them and still employing people from outside and that is not right. (South Site shop floor employee)

... what kills their spirit of working it was when they were retrenched and most of them were told they do not know how to operate the new machines. But I have been working here for 30 years and they asked, what is the difference between my 30 years service and now? So they said they need somebody with qualifications like N6. So that killed the spirit of the guys and I mean there is a lot of poverty in the townships ... and I mean this guy and the machine has been here for 30 years. So why do you say this guy cannot work with this machine? You bring a new guy in and say that this guy can do better, and I mean the one with 30 years has more experience and experience counts. (South Site shop floor employee)

These perhaps unforeseen ramifications of LSAM's strategy to attract (external) black talent gave rise to a contradiction in LSAM's organisational culture: LSAM deliberately introduced diversity in terms of EE, and were appointing highly qualified designated candidates. Yet LSAM's approach suggested to its people that it was, in fact, intolerant of diversity:

... all different peoples are welcome as long as you are the perfect [LSAM] clone: a highly qualified, over-confident workaholic, who's fiercely patriotic of [LSAM] and chases the numbers no matter what. (North Site senior manager)

## The intervention

LSAM's overall BEE target was described in "Project Zebra", which stated that each site should have achieved 50% white to 50% designated employees in management by a particular date. The two manufacturing sites

studied, North Site and South Site, both implemented locally designed diversity interventions which were linked to the overall BEE strategy.

South Site introduced a “Diversity for Growth” intervention, which was designed in conjunction with a professional external diversity service provider and combined both content- and process-based change activities, thus encouraging experiential change in individuals. North Site’s intervention was termed “Finding Common Ground” and was based largely on creating awareness by means of social events. While the intent of the North Site diversity work was to effect behavioural change, no direct behavioural or experiential work was done at the individual level.

At South Site, one gets the impression that the “Diversity for Growth” initiative started out as a general employee morale booster and evolved into a diversity initiative:

We had gone through a leadership change, and we were selected to pilot the revised OE survey. Well, it did not come out as we’d hoped. In fact the BEE part of the OE survey scored really low. (South Site general manager)

We also designed a questionnaire and did focus groups. And that’s where we uncovered the four themes that needed action. Only then did we start designing a solution ... of course we also looked at all available stats such as [labour] turnover, equity numbers and so on. (South Site HR executive)

Focus-group sessions were held to establish the employees’ level of understanding regarding diversity (including “Project Zebra”), the role of their EE committee (EECC) and the relevant legislation; to place diversity in the context of LSAM and how it related to its employees; and to use the “appreciative inquiry” (AI) technique to get employees to start imagining a desirable future, and in the process develop a prioritised action plan. South Site’s “Diversity for growth” intervention was designed to solve the four key dilemmas that arose from the diagnostic phase: race issues, leadership style, poor understanding of LSAM’s BEE strategy, and perceived unfair recruitment practices.

The South Site HR executive had spent some time in pre-planning sessions with the external diversity service provider and found herself in agreement with their principles:

Have you met [the service provider]? What a magnificent person! I have a huge amount of respect for [her] and she was spot on with our leadership styles – really interesting that she highlighted our [site’s] heroic leadership styles. And that has been our legacy especially when [X] was still our GM. (HR executive, South Site)

A detailed model of the “Diversity for Growth” intervention described the overall intent, alignment with business objectives as well as how success was to be measured. The model included an anchoring phase involving GM briefs and GM breakfasts, departmental change committees, a mentorship programme and a total employment offering (work-life balance) programme.

The intervention itself mainly involved leadership development and diversity workshops – these were elements introduced by the external service provider – as well as ongoing activities aimed at training and development. The leadership-development arm involved individual coaching sessions and the service provider recommended the Power Management Inventory (PMI) popularised by McClelland and Winter (1971) as a tool for highlighting potentially negative power motives that could prevent leaders from engaging meaningfully with staff, thus creating barriers to diversity.

Diversity workshops extending over one and a half days were conducted by HR team members and departmental line managers. On the first day of the workshops, participants watched two videos entitled *The morning after the night before* and *A class divided*, both of which highlighted the negative consequences of discriminatory stereotyping. Participants also played “diversity bingo” and selected diversity champions. Two months after the first day, a half-day debriefing session gauged experiential and perception changes. According to the progress report:

The objective of the workshops [was] to reinforce diversity awareness within the organisation particularly in relation to the [LSAM] values and our corporate culture; to improve internal relationships amongst managers and their employees, colleagues and peers; and to introduce systems and processes into the organisation to address internal diversity issues beyond race, gender and culture.

A separate change process map specified the timing as well as solutions to each of the diversity dilemmas.

In contrast with the South Site HR executive's obvious pride over their diversity work, the North Site HR executive was less confident:

I am so glad you're doing this research – it is really going to help us so much. We've got big plans and hopefully you can tell us if we're on the right track.

In keeping with the overall LSAM BEE strategy, North Site had located its diversity intervention within its business strategy of “Globally Great”. This vision was supported by four strategic goals, namely: Great [Product], Great People, Great Reputation and Great Value:

... our goal is to be “Globally Great” ... – diversity is an aspect of it.  
(North Site HR executive)

[Diversity] is part of the “Great People” goal. We do not want it to be a standalone thing. That creates problems. (North Site general manager)

The North Site HR team, together with input from central HR and two LSAM pilot sites (South and East Sites), designed their diversity intervention primarily to enable a cultural transformation:

... it's a culture-change intervention and it's about us deciding on what the behaviours are that we want to see our people exhibiting; diversity being one of the behaviours, embracing the whole transformation thing. (North Site HR executive)

Although the North Site HR executive was adamant that the intervention was designed to address specific behaviours, it emerged that the intervention design team were not sure which current behaviours were desirable or undesirable:

The actual behaviours, well, that as a team we need to thrash out, that's a two-hour session that I've got to run with our [team]. We discussed it last week in our goal session and we basically just need

to put that down on paper. We've designed the plan. Diversity is quite a big process, quite a big action plan. (North Site HR executive)

Despite not being clear on the desired behaviour change, the HR team had completed the diversity intervention plan. The plan itself was more a statement of intent than an action plan, and proposed five strategic elements that linked directly to LSAM's overall BEE strategy. However, total alignment with the LSAM plan without due consideration to the local situation was not likely to result in behaviour change. It appeared that the HR executive was (vaguely) aware of the potential pitfalls of a blanket approach to diversity:

We're not able to put our finger on it yet. I can give you my thoughts for now. What happens is that you've got this huge gap between this is level 3 and this is level 4 and then you've got this is level 2 and this is level 1. And it's different lives that we are leading understanding what's going on here. We don't know. I mean we don't know the difficulty that that guy – you know I'm speaking for myself now – that guy who works on the line, we don't know what his issues are ... and it's not answering your question around behaviour but the reason I can't answer it well enough is because you have a management group of people, you get car allowances, you also get other sorts of benefits, you see things from a different perspective and through a different lens and then you get the guys who are – you know, we have different sets of problems and different behaviours and different issues; if we were to delve down deeper we would never have guessed or understood it – you know, because we've never experienced it ... And I think just in terms of behaviours, we don't have that empathy here at a more senior level and we don't know how to do it. So just in terms of the difficulties and the challenges around diversity that exist – is that there's just too big a gap in terms of socio-economic stuff here in terms of us. (North Site HR executive)

At the time of this research, it became clear that the “Globally Great” strategy was still at an early design stage although the “Finding Common Ground” intervention had actually been implemented the year before:

Last year what we did was we ran an intervention called “Finding Common Ground” and what we were basically saying: We’re all different and that uniqueness we need to harness and use and leverage ... to what end is it that we’re here for? We’re here to run a business and to deliver. And what is that we needed to deliver to? Certain goals ... but ... you’re an individual, you bring something special. Let us acknowledge as a team what it is you bring, let us appreciate and let’s use that to take us [to the goal] ... so what we do as the managers in the one-on-ones, we actually talk about the individual contribution, what makes you special. The first thing we did was we’d run this hour and a half workshops – Power Organisation. It happened last year. (North Site HR executive)

In effect, the “Finding Common Ground” intervention was a mix of training workshops and social events. According to the internal diversity plan, the workshops were designed to impart the message that differences were opportunities to grow, and the events were intended to enhance social integration:

The “Finding Common Ground” – we decided to use the GM briefs to attach activities to these more than just presentations. The first one we did we decided to do a potjiekos competition – the turnout! Folks came out in numbers – from a diversity point of view, everyone participated. The communication as well as the togetherness that comes with these events – from a diversity point of view, folks rally around such activities ... we kicked off the first “women’s breakfast” – that went down well and we do it this year as well. It’s an aspect of diversity that people have come to treasure. I always thank them as well for their contribution to the company and to the country as well. It goes down so well with the people. It’s all these things that we focus on – like our HIV/Aids drive, even if guys are not infected they live with folks that may be infected and they want to know more. (North Site general manager)

Despite the focus on awareness and social interaction, the main diversity activity remained the EE drive, which was linked with “Project Zebra”:

... we do a lot around equity – it is the single most important thing that is done with diversity. If you do nothing else, make sure you get representivity. It has been hard in certain areas. The lab has historically been a certain profile, artisans, fork-lift drivers – we need to make these groups diverse. We do mentorship, the [executive assistant] amongst others – people with potential, we take them under our wing and get them to grow. But this is an interim measure – we need to have numbers first. (North Site general manager)

## Evaluation

Perhaps surprisingly, given the long-standing and apparently thorough attention that had been given to EE at LSAM overall, tensions around diversity at both South and North sites remained high even after the diversity interventions had been completed. Foremost at both sites were racial issues, although other tensions emerged as well. At South Site, racial tensions were generally based around perceptions of black incompetence and that black staff were “set up for failure”. These themes were also evident at North Site, with the added problem of racially based exclusion.

Perceptions of black incompetence (or superior white competence) was found at all levels at the two sites but was more prevalent in engineering disciplines than in the other circles of expertise, as described by the following quotes from South Site:

The targets are 60/40 ... 40% of this level has to be equity status so the other 60% I would call a merit-based or merit percentage – for those people that are in the job for skills. (South Site middle manager)

I think the issue of black artisans is going to take a while ... you still sort of have to prove your point. You still have to go the extra mile and for some white artisans you just won't ever be good enough. Because I had an issue with a white guy here and I told him where to get off ... if you see that there is too much work and too many breakdowns you can call somebody on standby and then this one white guy thinks whenever I am on shift I call him and I

am incompetent and that he was going to lay a complaint. (South Site shop floor employee)

**Participants experienced active resistance and a form of “career sabotage” of black colleagues by whites:**

I thought that this guy proved his worth; he was a black guy and a certain white manager ... worked him out of the business. (South Site junior manager)

When you are an outsider they really make you feel uncomfortable and push you to resign. (South Site shop floor employee)

Yes, I think there is a lot of pressure on these guys; maybe they cannot report straight to you because you are a black manager: “I prefer to rather report to a general manager instead of going to [packing] manager – no, I go straight to the next level.” On my side black managers don’t last, especially in this plant. (South Site junior manager)

**At South Site racial tensions were often linked to perceptions of white fear:**

They don’t accept somebody new in this place ... we need a vacancy and we need A, B and C [Asian, black and coloured] – now when that guy walks in we want to see how competent that guy is. We not assisting him so he can understand how [LSAM] work and we not helping him to show him what is it exactly that we want, and I know they say you learn if you are in the deep end. You leave him at the deep end and if that guy can sort of swim himself out you want to push him backwards down, and we use to get comments like, “You guys are here to take our job”. Most of the guys don’t last here; they work three to six months and then they resign and I think it is like making you sort of aware of the tactic ... [Q: Who does this?] White guys mainly because I am an artisan. (South Site shop floor employee)



At North Site, racial tensions were based on similar issues, but in comparison with South Site they appeared even more intense:

... a white Afrikaans male [and a] black male and they had issues, they were fighting ... the one guy – the black guy – said, “You know what, I want to be part of this team, I do, and I work for the guys on this line but you know, they had a team braai last week and they didn’t invite me and I felt excluded deliberately, I felt that they specifically chose to exclude me”. So I said, listen ... next time you have a braai ... consider inviting him then [the white male said] no, no, no, excuses, excuses; eventually it was budgets are tight. I said, “You know what, a plate of braai will cost you R20; if it is an issue take it out of my budget, OK, what’s the big deal here, really” ... and he couldn’t name it ... and I said, my goodness gracious me ... there’s racial issues. (North Site senior manager)

... there are people that just go out of their way to make sure that you remember that hey, you’re really not here because you can do this and we know you’re not clever and that you’re black to balance the numbers. (North Site junior manager)

I don’t know if it is a thing of how they were brought up. It’s definitely a thing that stands out ... let’s take an example, say you have a fault on a technical line then the specific races will take a bit longer, not necessarily always, but especially the first time they are known to take longer ... to get to the bottom of the problem ... then the black will struggle a lot but the white guy will say OK – he will click much quicker – I don’t say he will click immediately but he will click quicker, where the black will say, “Yoh! What is this here?” [translated from Afrikaans] (North Site shop floor employee)

We had a really bright black girl who knows what she’s doing, no problem with the level where she is, she’s performing and she is destined to go somewhere high up and she sort of get pulled up too quickly which is very stressful and obviously everybody is looking upon her saying, “Listen, what are you, so let’s see how you perform”. You know, where a normal guy would have got more

support from his team or her team or whatever. (North Site middle manager)

The language used to describe difference at North Site was often laden with white hegemony, as in the above quote where the middle manager describes how black employees do not get the same support as “normal” employees.

The second most frequently mentioned tensions at South Site were those concerning gender, and these largely emerged in the context of job suitability and male fear. Male participants repeatedly expressed that the manufacturing plant was not a suitable environment for females:

In my experience, they had a girl ... she started here and they brought her here, into our department. Our department is a very high machine packaging department, lot of noise, lot of hands-on work, and standby, call outs and working over weekends. I think it just did not fit with her being a female, she was only here for one or two days and then they moved her over to [pre-manufacturing], which is a very quieter environment. (South Site shop floor employee)

The packing plant was a highly automated environment where the (mostly male) operators activated electronic control panels to start and stop machinery – it was not obvious what made it unsuitable for females. One task required moving hoses that weighed several tens of kilograms from tank to tank, and this was frequently used to justify female unsuitability:

... there is some stuff that a female cannot do that a male can do, like the big hoses, for example ... My personal point is that I would rather have males because of the physical work involved and most females cannot cope. I have a woman who is like a brick and a ticky high. What is she going to do as far as physical work? (South Site junior manager)

A female participant gave her perspective, which suggested a similar withdrawal of support as had been experienced by black colleagues:

... in my team I am the only woman there and sometimes when I need help with physical things they say to me, “I am not there when you get your pay cheque,” and most of them are not willing to help out. (South site shop floor employee)

Male fear was not limited to the work environment, and discomfort was often expressed as a disruption of the “order of things”:

We going to have a lady that is going to come in and take over and knows nothing and the guys are a bit sceptical about this. Because they think why did they just not choose one of their colleagues in the group who has the experience? (South Site junior manager)

Yes, everybody is not happy ... because the wife is bringing now the same salary or even more than your salary. My wife is working and she earns more than me then she says to me I am going to town and I will be late. Now, we don't feel that it is OK for our wives to speak to us like that. Now because of equity my wife can tell you something. Yes, the guys are feeling the pain and that is very bad as I told you about those ladies that are working here those ladies are top managers. And maybe these ladies are married and she brings R23 000 from work on her salary and monthly and maybe I bring R6 000. Money speaks, so she is the best. (South Site shop floor employee)

Other diversity tensions were uncovered at South Site, including pay-grade tensions, which manifested as class stereotyping (looking down on those in lower pay grades) and the exclusion of certain employees from privileges.

At North Site, the second most frequently mentioned diversity issue after racial tensions was the perception that development was reserved for outsiders. Shop floor employees felt they were excluded from the development process despite their contribution to LSAM's success:

... I would like to see them saying look, so-and-so, today he is heading up such a department, he came in here as the super, he ... was groomed through the ranks ... But it seems like we're chasing numbers and we're poaching from other companies to fill those

numbers ... What about the people in the company who makes the company what it is today? Today it's the second largest [manufacturer of its kind] because of the people who are doing the shop floor work and if you're not taking care of those who are your most valuable assets. (North Site shop floor employee)

Language exclusion also emerged as a diversity issue at North Site, where participants noted that Afrikaans was dominant and that they felt undervalued when they were linguistically excluded:

... the thing that did strike me and I did voice it out even to my manager was the fact that even in meetings, some of us don't know Afrikaans so you'll find in discussions ... maybe so-and-so has to answer that question, and he now he's talking to so-and-so who's an Afrikaner, he still just answers in Afrikaans; they're more like talking to each other but ... it happens a lot ... what it does, it feels like you don't have anything valuable to add so they just continue in Afrikaans and after a few minutes you start feeling left out ... [The other] day I decided not to do anything, I decided to wait, you know, it continued for the whole meeting. It was Afrikaans all the way and then at the end of the meeting I said to the [manager] "Did you realise that the meeting was in Afrikaans all the way for an hour and a half?" ... But then I felt like I restrict them ... so now because of me they have to speak English. (North Site junior manager)

North Site participants also perceived that white employees feared that black empowerment would lead to career stagnation and would permanently exclude skilled whites because the new breed of black technicians had much higher qualifications. Typical expressions of white fear included:

... they're saying, "We're trying to fix the numbers" ... Look, I understand that all people should be given a chance and I have no problem with that ... That's the only thing that catches me – it's now like I've been put in the corner ... I just feel, you know, there's no opportunity. (North Site shop floor employee)

The intensity of the diversity issues at North Site might be attributed to the pervasive problem of poor team integration and the unusually high level of cliques:

... when work is done ... we meet in the pub, sit, chat as colleagues and we can relate to each other but there are those that do the same, we go up to the pub but they sit at a distance, you see, there's still that exclusion to some others. (North Site junior manager)

... when I got here there was a group of people that that just hung out together. And they backed each other up in meetings ... they have this clique going on. (North Site middle manager)

When I first started here I felt very alone ... you find lots of cliques in this place ... I think it's fear of people putting themselves out there it is not encouraged as such from the top – other places I worked at, top management is more open and the morale is low here. This is the lowest I have seen in a long time compared to other places of work. I feel the morale was better at the place where I came from and that place had race issues! There are normal human issues here but, wow, they take it to another level in this place. (North Site shop floor employee)

At the same time as participants commented on the slow pace of change, a quarter of responses linked existing redress with a lowering of standards and growing inexperience. At both sites, the engineering departments, middle managers as a group and the EE committees (EECC and EESDC) were singled out for not embracing change or not changing at the required pace. Typical sentiments included:

... more or less eye level [meaning the middle layer], the majority of guys are white. (South Site junior manager)

I can say with the managers, there is a lot of apartheid ... (South Site Shop Floor)

I think our management team apart from [a particular manager] is 80/20 white. Eighty per cent is lily white ... What I see lacking is a succession plan. (North Site shop floor employee)

Some departments in my opinion did not do enough restructuring and as a result you end up with these guys who are here for 15 and 20 years, and these guys have not developed themselves, so they feel threatened by equity. And they will do anything to protect their territory; that is what it is, if I can get straight to the point. (South Site shop floor employee)

... one department that I feel bitter is the engineering department; they need to be more mixed. To me it still is sort of odd, if I can put it that way, but I have worked with engineering guys before and they are not an easy bunch to work with. They don't accept changes ... (South Site shop floor employee)

The engineering department you can see that there are only whites ... That is why I am saying that I don't know why are there only white people. Is it because of the qualifications they have or what? If there were any changes you would see but for now it is like that. (South Site shop floor employee)

From the lingering tensions at both North and South Sites it is clear that the specific interventions had made no change or had even had a negative impact – this was despite LSAM's intention to create deep culture change. The overwhelming majority (84%) of responses at North Site were negative, with South Site's at 63%. Clearly the interventions had not translated into either real or perceived change.

Most participants referred to AA or EE as the key motivation behind diversity work, but few respondents were able to locate the site-level intervention within the greater LSAM BEE strategy. Knowledge of the actual interventions was very low: only the HR executive (who designed the intervention) and the South Site general manager could name them. None of the South Site participants referred to "Diversity for Growth" and no one at North Site recalled participating in "Finding Common Ground".

At South Site, while participants mentioned the focus groups, training, the “diversity bingo” game, the external diversity service provider and visual management (diversity branding and information posters) alongside EE, there were few mentions of the anchoring activities of the intervention, namely the GM briefs and GM breakfasts, the departmental change committees, the mentorship programme and the total-employment offering programme. It became apparent that South Site’s intervention was seen mainly as a vehicle for improving the level of acceptance of others and to a lesser extent for improving company performance through enhanced teamwork.

At North Site, only 6% of the responses referred to the HR and training sessions that formed the educational heart of the intervention. The intervention was seen mainly as a vehicle for legal compliance and enhancing company image.

## Conclusion

Two years ahead of the deadline for “Project Zebra”, both South and North sites were very close to the requirement of raising the ratio of black versus white managers to 50:50. In addition, in the preceding year, South Site had rapidly progressed from having 34.8% ABC managers to 44.1%, suggesting that the “Diversity for Growth” intervention had prompted a more earnest approach to “Project Zebra”.

Despite this progress, when BEE statistics were viewed from a critical angle it became evident that power and privilege had remained in white male hands – and this distribution of power was skewed throughout LSAM. All seven of LSAM’s South African manufacturing sites were run by male managers, five of whom were white. One level higher, at board level, eight of the nine directors are males, seven of whom are white.

The overall LSAM BEE strategy clearly identifies the EECC as key to monitoring and evaluating the BEE strategy, which includes the diversity interventions. Yet the EESDC at South Site did not see diversity as part of their roles and responsibilities:

I don’t think it is in the constitution of the EESDC to do that but I think we must be very careful not to create something – be a part

of what we are not able to do. (EESDC South Site member, middle manager)

There will be a place where we will come and decide ... whether we accommodate this diversity or it will be in our regional meeting. (EESDC South Site member, junior manager)

... [diversity] is outside of the committee, it is for a number of reasons, and one of them being is diversity which has been sort-of kicked off from an HR drive to the end of last year. Another big factor is that the EESDC committee was restructured in terms of getting it to function appropriately so those are the two reasons perhaps for not been part of the committee. But discussions with the HR and the committee I am sure the committee will look at how they will play a role perhaps driving the diversity that has been laid so far last year. At this stage not. (EESDC South Site member, junior management)

And I don't think it should. (EESDC South Site member, shop floor)

Yes, I also don't think it should. (EESDC South Site member, middle management)

My belief is that we should not have a committee that runs diversity because it is everybody's responsibility. And it is a way of life. (EESDC South Site member, middle management)

At least the South Site EESDC, which had recently been restructured, was in the process of establishing new terms of reference, but the North Site EECC was not able to meet the researcher at all. According to HR, the EECC had not been involved in any of their diversity planning sessions, despite having been invited several times. According to LSAM's central BEE manager, each site had been encouraged to manage its own diversity programme according to the guidelines outlined in the BEE strategy – in the case of diversity, local autonomy had been seen as preferable.

It was perceived that diversity was not yet accepted (and therefore not celebrated or valued) at South Site, despite the “Diversity for Growth”



intervention being largely aimed at reducing negative stereotyping. In particular, participants referred to the lack of inclusivity (only managers appear to be trained) and the lack of continuity (an initial event with no follow-up) which had typified all of LSAM's change efforts. Only 161 out of 280 employees had been on diversity training.

Another stumbling block had been the constant need for LSAM to feed its growing international business with talent from its South African operations. In the preceding decade, LSAM had seen over a dozen of its most senior managers annually exported to support global operations, with half the LSAM board exported in the year before this research was conducted. The ripple effect was that there were many new appointments lower down in the organisation. Apart from the talent export, LSAM had also recently completed large-scale retrenchments, reappointments and restructuring. As a result, the managing director reported that the rate of appointment (i.e. people in new jobs) had exceeded 30% annually for many years. Within this highly turbulent people environment, all sites had also undergone large-scale modification of manufacturing equipment in line with new product-development requirements:

So I don't blame the [management] team for not responding to the [diversity climate assessment] report ... look they all sat and drew up action plans but the implementation ... (HR executive, North Site).

In seeking to address these issues from a diversity point of view, "Project Zebra" had failed. Essentially an AA programme that incentivised new black talent in the business, it nevertheless had the consequence of devaluing and alienating LSAM's existing black talent. This aspect of the intervention can be seen as a purely demographic drive, and the question must be asked why incentives were not paid to internal recruiters for advancing internal talent.

Instead, existing employees were treated to "diversity bingo" and negative stereotyping videos which, while allowing for self-reflection, cannot bring about the deep changes. Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) describe this "colour blind" approach to diversity as the "political turn" – so named because they argue that the diversity debate turned political when right-wing enthusiasts embraced the "*anyone* and *everyone*" coverage of diversity work to downplay the left-wing focus on AA. The intention of "diver-

sity bingo” may have been to show delegates that difference can be valued, yet it was experienced by participants as simply a lesson in the disadvantages of applying negative stereotypes.

Finally, no part of the intervention attempted to eradicate the “everyday racism” experienced by participants. This is the realm of postmodernist and Critical Diversity theoretical perspectives (Nkomo and Stewart 2006) and Kersten (2000). In Lorbiecki and Jack’s (2000: S17) treatise of diversity theory, the critical turn recognises that diversity work should not be done on a clean slate but needs to deal with the deep historical contexts that are the legacy of discrimination.

Based on an ethnographic study of culture in the context of organisational change, Heracleous (2001: 426) cautions that culture has “potent” effects on behaviour which “clinicians” undertaking organisational change work should research and understand. While the South Site diversity team conducted an inquiry into the extant, high-performance culture at LSAM, they did not question it as the foundation on which the diversity work was built. Rather, the high-performance culture was affirmed in a way that resonates with Schien’s observation that it becomes “valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel” (1984: 3).

This had permeated all functions of the business. The interventions that focused on the transformation of the leadership culture (the PMI and the LSAM leadership brand) recognised the critical importance of leadership in organisational change. But even these programmes emphasised the leader’s ability to maintain high performance in the staff.

While good business results are critical to the attaining organisational imperatives, the high-performance culture had become the only means of accomplishing good business results. Numerous studies, notably Booysen (1999), have shown that the culture of South African white male managers tends to emphasise performance, competition and winning, domination and control whereas the approach of female and black South African managers tend towards collaboration, participation, intuition, empathy, empowerment, self-disclosure and subtle forms of control. Critical Diversity Theory suggests that the sentiment reflected at LSAM was that it still saw its “ideal employee” as reflective of a white male ideal, even though it is presented as race and gender neutral.

Companies such as LSAM prevail in their perspective that good business results ensue from behaviours reflective of the white male ideal. This

is despite many years of research that have failed to produce evidence that the white male approach results in better business performance than the female or black approach (Nkomo and Stewart, 2006). Nkomo and Stewart (2006), Kersten (2000) and Booysen (1999) describe this phenomenon as hegemonic masculinity, institutionalised whiteness and Eurocentricism. These theorists collectively argue that organisations that perpetuate the white male ideal have systematically discounted female and black approaches to business – and are, in fact, diametrically opposed to embracing diversity.

Ultimately, the existing LSAM culture served to diminish the impact of real structural change in the diversity framework, and instead achieved measurable but arguably unsustainable change.

# Case study: LSAM



Large South African Manufacturer's (LSAM) list of values included “valu[ing] and encourag[ing] diversity”. The company had national strategic guiding principles, one of which described their approach to employee diversity:

[LSAM] companies understand and respect the wide range of human diversity in which they operate and encourage inclusiveness with regard to human resource practices, irrespective of (among others) nationality, race, gender and physical disabilities. The group is committed to an active equal-opportunities policy from recruitment and selection, through training and development, appraisal and promotion to retirement. In Southern Africa, there is a special focus on achieving demographic balance across management grades. Within the constraints of local law it is our policy to ensure that everyone is treated equally, regardless of gender, colour, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, religion or trade union affiliation.

A more or less permanent item on the organisational culture transformation agenda had been the issue of diversity and equity, with a new phase of the programme being rolled out every few years since 1971. The latest phase of the equity reform programme has been a company-wide diversity intervention. The strategy had been devised by the board of directors in South Africa, and implementation of the BEE policy was ensured by linking the strategy to bonuses paid to managers.

Two interventions were undertaken at two sites. South Site's “Diversity for growth” intervention was designed to resolve the four key dilemmas: race issues, leadership style, poor understanding of LSAM's BEE strategy, and perceived unfair recruitment practices. The diagnostic analysis was conducted by the South Site HR team, and was largely informed by insight gained at a diversity workshop conducted by an external diversity consultant who subscribed to the notion that organisational context

(including the diversity appreciation climate) is largely shaped by leadership style. Tools for breaking down negative stereotyping as well as assisting leaders to manage their communication were therefore advocated. Several workshops, programmes and tools were used during the intervention, including: workshops on the consequences of negative stereotyping; establishment of an EE committee; creation of a “people balance sheet”; an integrated management process; defining a leadership brand; leadership development; and a “best company to work for” programme.

North Site chose to locate its diversity intervention (called “Finding Common Ground”) within its business strategy of becoming “Globally Great” and all business interventions, including diversity, were located within this framework. Although North Site’s HR executive was adamant that the intervention plan was designed to address specific behaviours, it emerged that the intervention design team were not sure which current behaviours were undesirable or indeed desirable. The plan itself was more a statement of intent and philosophy than an action plan. North Site’s goal was to manage diversity through the application of various LSAM people-management strategies, thus ensuring its alignment with LSAM’s overall initiative. But despite the focus on awareness and social interaction, the main activity was the EE project and deliberately developing equity candidates to ensure representation at all levels.

Despite the intention to create deep culture change at both North and South Sites, all participants felt that the intervention had made no change or had had a negative impact. South Site participants were slightly less negative than those from North Site. All participants spoke of lingering racial and gender tensions that had not been sufficiently addressed.

LSAM did not regard EE as synonymous with diversity management: the business case and strategic imperative for diversity were heavily emphasised to the point where concerns about diversity could infiltrate core business activities. The organisation was characterised by high levels of activity across organisational structures, backed up by documented commitments to diversity – which reflect a multidimensional understanding of the issue.

Even with LSAM’s promising approach, the interventions had limited positive results. White males still dominated at management level, leading the researcher to conclude that “the distribution of power is ... skewed away from blacks”. Negative attitudes towards black (so-called

EE) appointments prevailed and black respondents reported ongoing experiences of everyday racism:

... there are people that just go out of their way to make sure that you remember that hey, you're really not here because you can do this and we know you're not clever and that you're black to balance the numbers.

There were many ways in which the credibility and authority of black employees was undermined through everyday racist practise. Black middle managers at LSAM reported that their subordinates would circumvent them, preferring to report to a black manager's senior white manager:

Yes, I think there are a lot of pressure on this guys; maybe they can not report straight to you because you are a black manager. I prefer to rather report to a general manager instead of going to [packing] manager; no, I go straight to the next level. On my side, black managers don't last, especially in this plant. (Junior manager)

Power was distributed away from women: all seven of the LSAM manufacturing sites in South Africa were managed by men (of whom five were white). At board level, eight of the nine directors were men (and seven were white). In all, 84% of respondents at North Site thought there had been no or negative change since the diversity intervention; at South Site, 63% felt the same. The primary reason was the slow rate of change while about a quarter of respondents at North Site thought change had brought lower standards and inexperience.

In line with the national political mood, gender plays second fiddle to race and it is clear that certain professions remain strongly gendered. At LSAM, respondents identified gender tension as the second most frequently occurring diversity tension after racial tension. A female shop-floor employee told the researcher:

... in my team I am the only woman there and sometimes when I need help with physical things they say to me "I am not there when you get your pay cheque" and most of them are not willing to help out ...

The attitude was confirmed by a male junior manager:

There is some stuff a female cannot do, that a male can do. Like the big hoses, for example. My personal point is that I would rather have males because of the physical work involved and most females cannot cope. I have a woman who is like a brick and a ticky high. What is she going to do as far as physical work?

Male fears at LSAM were expressed in the following way:

Yes, everybody is not happy ... because the wife is bringing now the same salary or even more than your salary. My wife is working and she earns more than me then she says to me I am going to town and I will be late. Now we don't feel that it is ok for our wives to speak to us like that. Now because of equity my wife can tell you something. Yes the guys are feeling the pain and that is very bad as I told you about those ladies that are working here those ladies are top managers. And maybe these ladies are married and she brings R23 000 from work on her salary monthly and maybe I bring R6 000. Money speaks, so she is the best.

It was fairly obvious that management was resistant to transformation: in all the cases the demographics of top management remained largely unchanged, i.e. white and male. And because management resisted transformation processes, its attitudes remained largely untransformed. As the following two employees at LSAM pointed out:

I think our management team apart from [a particular manager] is 80/20 white. Eighty per cent is lily white ...

I can say with the managers there is a lot of apartheid and that is the reason.

The LSAM environment remained hostile to or unsupportive of transformation, thus scuppering even a theoretically sound diversity and equity intervention.

## Questions

- Discuss the extent to which management resistance was being felt. How does this relate to LSAM's impressive diversity history?
- What factors had led such long-term policies to nevertheless struggle in changing the organisational culture?



# Commercial Organisation (CO)



Based on Masters thesis by  
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## Introduction

Commercial Organisation (CO) is principally involved in the supply and maintenance of air traffic and navigation services, and operates in South Africa's ground space and adjacent oceanic airspace. The company operates in centres throughout the country: Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, Nelspruit and Pilanesberg, amongst others. It was established as a state-owned, limited-liability company but later evolved into a commercial organisation. Because of the nature of its work, it retains links with the state in order to respond to economic regulations and set service and safety standards. A normal board/shareholder relationship applies between the CO board of directors and the state shareholder, which is the Minister of Transport.

CO's other operations include the supply of aeronautical information services, technical maintenance and aerodrome services, along with the training of registered air traffic controllers (ATCs) and avionic technical staff. Its influence extends to numerous roles that are of critical importance to the air transportation industry in southern Africa: aeronautical consultancy, information and communication services, search and rescue and aviation site surveillance. CO participates in the development of integrated, world-class air traffic control systems across Africa. SADC

members are focused on the feasibility of establishing a regional upper airspace control centre (UACC), and CO had participated in preparing, securing, funding and executing a detailed study of this proposal, which was approved in principle by the Southern African Transport and Communication Commission (SATCC) committee of ministers.

Air traffic services are constantly evolving in response to global technology. In its Aviation Training Academy (ATA), CO conducts rigorous training and mentoring to ensure that employees remain loyal and productive and are capable of meeting the high safety standards demanded by the industry. Constant investment in training, not only for CO, but also for their partners in the southern African region, has resulted in the Academy catering for the training needs of 27 countries.

In a typical career at CO, an employee starts as an ATSA (air traffic services assistant) trainee, becomes a qualified ATSA and then an ATC before the final promotion to principal ATC. Global competitiveness ensures a constant and increasing demand for ATC staff, prompting CO to recruit and train skilled ATCs from the South African Air Force. CO was unusual in that the greater part of its workforce consisted of highly skilled ATC professionals, with a large proportion of semi-skilled staff performing supporting duties (i.e. ATSAs preparing to become qualified ATCs). CO had also progressed well with the challenge of turning unskilled staff into semi-skilled staff.

Prompted by a request by the Department of Transport that all organisations operating under its authority change their job-level reporting, CO had recently changed their grading levels. In addition, CO had been focusing on correcting job levels in order to rectify the race and gender profile of its 716 employees. The racial profile had been steadily improving: at each airport, equity appointments increased according to geographical demographics, i.e. black African numbers increased in Johannesburg, coloured in Cape Town, and black African and Indian in Durban. In total, black African appointments saw the highest increase. While staff terminations were predominantly white, the recruitment of white males for semi-skilled and skilled/junior management categories as well as qualified professionals was still proportionately high – this was due to the long time it takes to train new ATCs, as well as the need to recruit already-qualified ATCs, many of whom were white, to fulfil the operational requirements dictated by international aviation law.

Female representation was distinctly lower than male representation in almost all categories except the “semi-skilled” category. At the time of the study, however, representation of women in top management had increased considerably, and female staff numbers in this level were only marginally lower than their male counterparts.

The top management profile had become more equitable in terms of race and gender. The lowest increase in representivity was seen by female black African staff in the skilled technical, academically qualified or junior management categories. Promotions had significantly favoured male candidates, but promotions for semi-skilled black African women had increased, hopefully in an attempt to develop these employees for future promotions at higher levels.

Resignations were worryingly high, possibly indicating an unhealthy corporate culture. Remuneration, lack of development opportunities, communication problems, the working environment, conditions of employment and the relationship with management were all given as reasons for termination. The problem was compounded by many ATCs leaving to work in foreign countries – particularly for bigger pay cheques in the Middle East. The CEO indicated that it was impossible for CO to compete with the operational salaries of the Middle East, although it did appear that CO was underpaying certain job levels. In order to be an employer of choice, the CEO had ordered a review of salaries to elevate certain job categories to the national median.

In general there was no race or gender significance to be drawn from the statistics about disciplinary action, suggesting that they were executed in a fair, non-discriminating manner.

## Organisational environment

This study focused on the Johannesburg region that made up the majority of the staff compliment, namely 350. It was apparent here that the majority of CO employees did not identify with CO as a company, and most were not particularly happy in the company. Although many employees (especially ATCs) loved their jobs, the company itself tended not to imbue a sense of pride.

CO's operations were structured as a series of quite distinct silos, which bred separation, stereotyping and a pecking order: senior managers

tended to dominate and were perceived as autocratic; middle managers were perceived as not standing up to them and not taking sufficient responsibility and accountability; ATCs were seen as aggressive (even though they tended to lack high levels of personalised power); and ATCs tended to see ATSAs as lazy and disinterested. The problem was compounded by very different power styles in the occupational hierarchy: the majority of senior managers practised “heroic management” (high levels of personalised power) whereas personal power levels were generally low in the rest of the organisation. There were high levels of affiliation (and hence, low levels of assertiveness) amongst many technical, admin and AIM (aeronautical information management) employees. Because of perceptions of senior managers and ATCs as aggressive and arrogant, many employees took on the role of powerless victims, a condition known as “learned helplessness”. Some ATCs were individualistic perfectionists, and found working with staff in the other silos frustrating. Some senior managers were struggling to change from an autocratic style of management and had thus adopted a chameleon style. There was also a strong perception that ATSAs’ jobs had been reduced to the extent that they spent long and frustrating hours of boredom, and many ATSAs readily admitted that they felt apathetic and demotivated.

An external diversity consultant identified that ATCs were mainly orientated around two generations. Older-generation ATCs (Generation 1) were more akin to the traditional workplace. However, a large number of new-generation ATCs (Generation 3), who were defined by their personal ambition, were struggling with the low levels of personalised power in their positions in the workplace. These staff tended to spend a great deal of time talking about their problems amongst their peer groups, but were unwilling to take responsibility for action plans and monitoring systems or to effect solutions for an inclusive and supportive diversity climate. In doing so, staff cast themselves as victims and revealed a paradoxical vested interest in the status quo. The resultant “blame and shame” culture served to exacerbate already strained relationships.

Gender stereotyping was felt to exist amongst some older-generation ATCs and managers, and the power dynamics between genders was an issue. Regardless of colour, many female staff members agreed that some older white males caused conflict and showed a lack of respect towards women:

Sometimes some of these males develop an issue because they have to listen to a female manager and in other instances it appears that these males do not always know how to react to these situations where I am the senior to make the decision.

There were also suggestions of victimisation and favouritism.

I think victimisation is still a reality. I have seen victimisation, it's not just a fear within. And to solve this who do you go and speak to? 'Cos the other manager is friends with the one that is victimising you ... and they talk to each other. To whom do you go? ... I have a problem with the manager and I go and talk to somebody and he makes a comment, and then I come back and that guy has still got a grudge feeling against me and I have to work with him and the team. If I have a problem with one of my colleagues and speak to the manager about it and that guy finds out, that's also a problem. Tomorrow I have to drive with him to Nelspruit and he is cross with me.

Staff from the ATA had strong feelings about favouritism:

... if you are nice and agreeable you will be fine, but being intelligent, and forceful is not good and some of the instructors, the training manager and the general manager will stick together against you ... your attitude is only right if you lick the right arses.

None of this augured well for teamwork. There was an urgent need to create higher levels of assertiveness and cross-functional teamwork in order to break down the silos and create a common corporate identity.

Information about an organisation's ideology is often found by the artefacts on the premises (Levin, 2000), and CO's physical environment confirmed the entrenched culture: while the financial department, the ATA and ATC had open-plan layouts, all other areas were divided into offices. The operational and technical staff at the Johannesburg ATS centre had separate tearooms. There was an evident distinction in dress code as well: ATS staff wore casual clothes, while head office staff's dress code was smart. Many of CO's offices displayed pictures of aircraft and aeronautical equipment, as well as the vision and mission statement, but there

were no photos portraying employees having fun, working in teams or taking pride in their jobs. The exception was head office, which displayed photographs of management having fun at various team-building events. The operational certificates and photos of equipment that were displayed also seemed rather removed from the direct experience of employees.

## The intervention

An external diversity consultant was appointed and initially conducted eight focus groups in Johannesburg and Cape Town to determine CO's organisational culture and identify the specific facets of diversity that needed attention. The consultant presented her diversity management approach to CO's executive management and backed it up with numerous references to relevant academics and authors. After clearly communicating her point of departure, the consultant conducted an in-depth workshop with senior management on their transformation aims.

In response, executive management recognised the importance of developing a business case for managing diversity that was aligned with company strategy, and the result was a new vision, mission and statement of strategic imperatives. Senior management released a document entitled "Towards a business case for diversity in [CO]" in which they argued that:

the effective management of diversity would help secure our future by: taking advantage of the widest pool of talent available; ensuring the productivity of this talent; improving staff loyalty, morale and retention; giving a multiplicity of perspectives; ensuring a productive, efficient organisation; and finding new market opportunities, particularly to meet our regional strategy.

The following steps were decided upon:

definition and clear communication of the business case for diversity in CO; development of a monitoring and performance-management system for diversity management; development and approval of departmental diversity action plans; development and agreement of individual action plans; and monitoring and perfor-

mance management of departmental and individual action plans to create a sustainable and improved service delivery capability.

An overarching diversity management policy reinforced the business case for diversity and recognised that the basis of an effective people-management culture was a belief in the basic equality and dignity of all people, irrespective of their position in the company, their race, gender, physical or mental ability, wealth, sexual, orientation and so on. This was underscored by a respect for individuals and an understanding of the negative consequences of stereotyping. The policy also expressed management's belief that most individuals, when managed and developed effectively, had a great deal to offer and were the most important factor in determining CO's success, which would in turn not only increase productivity, but also improve the interface with customers, suppliers, stakeholders and the broader community.

The policy emphasised that diversity management would receive high priority in CO's activities and recognised varying tiers of responsibility for CO staff. The CEO had to demonstrate personal commitment to transformation as a key strategic objective and to monitor the progress of subordinates and departments, as well as ensuring the effectiveness of the appraisal system. Line managers had to ensure that their departments' objectives were aligned with the overall business strategy and were obliged to communicate and reinforce their commitment towards the business case for transformation. CO's executive managers had similar responsibilities, but in addition they had to develop and implement a workforce plan with particular attention to transformation (including targets). Executive and line managers were required to work on their own strengths and weaknesses as identified by themselves, their superiors, peers and subordinates. The responsibility of non-managerial staff was to understand the transformation process, and to continue the process of self-development. Furthermore, it was expected that staff develop positive expectations and attitudes towards people development, consciously avoid and discourage stereotyping and to communicate in an adult-to-adult manner at all times. Commitment was required for raising transformation-related issues in an open and constructive way and for finding and implementing solutions. It was the responsibility of all employees to develop competence in diversity management – improved diversity competence would be an important criterion for promotion.

Four key focus areas were identified as part of the broad transformation exercise: people development, career development, performance management, and EE and BEE.

To improve its capacity in people development, CO undertook to assist employees to study (both financially and in terms of leave), provided that the qualification could be of use at CO. A Training and Development Policy stated that the development of all staff had to be conducted in a structured, transparent manner to ensure fairness in a system where people were grown to their full potential. Special focus was placed on the development of previously disadvantaged individuals, but a career development plan (CDP) had to be drawn up and managed for each employee. A mentorship/coaching process was implemented to facilitate this development.

As part of the people-development initiative, new staff were invited to an induction meeting, during which relevant policies – amongst them the sexual harassment policy – were introduced. CO also had in place a staff retention and exit policy which stated that EE imperatives may result in the reduction of staff or employment of new staff. In the policy, CO made provision for staff who may be permanently ill but had been refused medical boarding – indicating that CO recognised their responsibility for supporting staff affected by HIV-related illnesses.

Career Development overlapped with many of the areas of People Development, but in addition it focused on the role of EE in succession planning. Under this directive, CO also established a Training and Development Committee which aimed to identify the strategic training objectives for the company and had the responsibility of consulting with employees on training needs, along with sourcing trainers, and recording and monitoring training progress.

Performance management at CO was enhanced with a performance incentive scheme. In response to an earlier system that had been based on performance assessment, CO shifted focus to a performance management based on CO's key strategic objectives, individual departments' objectives and employees' job descriptions. In addition, staff could voluntarily present their manager with individual change objectives that would add to the company's performance. COs aimed to motivate 100% of employees to participate in this incentive scheme, which had a bearing on bonuses. Although a General Staff Incentive Scheme was in place, the policy failed to explain the manager's responsibility in assisting employees to improve



on personal performance and employees appeared to be left to their own devices for achieving team and individual objectives.

In terms of its management of EE and other aspects of BEE, CO stated its commitment to the EE Act as well as its internal goals and timetables. An EE forum was established to execute CO's EE Plan. The HR executive manager was chairperson and a member from each occupational grouping had to be nominated and voted in by employees. A representative from Solidarity as the recognised union and a representative from each race made up the complement of permanent members; each member would receive training and hold office for two years. To assess CO's compliance with the EE Act, the forum had to approve audits on workforce composition, policies and procedures, income differentials and attitudes and perceptions. Audits had to be completed for each department on an annual basis, based on which the forum had to make recommendations. The forum had to meet on a monthly basis and these minutes had to be distributed via notice boards within a week. While the forum had no power to implement discipline or penalties, it had a responsibility to channel equity grievances.

In terms of BEE, CO was aligned with the guidelines for state enterprises and focused on preferential procurement to ensure that they empowered BEE companies that met their performance criteria.

Before the onset of the intervention, the CEO informed all personnel of CO's intended transformation by means of a personal letter. The letter stated that the responsibility for successful transformation and diversity competence rested with all personnel, and that diversity competence would form part of future assessments and promotion criteria.

Located in this in-depth transformation landscape, four diversity interventions were named:

- departmental diversity workshops, which were designed to formulate departmental and well as individual action plans;
- a diversity steering committee with the aim to regularly monitoring the diversity climate;
- an external audit focused on assessing managers' diversity competence;
- and the integration of diversity into CO's broader people-development strategy.

The process began with eight focus groups to determine the major diversity and cultural trends within CO and to assist the diversity consultant in adjusting the workshops towards these trends. Subsequently, 42 diversity workshops were conducted. The accredited UPSIDE (Unleashing Potential – Skills in diversity and equity) workshop was used as it had the benefit not only of being formally recognised by government, but also that managerial staff would be motivated to participate in order to gain credits towards other formal managerial studies. All employees attended at least one workshop and some workshop groups included managers along with other staff. Follow-up workshops were provided for departments which requested more guidance with internal issues or for compiling their action plans.

In addition to developing the individual and departmental diversity action plans, the workshops aimed to: develop an understanding amongst staff of what diversity is and how it makes business sense to manage diversity effectively; provide opportunities for self-assessment and the development of practical skills; explain how diversity management and AA form the basis of effective EE and how related skills underpin all communication in the work environment; and provide tools to continue the discussion around diversity and regularly monitor the diversity climate.

The main focus was to encourage the realisation that people differ, but that this awareness should not be used to the detriment of others. Because research demonstrates that people use these differences to categorise people into in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel, 1972), the workshop included a video of Jane Elliot's famous eye-colour experiment, which illustrates people's ability to create different realities through categorisation (Maier, 2002). In addition, group discussions were held based on different scenarios in which staff could explore their own preconceived ideas and work situations. In addition, a power management inventory (PMI) had to be completed by each individual in order to determine his or her personal diversity-management style. Finally, the importance of personal diversity competence (growing an assertive power style) in the organisational environment was discussed as a way of encouraging organisational growth.

After the diversity workshops, most departments presented their diversity action plans to the Employment Equity Forum (EEF), and these were being implemented and monitored. These departments were required to present a progress report to the EEF on an annual basis.

In addition to the workshops, a diversity steering committee was appointed to ensure the alignment, transparency and buy-in of all stakeholders through a focused process towards transformation. The intention was for them to meet quarterly to report on transformation progress and discuss challenges. Permanent members were the CEO, the chief operating officer, the chief financial officer and the GM of HR, as well as the diversity facilitator. A diversity facilitator took charge of the day-to-day issues and practical considerations of the transformation process, but responsibility for formulation, communication, monitoring and evaluation of the diversity strategy rested with the CEO.

A diversity audit was conducted on 61 managers, and employees received feedback on the audit results for their respective managers. Managers were required to develop action plans to address the areas that required improvement.

Finally, diversity management was incorporated into the performance management and evaluation of all staff. However, it appeared that this section of individual performance evaluations had frequently not been performed. A performance evaluation that included diversity competence/management was under revision.

## Evaluation

Given the depth of their engagement with diversity, CO believed that their interventions could only be successful. Unfortunately, however, the interventions were subject to a series of events that were not all under CO's control. Shortly after all 42 workshops were completed, the CEO resigned and a new CEO, who had not been involved in the earlier strategic exercises, took over the reins. The completion of the diversity workshops also meant the end of the external diversity consultant's contract, which she did not want renewed, and so a new full-time external consultant was appointed in her place. In addition, a hierarchy shuffle led to five changes to a total of seven senior managers. While awareness about diversity may have improved amongst CO's employees, the real test of the company's success would be if the new CO leadership would be able to embrace and leverage the workforce's diverse demographics as was intended in the original transformation exercises.

The diversity facilitator who conducted the workshops felt that many of the delegates, including some senior managers, had shown real interest and commitment, although some senior managers had originally been sceptical about the transformation process. Interviews were held with employees to ascertain their own feelings about the workshops, and it appeared that the workshops had had a significant positive effect on those who were open to learning about diversity. The Jane Elliot video on stereotyping had a significant effect on numerous employees, and most felt that their perceptions towards other people had changed as a result. As one employee said:

For me, racial issues were brought into the picture, stereotypes, stereotypes. I found it helped me a lot and highlighted a lot of perspectives that people get of each other, and that in many cases it was incorrect. I'll never forget the blue colour, brown colour, what was that? It pretty much proved to us, you know, that perceptions, what a person think of another. A person must not make the mistake of stereotyping. It helped a lot in giving a person a fair chance.

A white female employee admitted that the workshop she attended made her realise the unfairness of her comment towards a black co-worker's eating habits and enabled her to change her attitude:

I changed in myself, starting asking questions: why like this, why like that? Then after a while I would see things in [my colleague] and ask him: "Hey [colleague's name], why are like this today?", and we started talking and we don't bottle up. I've learned it's about communication, it's communication. If we don't communicate more frequently, if I said something to you, um, a comment that you didn't like, I'd like you to call me around and say: "Hey, V, that was a bit harsh," then we talk, then we solve it, man to man. In future, I know if I talk I know what's the limit, I know where's the red tape.

Some employees found workshops to be useful as opportunities to get to know people in the group and their different backgrounds. One employee was interested to hear that most people in his group had family priorities that they rated more important than anything job-related. Following the

workshops, one department had a few informal sessions thereafter where staff actively engaged in learning how to greet others in all the different languages represented there. Another department's staff compiled a code of conduct, got a mascot for their diversity drive and laminated the code for use as a continuous pocket reminder for each individual.

Despite the generally positive remarks by most staff, the workshops had been a traumatic experience for some. One white woman felt she had been forced to "defend the white race". A black African individual experienced a racist remark by a white colleague which had a lingering negative impact on her experience at work as well as her own creativity and productivity:

But on some things that were said, they also had a negative impact on other people like myself for example. Uhm, the fact that, uhm, the fact that black people learn slow, that they are not as competent, I have to be honest it haunted me for about four months, because there were situations where I could give my input by showing initiative, you know in the work environment you don't only do what you are told to do – you can foresee this will be a problem tomorrow – let me be creative and solve it now. But you know living with that feeling that I'm not as creative as other people, you know it, you know, it really gets you into a situation where you do what you're expected to do, you don't see the importance to show initiative ... I even discussed it with other people, this workshop brought some negativity because I really felt very bad after that. It was just an attack, a way of attacking other races. It shows a lack of respect to other people, I remember another remark, I would not say who made that remark, but he said, he said, "These people, these people cannot file flight plans because they are [only] capable of cutting wood."

Such detrimental experiences confirm the importance of having experienced external consultants who are able to deal with and guide such scenarios. Both this employee and the colleague who had made the remark might have benefitted from counselling (and certainly some form of action might have been necessary for the racist colleague).

A substantial number of employees felt the workshops were just "people speaking about their own experiences" and that not enough time

was spent on talking about discrimination and racism. A black African employee said:

... there is too much of a generalisation of colour and race issues. White people were lied to; because my dad is a racist, it is not just white hating black but racism between Zulus, Xhosas and Tswanas. A far greater problem within the company was the underlying phenomenon: Let's not say it in front of so and so.

Worryingly, some technical and administrative staff were reluctant to talk about issues raised in the workshops for fear of victimisation. A few employees could not remember what took place at the workshops.

In general it appeared that diversity had developed a presence in the company after the workshops:

Whether it's in a joking manner or if people are taking it seriously ... diversity is there now, it's a word now, every day.

Nevertheless, while the corporate culture had appeared to become more inclusive, there was a lingering misperception that diversity was about making black Africans feel at home:

... the troubles and problems of before were more targeted at the African people, they are the ones that have to be uplifted by this, so they must actually give us comment on how the guys have been doing. I personally have seen a remarkable change in all my colleagues from old to young; people are accepting African people and socialising with them, they are understanding, sometimes they don't agree but, I mean, people are like that, but I have seen a great improvement.

Specific groups had noticed a change in their own working environments as they and their colleagues developed a greater sense of pride in what they were doing. Other employees, however, observed that the change had lasted only a short period of time, and some still believed that much of it was just window dressing "because people's behaviour would change under pressure, when they become emotional or angry, and soon their background comes out again".

Interestingly, a group of younger employees suggested that organisational hierarchy was a more significant issue than race at CO. A group of junior staff added that there were no diversity issues within their group, more personality differences:

The workshops created tolerance and the evidence was visible within our section, but on corporate level there was no change.

These employees felt that most staff did not practice what they had learnt, and that disrespect towards more junior members of staff (ATSAs and AIM staff) occurred because “Controllers think they can get away with everything”. They felt that the individual had to be respected and not the position or skill/qualification, and noted that even ATSAs that became ATCs did not mingle with other ATSAs after their promotion because: “they were already brainwashed on validation”. The comments from younger staff supported the generational trend that was identified by the consultant: these youngsters had grown up in an environment where diversity was more of a reality.

A significant point of discussion was that employees felt that the stipulated company values of trust, respect, teamwork and participation were not yet a common binding factor. It was interpreted by another employee that managers did not “practice what you preach”. This became a central issue for many employees: senior management was seen as preaching, and middle- and lower-level management was seen as not putting these values into practice.

There were a flood of suggestions for future workshops or for how the diversity interventions should be framed. One of the shortcomings of the intervention was that workshops were held over a period of 18 months, resulting in some staff being excited about the changes in diversity at the same time as the excitement was wearing off for others. Many employees indicated a need for more meaningful engagement: motivational speakers, additional videos on diversity matters, a continuous diversity drive and an open door from management, informal group discussions and an ombudsperson. These suggestions may have been in response to feelings of fear and uncertainty regarding their own diversity competence. The following quote indicated some of the dangers of diversity-awareness training that may leave employees with questions that could damage their own sense of security:

From my point I'd say yes, I've seen them [change] but now there's some barriers I need to sort of like deal with, like when I open myself to one part – I know what is diversity now and what diversity should do, but I still got these questions that are sort of like introspection questions that I need to sort out. And there is still fear in there you see, you are not sure of things.

Where fear had entered into the diversity arena, leadership was clearly required. Respondents were unsure about the new CEO's stance on the issue of diversity management, but they also expressed concern regarding the lack of experience and knowledge of the managers. They indicated that they were willing to listen to what managers had to say, but wanted head office to become more involved in the process.

If leadership was no longer communicating interest in participation, it was hardly surprising that the diversity steering committee wasn't either. Since its inception, the committee had held only a few meetings. According to the following respondent, the committee was dysfunctional and ineffectual:

This diversity it's now a name but we aren't doing enough as well, we just call it on Wednesday meetings. We got this subject on diversity and, well, I don't know if anybody is too scared to say anything or just to get the meeting over or they don't know what to say ... it's like the same as managers or the head office, we ask them to be more involved. Why don't they come or we get somebody to speak a little bit on or to give us a seminar; some people say we should get a motivational speaker to talk about diversity.

Communication about diversity had become uncertain. Although the EE forum constitution clearly stated that it would handle all diversity and EE concerns, none of the respondents were aware of any formal mechanism in place to raise concerns. One respondent mentioned: "I am sure there is something in place, but I am not sure what it was".

The uncertainty had spread to matters of direct concern for diversity. Victimisation by managers and colleagues was still being reported, and staff reported that management was not responsive to their queries about career plans and development. Worryingly, in their individual capacities, managers were communicating vastly different perspectives on these



issues. In response, the committee agreed that a single transformation perspective be achieved – this was achieved at a follow-up meeting. It was then agreed by the diversity steering committee that communication around transformation and diversity would need to be reintroduced.

While there had initially been a comprehensive plan, problems later developed with monitoring. According to an employee:

We actually have a diversity plan which has been submitted probably two years ago already. I don't, we really, actually have got a specific set of targets although we've got the plan in action, we try to live the plan on a daily basis. So we don't really measure ourselves to say we have achieved a certain few things.

In confirmation of these findings, the audit showed that there was a long way to go before managers reached workable levels of competence in diversity. On the whole, employees required more honest, frequent feedback, since managers generally did not tell them when they had done something wrong, and neither had they assisted them to improve. Most employees did not feel that their managers did enough to facilitate employees' career progression. Staff also felt that they did not get enough praise. In some environments employees felt that their managers created a demotivating environment. Some managers also needed to work on improving understanding of their own shortcomings in relation to diversity management.

## Conclusion

CO was structured as a series of distinct silos, which encouraged division amongst employees and, in the worse cases, suspicion, victimisation and experiences of racism and sexist behaviour. Although CO was in desperate need of instilling a sense of pride in its employees, at no point did the diversity intervention focus on finding a unifying set of values or other common denominator that embraced all CO employees. Instead, workshops focused on the negative effects of stereotypes – which in some cases backfired when employees struggled to incorporate these ideas into a culture that was defined by hostility and antagonism between certain groups.

On a strategic level, however, CO had gone beyond EE to managing diversity and had instituted a comprehensive and far-reaching set of strategies for dealing with diversity. Unfortunately, changes in management had led to a breakdown in the process and after the initial diversity workshops, the process came to a virtual standstill. The diversity intervention created an initial awareness in employees about CO's diversity potential. However, there was a need to keep the process evolving. More diversity training/discussions/information sessions were needed to build on the training and develop a broad definition of diversity. Perhaps a greater emphasis on the individual action plans could have sparked a conscious effort on the part of CO employees to make the process work.

In theory, CO's diversity intervention was located within the key focus areas of personal and career development, people management and EE. Nevertheless, one of the reasons for CO not enjoying the full benefit of its diversity potential was because staff were not presented with challenging opportunities for personal development – not involving staff in the development and implementation of the departmental action plans was a perfect example. On numerous occasions staff mentioned that they wanted a diversity intervention “by the people, for the people”.

Similarly, while the previous performance management system had been adjusted to incorporate diversity management, this fell flat due to the lack of rewards for exemplary managers. Middle and lower level managers showed low levels of buy-in as they had not been involved in the initial strategic process. Despite the initial intention to link diversity competence with performance appraisal, this had not yet been effected. As a result, not complying to diversity management requirements had no consequences and thus condoned the actions of disinterested managers, allowing the continuation of the problem. This impacted, in turn, on their ability to communicate their support of the process: generally, these managers failed to inform staff of the transformation process and to communicate their personal commitment. This reflected on a poor communication strategy within the company as a whole.

As the central link in the diversity chain, the interventions were inhibited by managers whose approaches to diversity revealed a mistrust of the process. Success stories tended to be from those managers who took the criticisms of the diversity audit's results to heart and decided to effect personal change. By contrast, non-responsive managers found the work-

shops to be of a lesser value because they did not buy in to the transformation process or their personal need to change.

A serious factor appeared to have been the lack of personnel training for managers. A significant number of managers had experience in their respective disciplines, but lacked the managerial skill and experience to manage people and, by extension, diversity. Some line managers were not sufficiently equipped to manage conflict and address the issues of discrimination and victimisation. These issues confirmed the importance of continued training after the initial awareness training.

Finally, the consultant played such a significant role in the success of the intervention that it virtually collapsed when she came to the end of her contract. A committed internal driver to manage the process and adjust the strategies was crucial to the process's ongoing success.

# Case Study: CO



Commercial Organisation (CO) was a previously state-owned supplier of air traffic and navigation services, operating in South Africa's ground space and adjacent oceanic airspace. It had later evolved into a commercial organisation, but retained links with the state in order to respond to economic regulations and to set service and safety standards. Thus, the Minister of Transport was a shareholder.

The company operated in a series of distinct silos, which created a strong sense of division and hampered the development of a cohesive corporate culture which could instil a sense of pride in employees. In its absence, staff exhibited high levels of fear and suspicion. Staff feared management, management were suspicious of staff, and colleagues were suspicious of each other:

I think victimisation is still reality. I have seen victimisation – it's not just a fear within. And to solve this, who do go and you speak to, 'cos the other manager is friends with the one that is victimising you ... and they talk to each other.

Race and racism presented as the most salient diversity issue:

He said, he said, "these people, these people cannot file flight plans because they are [only] capable of cutting wood".

This still feels like a white company and I am an outsider.

Gender issues were also apparent. A female respondent said older males struggled with receiving orders from women:

Sometimes some of these males develop an issue because they have to listen to a female manager and in other instances it appears that these males do not always know how to react to these situations where I am the senior to make the decision.

However, it was suggested by younger employees that job levels caused more antagonism, as there were high levels of affiliation in departments but little opportunity for workers in departments to work together.

CO presented a comprehensive engagement with diversity at strategic-business level. After a workshop conducted by a consultant with senior management, the managers released a document entitled “Towards a business case for diversity in [CO]” in which they argued that:

the effective management of diversity would help secure our future by: taking advantage of the widest pool of talent available; ensuring the productivity of this talent; improving staff loyalty, morale and retention; giving a multiplicity of perspectives; ensuring a productive, efficient organisation; and finding new market opportunities, particularly to meet our regional strategy.

The following steps were decided upon:

definition and clear communication of the business case for diversity in CO; development of a monitoring and performance-management system for diversity management; the development and approval of departmental diversity action plans; the development and agreement of individual action plans; and the monitoring and performance management of departmental and individual action plans to create a sustainable and improved service delivery capability.

Significantly, CO did not regard EE as synonymous with diversity management: diversity management was seen as going further than “getting the numbers right” to actively leveraging a diverse workforce for strategic advantage and competitiveness. This strategic imperative was heavily emphasised so that diversity could infiltrate core business activities. Managers decided that diversity competence would determine employees’ career advance in the organisation.

A number of interrelated diversity interventions were implemented at CO. First, 42 diversity workshops were conducted and attended by all employees. These were intended as arenas for devising individual and departmental action plans which would then be presented to the EE forum and senior managers. While some respondents regarded the workshops

as “window-dressing”, others saw an improvement in (especially racial) relations. Many respondents said that a useful space was created for discussion of differences at work; however, others found the experience of the workshops threatening, either because they felt cornered, as in the case of a white woman who felt she had to “defend the white race”, or else because they were subjected to unguarded racist opinions of colleagues. Nevertheless, the workshops led to diversity becoming an everyday word at the workplace and an issue that everybody could grasp.

The racial aspects of the workshops generated a lot of emotion without providing participants with the tools for dealing with it. A black CO employee reported a negative experience due to a racist remark by a white colleague:

... some things that were said, they also had a negative impact on other people like myself, for example – um – the fact that – um – the fact that black people learn slow, that they are not as competent, I have to be honest it haunted me for about four months, because there were situations where I could give my input by showing initiative, you know in the work environment you don't only do what you are told to do ... you can foresee this will be a problem tomorrow, let me be creative and solve it now. But you know living with that feeling that I'm not as creative as other people, you know it really gets you into a situation where you do what you're expected to do, you don't see the importance to show initiative ...

The above quote shows the damage a badly facilitated workshop can wreak. Not only did it “haunt” the respondent, but it started to impact on her contribution and performance at work. Rather than leveraging the diversity she brought to the organisation, she had been silenced.

Second, a diversity steering committee was created to monitor the diversity climate. Although this had started with the appropriate intentions, a lack of commitment by committee members rendered it dysfunctional as time wore on.

Third, an external audit was conducted of the diversity competence of managers. The audit showed that managers at CO had a long way to go to reach workable levels of competence in relation to diversity. Managers were perceived as autocratic and decision-making structures were too hierarchical.

Finally, there was active integration of diversity into the broader people-development strategy.

Despite CO's sophisticated and multilevel intervention, there were problems with monitoring. At CO there was a very clear plan, but according to an employee:

We actually have a diversity plan which has been submitted probably two years ago already. I don't, we really, actually have got a specific set of targets although we've got the plan in action, we try to live the plan on a daily basis. So we don't really measure ourselves to say we have achieved a certain few things.

At CO, top management was committed to transformation and leading from the front. Here the intervention fell flat in its implementation by middle management/professionals. A respondent referred to the need to "practice what you preach". Although this was directed to senior management, middle- and lower-level management were also not putting this "preaching" into practice. Middle management's resistance was evident in their lack of enthusiasm for implementing plans, activities and structures from top management:

Resistance to participate, people even, even with the focus group trying to get people just to take part, they always think, hey, that I can't, maybe I'm going to be put in a position where I will be focused on or looked at or penalised. They don't want to really say I have taken part in a specific project.

The respondent ascribes this to possible fear – clearly leadership was required in this area. However, after a significant change in leadership following the workshops (the CEO resigned), the new leadership had not caught up with the strategic demands required of CO's diversity plan and appeared uninterested in participation. It was not surprising, then, that the committee followed suit and the entire diversity process lost momentum. According to the following respondent, the committee was dysfunctional and ineffectual:

This diversity it's now a name but we aren't doing enough as well, we just call it on Wednesday meetings, we got this subject on diver-

sity and, well, I don't know if anybody is too scared to say anything or just to get the meeting over or they don't know what to say. I think there should actually be ... it's like the same as managers or the head office, we ask them to be more involved. Why don't they come or we get somebody to speak a little bit on or to give us a seminar; some people say we should get a motivational speaker to talk about diversity.

CO had not managed to translate its initially thorough strategic engagement of diversity into interventions that had meaningful impact on its staff. In particular, middle managers had been unable to communicate their support of the process, and after the initial diversity workshops, not much had changed in the organisational culture.

## Questions

- What are some of the ways in which middle managers could have been engaged more fully in the diversity intervention?
- In an already divisive organisational structure, the workshops had served to highlight and emphasise employees' differences, rather than looking at common values that CO employees could share. Discuss this statement with a view to its impact on CO's organisational culture.
- Much of the failure of the intervention is attributed to a change of leadership that occurred after the completion of the workshops. At the same time, the external consultant's contract came to an end and she was not willing to have it extended, so a new full-time external consultant was appointed. What are some of the ways that this situation could have been managed more effectively?





vimeo

Commercial Organisation (CO)

*Interview with Réjane Williams and Ilze Olckers, EMBRACE*

# Large, state-owned commercialised-resources enterprise (Sekupu)



Based on Masters thesis by  
Mmontshi Sumani, supervised  
by Prof Stella Nkomo, Unisa

## Introduction

Sekupu is an integrated oil and gas company with substantial chemical interests. Based in South Africa and with international operations, Sekupu is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and the JSE. Sekupu is the leading provider of liquid fuels in South Africa and a major international producer of chemicals.

Sekupu has more than 25 000 employees all over the world but this study was conducted in one of the functional units based in the Free State – the site comprised mostly scientists and engineers and numbered just over 500 employees.

Sekupu's vision is:

To be a respected global enterprise, harnessing our talents in applying unique, innovative and competitive technologies to excel in selected markets in the fossils' products and related sectors in Southern Africa and worldwide.

In its mission statement Sekupu bound itself to creating an environment in which teams of individuals from diverse backgrounds can grow to their fullest potential, and stated that it would actively implement AA until diversity and equal opportunity were a reality. Diversity was conceptualised by the leadership as a business imperative that could be leveraged to gain competitive advantage – as such, it was integrated into Sekupu’s core business strategy.

An EE policy drove the proactive engagement of diversity at Sekupu. In the EE policy, the role of all stakeholders was clearly defined: the MD of every business unit was accountable for the implementation of EE and AA in that division. The policy also stipulated that the role of diversity managers at each business unit was to facilitate the development of the EE and AA implementation plan, and line managers were responsible for implementing plans within their domain. Supporting policies, such as the recruitment policy, were intended to ensure that diversity was realised throughout the organisation.

In most cases, EE plans of individual business units were aligned to fit with the objectives of Sekupu’s overall EE policy. The EE plan of the unit under review consisted of the numerical targets and strategies to achieve the desired workforce profile. The strategies focused on: developing an inclusive culture; transparent communication on EE matters; utilising a wide recruitment pool; training and development which focused on designated candidates; dealing equitably with gender; staff retention; staff facilities; income differentials; measurable performance management, meaningful job classification, equitable promotions, dispute resolution and dealing with barriers. Nevertheless, for the preceding eight years the unit had no strategies on how to get the numbers right and create an environment that was friendly to minorities. The business unit MD had recently appointed one of his senior managers to implement both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the EE plan in a more organised and measurable fashion.

Sekupu had made good progress in reaching and in some cases exceeding their EE targets. As a result of promotions and recruitment, the company had seen an encouraging increase of black African staff in the professional and middle-management levels. Generally, however, designated groups occupied the lowest levels in the organisational structure, with little representation in the highest management levels. The power dynamic of the organisation had remained stratified according to race

and gender, with white males dominating top positions. At senior-management level there was only one (very recent) appointment of a black African employee, although there was an increasingly significant presence of white females. Nevertheless, this indicates the slow pace of transformation at this level.

Despite its successes, it was of significant concern that Sekupu had failed to retain designated staff, particularly black African women. High levels of resignations and terminations of lower-level designated staff had also impacted on the company's ability to promote suitable candidates internally. As this employee noted:

I am somehow disappointed. We are unable to keep managers from designated groups. It becomes a remuneration game. Salaries get out of proportion. We should get right people at right places. (White manager)

A notable exclusion from any form of diversity attention was the disabled, where there was no representivity. Most employees believed that their division was unsuitable for people with disabilities:

We do not accommodate people with disabilities. (Coloured professional)

They tried, e.g. lifts are wide and there are ramps, but in addition the environment is not suitable for people with disabilities. (White manager)

## Organisational environment

The researcher asked the MD to define the ideal culture for his unit:

The ideal culture is one of: innovation and quality; values based on respect and trust; scientific excellence and individual competence; sharing, networking and teamwork; customer focused; tolerant of risk and failure but with learning and continuous improvement; clear accountability at individual, team and organisational levels; minimum acceptable levels rather than rules; diversity where

appropriate; seeing the total organisation as being important; up, down and peer communication which is culture sensitive; open to collaboration, but respecting confidentiality.

The reality was somewhat different. Employees perceived the culture to be individualistic, results driven, inward focused and conformist.

Individualism was driven by Sekupu's style of performance management, which was based on merit, incentives and forced-ranking processes, which measured individual outputs. These generated feelings of competitiveness which thus resulted in limited sharing and cross-pollination of ideas. The focus on results, particularly the quantity (rather than quality) of results, bred a culture of busyness and pseudo-efficiency, even when projects were not deemed to be optimally effective. This often resulted in employees spending too much time on individual projects and not embracing new ideas because they presented the risk of failure. There were high levels of autonomy provided employees produced results, but the pressure for results also limited the time available for people development.

The culture was also experienced as being exclusive and inward focused. There was limited collaboration and cross-pollination between management and the rest of the staff, as well as black African staff and those of other races. Conformity was also evident, with staff displaying little openly challenging behaviour. Many employees expressed feelings of detachment from constructively participating in group processes.

The reality of this culture of division was evident during the lunch break, when it was observed that people grouped themselves according to their race. While job categories were a site of significant separation, employees felt that race was still the most significant divisive factor:

It is not a level thing, it is cultural and not related to hierarchy. Even if you are at a lower level you can approach a person at a higher level which is not the case with blacks. (Black African manager)

They alienate themselves, people form their own cliques. (White manager)

Birds of the same feather flock together. (Coloured professional)

Nearly 70% of respondents felt that designated employees struggled to fit into the existing culture:

There is a big barrier to get into networks. If we did not have a large group of Afrikaans-speaking colleagues it would be better. (Black African manager)

It is difficult fitting in as an outsider since they have an established culture unless if you assimilate. (Coloured professional)

We do not fit in this culture. Backbiting and crap. Big white male culture! There are cliques. (White professional)

It is difficult, at tea breaks black colleagues are not there. They take tea into their offices. (Indian professional)

The isolation and alienation of certain categories of employees was disturbing, although there was an indication that things had improved:

It is much better compared to the past. Now we can talk to them. (Black African professional)

Among certain races, gender seemed not to have been a divisive element.

It is clear from the employees' responses that the MD's ideal organisational culture is still the stuff of dreams. Instead, he needed to embark on a serious culture change if the retention and promotion of designated employees was to be realised.

## The intervention

The senior manager heading diversity named the Employment Equity Consultative Forum (EECF) as the main diversity intervention. Although he admitted that there were some areas of difficulty, he judged the intervention as being a success overall.

The EECF was given the responsibility of monitoring (and submitting proposals) towards the proper establishment and execution of diversity procedures. These included processes that directly impacted

Sekupu employees, such as restructuring, new appointments and inter-company transferrals, promotions, performance incentives and changes to other people-management systems. In particular, the EECF monitored and gave advice to management on EE plans and numerical targets. As an advisory body, EECF was the link between Sekupu and employees, and thus the EECF chairperson was to attend management committee meetings (as far as appropriate). The forum was tasked with informing employees about the state of diversity management and sensitising and educating personnel on diversity management and related issues while acting as a sounding board to management on EE issues.

EECF members were elected by the people for the people, according to legislation. The forum consisted of 10 members and the composition of the EECF was primarily based on race and gender, with both management and HR represented. The forum held meetings once a month. Permanent issues on the agenda included management feedback on agreed EE/diversity activities, EE statistics, employee and governance issues, and resignations and appointments. Minutes were distributed across the company for review by all stakeholders. Speakers were organised from time to time to share their knowledge on specific diversity issues, for example, the barriers faced by women in the corporate sector.

In addition to the EECF, ongoing management activities aimed to ensure EE was effectively implemented. These activities included identifying people from designated groups for specialised training and encouraging career mentorship and exposing two senior people from the designated group to senior management's activities. Transparency was encouraged in dealing with merit and remuneration and EE was included in the incentive bonus scheme.

Management also attended a one-day diversity workshop titled "Leadership advantage through diversity". The training focused on communication, building, leading and managing the performance of a diverse team and managing diversity in a changing business environment. The intention was to roll out this training to other employees.

## Success of the intervention

Employees were interviewed in order to ascertain their experiences of the interventions. Most stakeholders questioned the EECF's powers to

effectively drive the EE process. It seemed that despite the forum's many responsibilities, they were still focused mainly on monitoring EE, and were not effective in changing or encouraging the process:

To some extent the [unit] is trying to comply but some "people" perceive African people as not having the right skills and regard complying as window dressing and the EECF only monitors with no real powers. (Black African professional)

A wish was expressed that the EECF be given "real" power to deal with managers who were perceived as resistant to change.

Black African staff were seen as the most active participants on the EECF, since they are mostly affected by the perceived injustices. Some employees believed that the MD was only participating because he had to in order to comply with the EE Act. The suggestion was that if the MD "walked the talk", the effort would filter throughout the organisation.

A large 76% of interviewed employees perceived problems with EE in Sekupu. A high 88% thought training and development was not being implemented adequately. According to respondents, managers were not trained in understanding and valuing similarities and differences among employees, and this was breeding distrust:

I have lack of trust on line managers, i.e. they are not honest on performance. I feel like just a pair of hands. I have been victimised for talking and now I internalise the feeling of not being good enough. If I do not perform, why don't they fire me? (Coloured professional)

Another problem included the perception of white staff that black Africans were promoted without the necessary experience:

They promote African people to higher levels without equipping them. I am not against fast tracking but people are promoted to incompetency. (White professional)

Black African managers said that black African staff were never sent to represent the company, a system that was confirmed by employees:



Yes, if we have to deal with customers, there is a need to send people by race. (White professional)

The following manager described his own experience, which he ascribed to the fact that black African people were not trusted:

The one issue I have a problem with is that when it comes to the outside world, there is a tendency not to send Africans as representatives of the company; maybe it is fear that the guys could be poached, or may embarrass the company. Is it a lack of trust? There is that unwillingness to send Africans to outside forums even in areas where it could make sense and the EECF has no powers over this. On paper there appears to be commitment but the actions are not supportive. When it comes to appointing people EE does not get consideration. (Black African manager)

Most employees did, however, believe that EE had brought some opportunities for the company, although there were varying degrees of enthusiasm:

The only opportunity that has been realised is good relationship between the government and the [unit]. (Black African skilled technician)

Yes, the emphasis has shifted a lot to people management instead of asset management. Getting new ideas through EECF as a representative body of employees and being better citizens in understanding diversity. (White professional EECF member)

Diversity makes the [unit] stronger in terms of ideas and opportunities. (Indian professional EECF member)

It is the improvement in diversity which enhanced innovation and productivity. (White manager)

Where EE was not seen in as positive a light, most employees attributed it to line managers not being held accountable for EE in their sections:

In some ways they are told but there are no consequences. (White line manager)

In terms of communication, most employees received regular communication about the EECF and all were happy with the EECF's communication of diversity issues. Nevertheless, only a third of the respondents understood how recruitment was carried out in terms of EE. There were wildly differing views on the recruitment of designated employees, as the following comments show:

There is no special effort to find suitable black candidates. (Black African skilled technician)

We do interview black people even if they did not meet the initial standards. (White manager)

They do select designated candidates to fulfil the numbers. (Coloured professional).

While the vast majority of respondents were aware of the training and development philosophy, they believed it was not properly implemented:

We do have the programme but the way it is managed is wrong. It is done very haphazardly, it is left to the employees. There should be a 50/50 involvement between line manager and an employee that matches the career aspirations. (Black African manager)

An important factor in this lack of adequate implementation was the perception of over half the employees that managers were not trained in understanding, valuing and utilising the similarities and differences that existed among diverse employees:

You must be aware that, specifically amongst black employees at this [unit], there is a rife and prevalent sentiment that middle managers are a stumbling block, when it comes to matters related to employment equity and affirmative action. It is also a widespread view that middle managers are the reason behind the slow progress of many of their black subordinates; either unconsciously

or deliberately. For years now, there has been a call to proactively sensitise and change the mindset within this layer of management. Accordingly, this workshop was one of the interventions that senior management has decided to apply in reaction to that sentiment.

My hope is that each one of us, who participated in this exercise, became even more aware of the seriousness of the role that they play, and that individually, we all are agents of change. Furthermore, I am hopeful that it became at least one of your [managers'] resolves to contribute positively towards improving and advancing the careers of black and women employees under your leadership. It is a combination of each small contribution by those in key positions, such as yourselves, that will result in positive and tangible change in the work life of many amongst us, who happen to be different from you and in the minority. (Black African professional)

There was a need for line managers to apply what they were learning in their training workshops.

All respondents agreed that mentoring was taking place in the company. Although mentoring was one of the EECF's key focus areas for designated members, many employees did not have mentors or found that the mentoring programme did not work for them:

They do encourage it but it is not governed properly. (Coloured professional)

Yes, but I have never participated. (Black African professional)

An idea was put forward by an EECF member that white men were benefitting from informal mentoring since they identified best with the (mostly white) bosses.

Key to the way the intervention was not producing adequate results was the lack of commitment by managers in actively driving the process. Diversity was seen as a "soft issue" and was easily relegated to being the "last thing in their minds", to be dealt with after the real work.

## Conclusion

Despite the unit at Sekupu making the business case for diversity, implementation of the strategy had broken down and had resulted in little change in the corporate culture beyond a marginal increase in representivity. In particular, the unit had struggled to retain designated employees since the environment was not welcoming to this group. Management had little idea about what managing diversity meant and it was often confused with valuing diversity. In addition, the business imperative had not been clearly communicated in the EE plan for the benefit of ordinary employees. As a result, the process devolved into just being about “getting numbers right” and building good relations with the government.

Some EECF members did not even know that the EE plan existed. Terms had also not been defined. In a strategy document that stated that Sekupu aimed to promote their ability in managing diverse teams, there was no mention of race and gender – it is possible that this was referring to skills diversity instead of demographics. It was recommended that the unit embark on a serious diversity awareness campaign and aligns itself with Sekupu’s overall EE policy. It was also recommended that a proper gap analysis should be conducted to determine what is really causing the unhappiness, especially from the designated groups.

Some factors needed serious reconsideration if diversity and equity were to be successfully realised in the company. The first aspect that needed to be addressed on a strategic level was the general sense of compulsion rather than commitment to the business case (Human 2005). A lack of commitment from top management was perceived by most respondents and explained the uneven achievement of EE targets. Employees felt Sekupu was playing a numbers game which it was unable to win as long as it kept losing the people it hired. One senior white male manager said it was difficult to retain black Africans since other companies were paying higher salaries. According to Human (2005), however, problems with retention are generally not so much the result of “job-hopping” by black African professionals or poaching by organisations, but rather issues around career-development opportunities and the creation of an inclusive and supportive diversity climate.

Indeed, respondents from the designated groups felt that the work environment was unfriendly for those outside of the “old boys’ club” with the result that they felt alienated. Serious stereotypes existed in the company

that black Africans were not competent, a response by white employees that reflected social identity theory in the forms of social cliques (Nkomo and Steward 2006).

In this sense, Sekupu needed to do some serious introspection. One of the respondents mentioned that a cultural awareness programme had been rolled out the previous year. But according to Human (2005), an attempt to “understand black people” can introduce stereotypes by extolling the difference between “African” culture and that of the “West”. In response to this kind of intervention at Sekupu, one of the interviewees questioned why employees’ differences should be emphasised in the aim towards integration.

What the company was failing to realise was that diversity awareness first needs to break through the negative expectations created by history and reinforced by apartheid (Human 2005). Furthermore, there are possible unintentional consequences of “cultural” awareness programmes that reinforce difference and negativity, sharpening the distinctions in people’s minds between “us” and “them” (ibid.). This company had a serious problem when it came to the division among employees.

The company was also failing to recognise that while managers are selected on technical skills, their leadership and managerial skills were often lacking, resulting in managers failing to realise that employees needed to be given opportunities, support and training for maximum output. It was these managers that were causing employee unhappiness, especially for those in the minority.

Human (2005) proposes that there must be a link between diversity, assertiveness, conflict management and performance feedback, and that where that link is not established, performance management is employed in an autocratic or passive manner. At Sekupu, this had become part of a vicious cycle in which designated groups consistently received lower merits than their white male counterparts, with this “relative poor performance” leading to frustration, feelings of exclusion, antagonism and demotivation. Effective communication skills on the part of line managers would increase productivity by reducing stress and increasing the motivation and commitment of vulnerable employees.

Although this unit had not shown significant results in EE, there was indication from management that managing diversity was understood as not only about headcount. The need to create an inclusive and supportive culture which motivates and retains a diversity of employees had been

recognised. What was left was for management to formally address diversity in documents over and above their EE strategy and define exactly their expected outcomes and the processes they needed to achieve the desired results. Moreover, middle managers needed to be engaged more fully so that they would cooperate and drive the process forward.

# Case study: Sekupu



At a large, state-owned commercialised-resources enterprise (Sekupu), diversity was seen as a business imperative for attaining competitive advantage and was therefore integrated into the core business strategy. The mission stated that the company aspired to having teams of people from diverse backgrounds, skills and needs who grew to their full potential, and that development and empowerment would happen with a view to meeting “agreed business objectives”.

The EE policy stated that a diverse workforce was a competitive advantage in a multicultural and diverse market place. The EE plan was seven years old but did not have any strategies attached to it. In it, Sekupu committed itself to implementing AA until “diversity and equal opportunity is a reality”. The plan focused on achieving numerical targets; promoting an inclusive culture; having open communication; recruiting widely; training members of designated groups to enable promotion; treating “all sexes” fairly; retaining members of designated groups; and addressing barriers. Thus, the focus of Sekupu’s engagement was on EE numerical targets and creating an atmosphere where everyone could feel “at home”.

The EE consultative forum (EECF) and cultural sensitivity training (for management) were identified as the diversity interventions at Sekupu. The organisation had integrated the idea of diversity into its core business strategy, although 24% of respondents did not know about it.

The EECF was elected by employees. It consisted of ten members, including two from management and two from each race and gender across all levels. Monthly meetings were held where “EE/diversity issues” were discussed, including management feedback on EE, EE statistics, employees’ issues, governance, resignations and appointments. Minutes were distributed to all stakeholders. An intranet site was used for communication, which employees also used to make comments. In addition, speakers were arranged to share knowledge on diversity.

Initially, the forum’s function was predominantly monitoring. It then became a consultative forum but the functions were still to advise, monitor, inform, sensitise and act as a sounding board on EE for management.

Concern was expressed as to whether the EECF had “teeth”: some staff members wanted the EECF to have the power to intervene in cases where management was resistant to change. Black African people were seen as being most active in the EECF as they were “mostly affected by the perceived injustices”.

Five years after the forum came into being, a senior manager was assigned to implement the EE plan. AA and EE policies were assigned to MDs of business units. However, many members of the EECF did not know that there were such policy statements.

Management’s ongoing activities aimed at EE were varied. Their role was to identify people from designated groups for training and encourage “previously disadvantaged persons” to have mentors. They had to implement the EE incentive-bonus scheme. They also met quarterly with the EECF to discuss diversity issues, and the EECF chairperson was invited to discuss issues at management meetings. All managers had to attend a one-day diversity workshop entitled “Leadership advantage through diversity”.

Despite all this, problems existed with the retention of black African and female staff, and 76% of respondents thought there were problems with EE. A high 88% thought training and development was not being implemented adequately. According to respondents, managers were not trained in understanding and valuing similarities and differences among employees. Other problems included white staff saying that black Africans were promoted without being equipped, and black African managers saying that black African staff were never sent to represent the company. The following black male manager described his experience, which he ascribed to the fact that black people were not trusted:

The one issue I have a problem with is that when it comes to the outside world, there is a tendency not to send Africans as representatives of the company; maybe it is fear that the guys could be poached, or may embarrass the company. Is it a lack of trust! There is that unwillingness to send Africans to outside forums even in areas where it could make sense and the EECF has no powers over this.

Even though Sekupu had made the “business case” for diversity, emphasis remained on “getting the numbers right”.



Lack of implementation arose out of an environment that did not reward managers if they performed well in this area or held them accountable if they did not. This did not go unnoticed by staff, and 76% of the interviewed employees at Sekupu believed that line managers were not held accountable for EE in their sections. Further to this, diversity was seen as a “soft issue” and was easily relegated to being the “last thing in their minds”, to be dealt with after the real work. As one employee said:

We do have the programme but the way it is managed is wrong. It is done very haphazardly; it is left to the employees.

It is obvious that diversity management had little or no priority in the managers’ day-to-day activities:

Managers are here to stop fire, they are very defensive. How can they do diversity management? Soft issues are the last thing in their minds.

The intervention largely failed because diversity had little or no priority in Sekupu’s strategic objectives.

## Questions

- In some documents, it was unclear whether the term “diversity” was being used in relation to race and gender or to skills. What does this ambiguity say about Sekupu’s approach?
- In setting up their EECF, the business unit had complied with many of the legislative requirements, but the EECF had still failed to make a significant impact. Discuss this in the context of Sekupu’s broader diversity policy.

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