Chapter One: Introduction

Background
In February 2001 I was recommended by a marketing company as a consultant to assist a South African food processing company to improve relationships between the factory and office staff and build a united team. The company, part of a multi-national group, had followed instructions from their head office in the United States of America to conduct a survey to find out how the local staff viewed their management. The company consisted of factory staff, most of whom were black South Africans, and office staff, almost all of whom were white South Africans. The staff operated out of two separate buildings on one site. The survey indicated a high level of dissatisfaction on the part of the factory staff with regard to working conditions and the attitudes of the office staff. There were low levels of trust amongst the staff in general. The South African branch reported to the United Kingdom executive manager who made it clear that the cultivation of an appreciation of diversity among staff members held a higher priority than profit at that stage. Unless the company changed drastically, it would be closed. In light of this, I was given the task of assisting them to make two separate work forces into a united team. I had been working in various sectors of diversity management for twenty years.

Historical Context
In 1994 South Africa became a democracy. For three hundred years prior to that, South Africa was governed by the white minority who, under Dr Hendrik Verwoerd had instituted the ideology of Apartheid, or separate development. The theory of separate development was that the black majority and the white minority would develop separately in South Africa. This meant separate school systems, living areas, universities, employment opportunities, hotels, restaurants, beaches, cinemas. “Separate freedoms for the various nations in the multinational state of South Africa” (Biko:1978:19). In practice it was a systematic exclusion of the black population from equal opportunities in every field so as to exploit them as menial workers who would pose no threat to white people and would provide cheap labour. The population of the country was divided into four race groups: white, Indian, “coloured” (a term constructed to represent the progeny of
marriage between white and black people) and black. Much lower standards of education, health care, housing, transport, sporting facilities and work were provided for Indian, black and people of a mixed race group. The black population had no voting rights or freedom of movement. As one of the factory workers in the food-processing company said: “We were treated as strangers in our own land.”

In 1990 Nelson Mandela was released from Robben Island and the African Nationalist Congress was voted into power. A new constitution was drafted and South Africa embraced democracy. However, attitudes to race and ethnicity entrenched in the Apartheid years remained. The food-processing company was a microcosm of Apartheid South Africa. Politically, South Africa had changed, but on a personal and subconscious level, it is likely that many South Africans, both black and white, still hold Apartheid-engendered attitudes.

**Background to the Company**

The company began in the 1980s with a small factory and office. By 2001 it had grown to a company of approximately 65 staff members. When this study began, the managing director had been transferred and another man had taken his place. Both men were white. The new managing director was assigned to head the diversity process in conjunction with his role as MD. Our brief was to assess the current situation, design a process over one year that would surface the problem areas and issues amongst the staff. We would assist the organisation to address those issues, and solve their problems so that the company could function as one united staff, free of racism, sexism and classism.

I selected a team of three facilitators to assist me. Jerry Mofokeng and I had worked together previously with young black adults. We had used art and drama to release the negative effects of Apartheid. Jerry is a well-known actor who had also worked in the corporate arena. His ability to relate immediately to a mixed group, plus his knowledge of the use of drama as a communication tool, plus his experience in South Africa and in America were factors I considered in my choice of him as a facilitator.
Tebogo Makgabo had been referred to me by an associate. I wanted a black, female psychologist who could also work in a training and development situation. Tebogo could speak a number of languages; she was relaxed and generated a sense of calm, and her insight was invaluable. I met Nico du Bois at a breakfast in the Joubert Park greenhouse where people who were interested in the development of the park within central Johannesburg gathered. An Afrikaner and a transformation consultant, he had developed a style of interaction and communication with groups that was different to mine but complemented it. He knew the theory of transformation, had been politically active and was sensitive and caring.

A Preliminary Investigation of Issues
Finding out more about relationships within the company - particularly around the subject of race relations - was our first priority. The facilitators worked in pairs and interviewed the entire company of 67 people in six sessions. Nico du Bois and I worked with the office staff and Jerry Mofokeng; Tebogo Makgaba and I worked with the factory staff. Each session lasted approximately 2 hours.

Information Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>5 female, 3 male</td>
<td>English and Afrikaans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Laboratory, Research and Development</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7 white 1 coloured 1 black</td>
<td>6 female, 3 male</td>
<td>English, Afrikaans, Sotho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts, Sales, Secretarial</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>English and Afrikaans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory Group 1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>5 female, 11 male</td>
<td>Zulu, Sotho, Sepedi, English, Afrikaans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory Group 2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>1 female, 13 males</td>
<td>The above plus Shangaan, Southern Sotho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory Group 3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>1 female, 11 males</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The general results of the interviews were:

RACISM

- Office staff discriminated against the factory staff. This was acted out in many ways: only factory staff wore name-tags that were sewn onto their overalls. If a person had no name-tag, white staff did not know who the person was. Factory staff complained that even through some individuals were regularly at the offices, the white staff made no attempt to remember their names or address them by name, yet they (the factory staff) were required to know the name of the white person. The supervisor was unable to recognize his staff without them wearing a label. This was a case of “all blacks look alike.”

- The factory staff complained that when they had to take messages over to the white staff or collect samples they were often ignored or left waiting for long periods of time. Regularly the white staff did not greet them.

- Combined staff functions did not take the factory staff into account in terms of time, food, venue and inclusion. Often the factory staff were excluded because the availability of transport necessitated their leaving at a certain time. The venue was the office block which represented the white staff. Little attempt was made to integrate the factory workers at such functions.

- The factory staff felt intimidated into keeping quiet and not expressing their concerns. If they complained they were told that they could easily be replaced.

- Factory staff were accused of stealing without proof.

- The factory staff had to choose either to study to improve their status and lose their jobs, or to keep their jobs and study after hours. This unwritten “policy” was limited to the black staff.

- Some factory workers did an unreasonable amount of work. This was the result of poor management and it was linked to a lack of job descriptions. It was also perceived as racism by the factory staff.

- There was no appraisal policy for the factory workers. This was perceived as a sign of disrespect. It emphasised management’s reluctance to appraise each factory worker’s progress and to set goals.

- The Black staff had no assigned tea break. They saw this as a strategy to prevent them from socialising. It showed a lack of respect as drinking tea is a social act in African culture and many, if not all, of the factory staff would eat their first meal of the day in the late morning.

- There were no assessment criteria or policies around promotion, for example from temporary to permanent staff in terms of time or qualifiers. Legally, workers hired as temporary labourers became permanent after six months or left. Some of the factory workers still earned temporary wages after years of employment. Management were relying on none of the workers bringing this to the attention of either the Trade Union or the Managing Director.

- All management positions were occupied by white people.
Only once a staff member became permanent did he or she begin to receive a pension. This meant that factory workers who had worked as temporary workers for more than the minimum amount of time would lose the money that should have been due to them on retirement.

**LACK OF POLICIES**

- There were no job descriptions and a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities. As a result some factory workers did multiple jobs every day. This made assessment of their competence and quality appraisal more difficult.
- There was a lack of a policy around wages: some newcomers earned more than long-standing workers and those who earned more were part of the family of the supervisor.

**LACK OF COMMUNICATION**

- There was competition between departments rather than co-operation. Departments did not share information.
- Communication from management to office or factory staff was inadequate. Often staff found out information through “gossip corridors” or information was given to only a few.
- The mainly white laboratory staff felt they were treated with disdain by the rest of the white staff.
- There was a lack of cohesion and trust among both the black and the white staff.
- There were no staff rooms – neither for Factory nor Office staff - nor a combined staff room.

**FAVOURITISM AND NEPOTISM**

- Empire-building was evident within the company including nepotism and elitism. Some managers were related. Sisters and mothers of staff held temporary and permanent positions in the office. Many of the factory staff belonged to one extended family.
- Random annual bonuses and reward systems set the tone in the factory. The supervisor favoured people who were related to him and this caused resentment. The operations manager left many of the decisions to him.

**TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

- No skills audit had been done and there were no career paths for staff.
- Inadequate computer systems made it difficult for work to be done well.
- Neither computer skills training nor further training was offered.

Before I make an account of my philosophical approach to education and research and set out the purpose of this research, I would like to describe my response to the situation at the company. At first I was dismayed at the extent of the divide between the factory and office staff. I was angry that this had been allowed to continue so long into the new
democracy. It had been almost ten years since Mr Mandela had been released. I found this shocking.

I was nervous of the possibility that the white staff would not co-operate and that resistance to our intervention would be high. During the interviews I was pleasantly surprised by the white staff who appeared ready to talk and who clearly wanted change in the organisation. I had also underestimated how compliant the white staff were. They did not want to lose their positions; they would do as they were told. They admitted to being somewhat uneasy about the process but that was a natural response.

I was apprehensive about meeting the black staff because I wasn’t sure how they would respond to me, a white woman. I was glad that Jerry and Tebogo were with me. I was saddened by the expressed hopelessness of the men and women around change. This was not the first time they had talked about their problems. I felt pain and outrage at the injustice of their situation and the abuse they had experienced for so long. I determined that this time it would be different and that we had to make sure their complaints fell on open ears and that the necessary action would be taken. I felt what had happened to them had happened to me. Their level of trust in this intervention was abysmal and I fully committed myself to the process. I also felt grateful that I had been given this opportunity and that I had such competent and sensitive co-facilitators. All four of us realised we were embarking on a first-time project and that we needed all the help we could get – both intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. We also knew we would learn from this experience and it would change us too.

Philosophical approach to education and research
My philosophical approach to education and research is shaped by the historical context of Apartheid South Africa. A fledgling democracy that side-stepped a civil war, this nation still carries many Apartheid attitudes and psychological wounds. Bantu Education was designed to maintain the status-quo and Christian Nationalist Education reinforced white supremacy. The effects of Apartheid - of promoting the belief that black people were not as intelligent or capable human beings as white people and that the white
population were following a God-given role to rule and to use the black population for their own benefit - do not easily disappear. Internalised inferiority and superiority require healing. Healing and education, in my opinion, go hand in hand.

I work as a facilitator of personal growth focusing on self-awareness and the recognition of current attitudes towards self and others. This involves assisting people to recognize the way in which they perceive themselves, evaluate those perceptions in terms of their origin and veracity and reformulate their attitudes based on value systems linked to their identity and roots through which their identity as human beings can be expressed.

“Critical thinkers see themselves as creating and re-creating aspects of their personal, workplace and political lives.” (Brookfield, 1987:5) This is combined with an emphasis on the appreciation of diversity in terms of race, gender, religion, class, sexual orientation, health, age and ability. Until we deal with the past, individually and as communities, I believe we will be incapable of creating a truly democratic, non-violent future.

I locate my philosophy of education within four of the seven philosophical systems identified by Heimstra (in Elias and Merriam 1980) These are idealism, realism, progressivism, liberalism, behavioralism, humanism, and radicalism. Most of my thought lies within the humanistic system in terms of the nature of humanness, educational aims and methods, and practices. This means I agree that the nature of humanness includes dignity, freedom and autonomy, and that our aims are to reach our potential as individuals and to self-actualise. We do this through self-direction, teamwork and facilitation.

I agree that within this humanist philosophy important societal goals are missed. Here I would insert the ideas of the radical educationist Freire (1970) who believed that people can change their environment. Education is about asking questions and thinking critically, not about “banking” knowledge. We do not live only as individuals. We are free and have dignity so that we can make an impact on our environment. We reach our potential so as to affect our surroundings and shape our world.
Much of our behaviour is tied to prior conditioning (Skinner 1971). I believe that people develop through experience and that educational content that builds on people’s experiences and needs is more likely to be effective (Bergevin 1967). In general, my approach is eclectic, with most of it finding resonance within the humanistic framework.

In addition to the above I hold a spiritual focus with regard to education and research. This includes respect for the person plus a sense of their spiritual core. There is space for not knowing. I do not mean ignorance, but a setting-aside of “having the answers” a sense of being empty and allowing the process and interaction to unfold. As an educator my aim is to discover what the belief system, value system, meaning-system or no-meaning system the people I am working with hold and what effect that might have on them and on their relationship to learning.

Both personal development and social action are the foci of my work. In an attempt to achieve both I need to adopt two roles- that of facilitator and teacher.

“When individual and social action are the goals, the role of teacher involves a more active partnership with the learner. Cognitive, affective, and skill development are stressed equally as they relate to the individual’s social context and to the enhancement of the social order in general.”

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982).

I add group-work as a powerful educational tool in the way it facilitates growth. I include creativity in the form of role-play, visualization, art, movement, music, sculpture and poetry. This also includes dialogue, problem identification and resolution. The sum of this philosophical framework tends to result in people feeling part of a community rather than feeling they are scattered individuals grouped with others for a limited time.

**Research Aims**

This research aimed to reflect on a process that created the opportunity and possibility for two groups of South Africans within a food-processing company to attempt to overcome
barriers of race, gender, class and the negative history of the company to form one productive team.

**Research Questions and Hypothesis**

**Question 1**
Is it possible to integrate two work groups differing in race and class given the historical background in South Africa? Why would it be important to attempt to achieve this and how can this be facilitated?

**Question 2**
Is it possible to heal the negative psychological effects of the *Apartheid* system? What is meant by healing in this context? Is it necessary to delve into the past in order for healing to occur? How long could this take?

**Question 3**
What changes, both intra personal and interperson, did management and workers undergo that contributed to the success and failure of project? Was there any resistance to change, how did this manifest and with what consequences?

**Question 4**
What allows a process of change to be sustained within an organization?

**The Importance of the Research**

Many companies, educational institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations and churches in South Africa realise the need to create a climate that recognizes and appreciates people who are different from one another in various aspects. My intention is that this research might indicate ways of achieving this and/or that the information might be adapted to suit the needs of various organizations in the private and public domains. The contribution this study will make to the field of adult education is that it indicates that many adults can change their attitudes and beliefs in terms of race and class. Many are capable of personal change and transformation within the South African context.
Post-script
The limitations of doing a retrospective case study is that when I began the process I did not have the thought in my head that I would be using this experience as a case study. I had not prepared any long-term follow up procedures. I began the process as a facilitator who had professional accountability to the managing director and the staff. If I had thought of writing a research report I would have been far more rigorous in the collection of data at each stage of the process. Although the intensity of the process lent itself to a case-study, what I was doing was done for a different reason - namely to meet the objectives the company had outlined and deliver positive results.

Organization of the remainder of the Report

Chapter Two will present the Literature Review.
Chapter Three will present the Research Design
Chapter Four will present the Research Results
Chapter Five will present the Discussion and Conclusion.