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# Coaching as an enabler for South African executives to unlock added value from demographically diverse teams

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# Coaching as an enabler for South African executives to unlock added value from demographically diverse teams

A research report submitted by

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**A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Business Executive Coaching**

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the potential for coaching to enable leaders in South African companies to extract added value from demographic diversity in their teams. The research contributes to an understanding of how coaching can enable South African business leaders to overcome any personal inhibitions they may have related to people from other demographic groups and to shift their thinking beyond the tolerance of diversity to a point at which there is active engagement in pursuit of the added value that demographic diversity can bring.

The action research process included seventeen interviews with participants who volunteered to be part of the research coaching. They consisted of two teams in two companies – eight people in one company and nine in another. The participants were demographically diverse leaders of demographically and culturally diverse teams. They all operated in demographically diverse situations, both related to upward and downward reporting lines. The research coaching consisted of six, monthly, three-hour group coaching sessions for each of the two teams and monthly individual coaching sessions for each participant for six months. The action coaching thus took six months (138 hours of action research, excluding pre- and post-coaching interviews) to complete. Participants were interviewed at the start and end of the coaching process about how coaching had impacted their ability to extract value from demographic diversity in teams. Their responses were analysed against the key questions the research aimed to answer.

The participants shifted from tending to operate in business as though all people are the same, to acknowledging and honouring difference as a potential value addition to every thinking process.

The research outcomes show the potential for South African businesses to operate in a way that encourages the active extraction of value from demographic diversity. It offers recommendations to address this in a way that enables companies to take advantage of the richness of diversity present in South Africa.

## KEY WORDS

Action research

Coaching

Cultural diversity

Cultural intelligence

Demographically diverse teams

Racial diversity

Unconscious bias

## DECLARATION

I, Patricia Helen Roberts, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Business Executive Coaching at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Name: Signature:

Signed at ……

On the …….. day of …… 20…..

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my fellow students in MM-BEC year of 2020. Thank you for accepting me wholeheartedly regardless of my differences from you and for always making me feel part of the group.

Thanks are also due to my husband, Mark, for his support and his understanding of my lack of availability for the two years of this degree.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CQ – Cultural Intelligence Quotient

ICF - International Coaching Federation

Comensa – Coaches and Mentors South Africa

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose of the study

The South African government encourages businesses to move towards representative demographic diversity at all levels (Jain, Horwitz, & Wilkin, 2012). Demographic diversity has been shown in the McKinsey and Company research, *Diversity Matters*, to potentially deliver 30% more value for businesses that embrace it (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015).

This action research study answers the question of how the use of executive coaching can support senior business people who see the potential of demographic diversity in teams to create added value. The requirement for achieving this would be a depth of understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity within the workplace (Livermore & Soon, 2015a). The research aims to find ways in which coaching enables leaders to unlock this value. It covers the prevailing attitudes of executives to demographic and cultural diversity. Typical challenges experienced in dealing with this concept in teams and the approaches found to be most effective in achieving a state in which team members embrace the concept of demographic and cultural diversity in a transparent and comfortable way so that they start to use diversity as an asset in the manner in which they approach their work are explored.

The findings of this action research may contribute to broader thinking about the approach to unlocking the value in demographic and cultural diversity in business in South Africa.

## 1.2 Context of the study

The 2019 edition of the annual letter to CEOs written by Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, the world's largest investor (Kramer, 2019), highlights the pressing need for business, globally, to embrace and realise value from diversity. Fink commits to changing his company's compensation structure to ensure that diversity increases so that, within five years, the company is no longer "a bunch

of white men." The strength of the corporate backlash to this commitment is a clear indication of resistance, globally, to the concept of embracing demographic diversity. This chapter describes the action research focus on support for executives in South Africa as they build their effectiveness in leading diverse teams.

South African human resources expert, Nene Molefi (2017), discusses how research shows that children's attitudes and impressions are well established by the age of six. Experiences after that are filtered through what was learned and believed in early childhood.

Rosinski (2010) talks about the increased challenge and stress that people potentially feel when they mix with other cultures and confront different worldviews. He recommends coaching as appropriate support for this stress. In Rosinski's opinion, coaches who deal with various cultures not only unlock more human potential but also aim to unleash the potential in alternative worldviews. In his research report, Anandlal (2017a, p. 105) states that "Given the history of division, strife and separation in South Africa, cross-cultural coaching allows people to reach out to each other and see things from the other's perspective."

Cox, Bachkirova, and Clutterbuck (2014, p. xxi) define coaching as, "a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the client and, potentially, other stakeholders". Stout-Rostron (2014b) sees business coaching as a systemic approach to coaching that has the potential to impact the overall performance of organisations.

The research will be of interest to business leaders in South Africa and aspiring business leaders. It is also relevant to human resources practitioners. It aligns with the objective of the South African Government to drive more equitable racial representation in business (Booysen, 2007).

People from different demographic and cultural groups in South Africa tend not to understand each other's circumstances fully because they grew up separately. This lack of understanding of each other creates the potential for assumptions to be made and for missteps in leading people whose background and circumstances are not fully understood. There is a tendency for some white people to believe that after the start of democracy in South Africa in 1994 (Johnson & Schlemmer, 1996), social equality was normalised, and everyone had the same opportunities. According to Molefi (2017), this lack of understanding of reality can lead to a disconnect between leaders and team members from different demographic and cultural groups in business, including a lack of appreciation for the challenges to performance faced by some employees. The research explores how coaching can be used to mitigate the impact of the lack of early-life exposure to diversity by enabling business leaders to respond more effectively to the needs of their team members.

Coaching is becoming recognised as a supportive intervention for business leaders (Stout-Rostron, 2014a). It is used more and more to enable leaders effectively to address the complex and diverse challenges they face (Passmore, 2015).

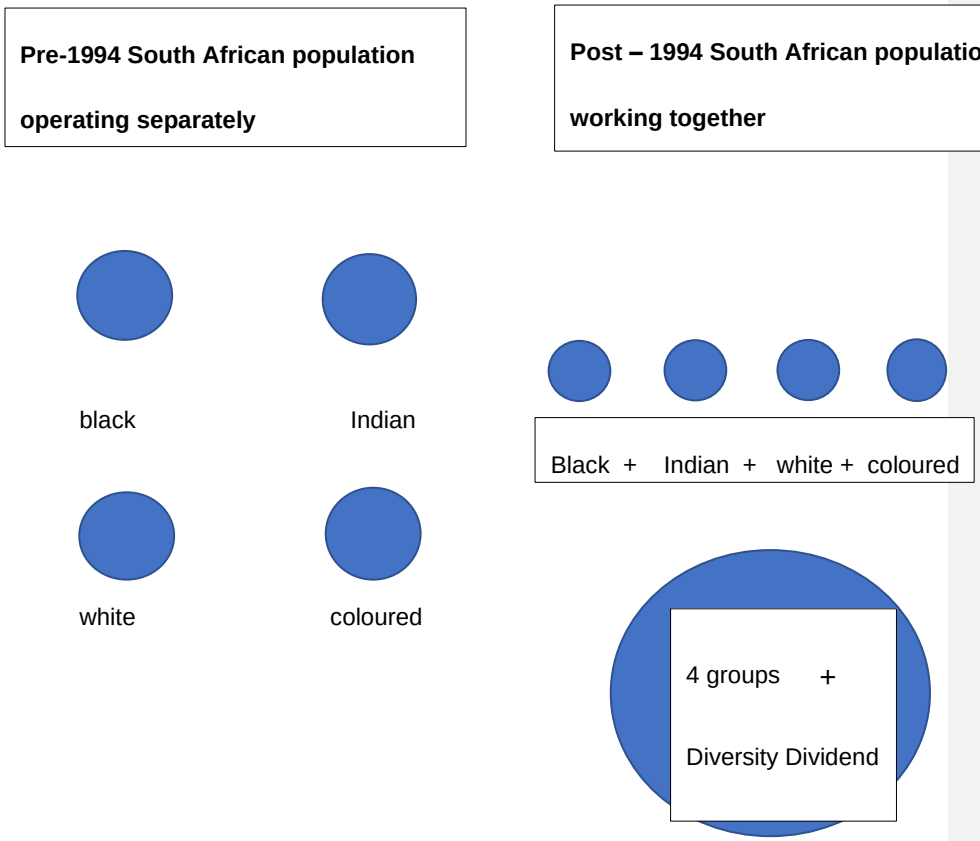



**Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the research study**

Source: Own Creation

This figure aims to show how demographic diversity operated in South Africa prior to democracy, with each demographic, and therefore cultural group, being separate. That changed to a demographic collective after the start of democracy. The research was based on the opportunity to extract the added value that this demographic and cultural collective offers. This opportunity is referred to by the researcher as the Diversity Dividend. Executive coaching is the approach used in the research to access this potential added-value.

The action research uses coaching as a mechanism to enable leaders to realise the benefits, referred to in this study as the Diversity Dividend.

Until 1994, South Africans grew up in separate and distinct racial groupings, each with its own culture (Crush, 1995; Mabin, 1992). At work, there is no racial separation, meaning that business leaders are required quickly to acquire the ability and depth of cultural understanding that was not part of their reality growing up. The research explores how coaching contributes to supporting the leaders' ability to fast-track the development of cultural intelligence that business requires.

The South African Government passed the Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998) with the intention of fast-tracking black inclusion in business after the removal of restrictions on the type of work for which black people were allowed to be employed. The subsequent Broad-Based Black Empowerment (BBBEE) legislation puts pressure on business to ensure a fair reflection of the demographics of South Africa (Horwitz & Jain, 2011). This pressure is one of the drivers of greater racial and this cultural diversity in business teams.

While laws set out what is required, it is only through a change in thinking that the intention will be achieved. Coaching is one of the mechanisms with the potential to change mindsets (Flaherty, 2010). Kochan et al. (2003) draw attention to the positive impact that diversity in teams delivers in new thinking and in driving improved business results. McKinsey and Company's report (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2014) on diversity in 366 companies globally, identified a 30% better chance that diverse and inclusive companies perform better than their competitors.

## 1.3 Research problem

This research assumed that business leaders in South Africa are not yet extracting the potential value from the racial and cultural diversity in their workforce. It explored how coaching can enable leaders to achieve more significant benefits from cultural and racial diversity in their teams. Challenges related to leading in a racially and culturally diverse business environment have

the potential to hold executives and organisations back if they are not skilfully managed (Livermore & Soon, 2015a). Having an experienced executive coach as a thinking partner enables executives to gain a broader perspective, as the essence of coaching is challenging their thinking, assumptions, bias and early-life conditioning (O'Neill, 2011).

The challenges faced by leaders in this context include how they think about themselves and others. Leaders also need to build the ability to inspire others to deliver their best in the South African multi-racial environment influenced by the emotional baggage of the imposed inequality of apartheid (Bloom, 2018).

## 1.4 Research objectives

The objectives of this research are to:

a.) Articulate the leadership challenges faced by South African business executives as they lead teams made up of people from different cultural and demographic groups.
b.) Explore the demographic and cultural diversity issues that the participants chose to work on within a coaching partnership.
c.) Identify ways in which coaching supported the participants in gaining a different perspective on the demographic and cultural diversity challenges they were dealing with that enabled them to be more effective as leaders.

## 1.5 Research questions

The questions answered by this study are:

a) What are the typical issues faced by South African business leaders who are leading demographically and culturally diverse teams?
b) Which demographic and cultural diversity aspects within teams do the participants believe had the most impact?
c) How can coaching support South African business leaders in growing their leadership effectiveness to realise the potential added value offered by demographic and cultural diversity?

## 1.6 Significance of the study

This research is expected to be of interest to business leaders, aspiring business leaders and human resource practitioners in South Africa. Recommendations for each of these groups included.

There are many theories covering related topics. These theories explore the topics of both racial and cultural diversity, how they show up in society, the human potential to categorise people and assign characteristics to those categories, the need to work effectively with people from different cultures and the impact of the history of South Africa on complicating human relationships between people from different demographic groups. No research has focused on how to extract value from racial and cultural diversity in a business context. The theories include:

- Diversity and inclusion (O'Donovan, 2018)
- Unconscious bias (Jolls & Sunstein, 2006; Livermore & Soon, 2015b)
- Cultural intelligence (Livermore & Soon, 2015b)
- Cultural awareness (Smith-Miller, Leak, Harlan, Dieckmann, & Sherwood, 2010)
- Coaching across cultures (Rosinski, 2010)
- Racial dynamics and challenges in South Africa (Bloom, 2018)

While this research takes into account the learning from the theories listed above, it focuses exclusively on how coaching can enable leaders to extract the potential added value enabled by demographic and cultural diversity in South Africa. While the McKinsey and Company research study (Hunt et al., 2015) points to the potential, globally, for racially diverse teams to deliver more value, this has not been specifically explored in the context of South Africa.

Anandlal (2017b) researched cross-cultural coaching in South Africa generally. This research focuses on coaching as a support to South African business leaders who lead people from different cultures. It starts to draw attention to the potential for demographic and cultural diversity to add more value to human interactions.

The research is based on the overarching theory of Cultural Intelligence (Livermore & Soon, 2015a), which is a requirement for understanding people from different demographic groups from one's own. Livermore and Soon (2015a) highlighted the need for humans to move beyond their comfort zone of working with people like themselves as they embrace the global nature of business. They show that only through the ability to interact effectively with people of other cultures, are we able to achieve optimal performance in a multi-cultural business environment. This study builds on that premise, looking at shifting performance from operating optimally to actively seeking and extracting added value from demographic diversity.

Each of these theories focuses on specific aspects of working with diverse teams, which are important in themselves. They broaden our thinking about the importance of the human ability to operate effectively with people who are culturally different from themselves. They emphasise the growing need for this ability as we operate more and more in a multi-cultural way, rather than only with people who think and act as we do.

The significance of working with diverse teams is demonstrated by the McKinsey and Company research study, *Diversity Matters* (Hunt et al., 2015), which postulates that, in addition to coping effectively with demographic diversity, there is the potential to actively seek out and activate demographic diversity to extract value from the diversity of thinking in people who are not all the same.

This study explored how coaching can enable team leaders to activate the value addition of demographic and cultural diversity in their teams.

## 1.7 Delimitations of the study

This social research study focused on business leaders in Johannesburg as the business hub of South Africa. It included business leaders who are white, black, Indian and coloured – the dominant South African demographic and cultural groups. It did not go into the sub-cultures within each group, for example, the different tribal cultures within the black South African group.

The research did not deal with racism or gender diversity.

The action research did not set out to prove or disprove the benefit of specific coaching approaches but rather to test which approaches achieved useful outcomes with the groups of participants who volunteered to be part of the research. Different participants may have found different approaches useful.

While answering specific questions about the impact of the coaching in the context of the research questions, it did not completely address the contribution of coaching in addressing all of the challenges of leading cultural and racial diversity. While it made some contribution to thinking in this regard, the study did not offer a methodology for business to transform in a way that achieves the benefits of diversity in business teams.

For coaches, it provides some thinking but not a comprehensive approach with which to support leaders who are not yet effective in the way they lead people who are culturally and racially different from themselves.

The coaching was limited to six months, and a number of the participants commented that a longer coaching process would have been even more enabling and would have embedded some concepts more deeply.

## 1.8 Definition of terms

**Cultural awareness** – sensitivity to differences in people based on the cultural norms of the society in which they were raised (Livermore & Soon, 2015a)

**Cultural diversity –** Differences in characteristics based on cultural conditioning (Rosinski, 2010)

**Demographic diversity** – the inclusion of people from different demographic groups (Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2011)

**Executive –** A senior business person who leads a team of businesspeople (Drucker, 2018)

**Executive Coaching-** “Coaching that occurs within an organisational context with the goal of promoting success at all levels of the organisation by affecting the actions of those being coached”. “It is primarily focussed on helping to achieve business outcomes. Both the individual and the sponsoring organisation are the client” (Kahn, 2014, p. xix)

**Inclusion** – a sense of being a valued member of a group (Molefi, 2017)

**Participants** – the people who volunteered to be coached as part of the action research (Saunders, 2012)

## 1.9 Assumptions

The assumptions made at the start of this research included that the participants were prepared to face their perceptions and bias related to cultural and demographic diversity honestly and openly as part of their growth in the coaching process.

When interviewed about their coaching experience, it was hoped that the participants would be able to reflect deeply on their experiences of coaching and extract realisations about themselves and their situations based on the coaching partnership.

There was an expectation of a high level of honesty, emotional maturity and objectivity among the participants.

It was also assumed that the participants would be able to apply their realisations from being coached into the way in which they led and interacted with their teams.

# CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter covers writing relevant to the research topic, which is examined from two aspects, namely the role of coaching in developing the ability of leaders in South Africa to extract value from racial and cultural diversity and the contribution of coaching to leadership effectiveness in this regard. It looks at the concepts of coaching, of leadership in South Africa, and demographic and cultural diversity in business in South Africa.

## 2.2 Definition of topic

The historical context of South Africa under the apartheid government has meant that South Africans grew up in separate and distinct demographic and therefore, cultural groups – the main groups being black (African), Indian, coloured (mixed race) and white. This separation of racial and cultural groupings meant that children grew up without close exposure to the other dominant demographic and cultural groups. They learned how people of their group think and behave, and their knowledge and understanding of people of other demographic groups was primarily based on what they heard, which was often skewed by perception and anecdotal evidence. This state of separation in the formative years is captured by Nene Molefi's (Molefi, 2017, p. 4) description of growing up in Soweto, the largest township in South Africa, "We maintained a distinct pecking order based on subtle differences in shades of black skin or from which parts of Soweto a person came. Meanwhile, we subscribed to a collective view of white people – whom most of us knew not at all. In our stories, all white people were clever. They were all smart. They were all rich. They were all racist. These early narratives - even when later proven to be ridiculous – tend to retain a powerful hold on our minds until we decide to do something and rewrite them". Exploring those early impressions of other demographic and cultural groups and their impact on how people show up in a business context is an area of research not yet fully explored.

After the start of democracy in South Africa in 1994, people of all demographic groups became eligible to work together at all levels, to live together and to fraternise socially (Tihanyi & Du Toit, 2005). Suddenly there was a need to get to know each other and to interact skillfully and without fear, resentment or the myths about other demographic groups. This is both an internal and external process, which requires that South Africans recognise the untruths in their perceptions first initiated by early life conditioning and continuously developed and re-explored even as adults.

## 2.3 Leadership challenges for business executives related to cultural and demographic diversity in teams

Molefi (2017, p. 153) cites her experience of South African companies, in a similar way to Larry Fink's detractors, questioning why they should put energy and focus into achieving a balance of diversity. In these cases, she refers them to the preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Govender, 2013; Van Heerden, 2007):

"We, the people of South Africa,

Recognise the injustices of our past;

Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;

Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and

Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity".

While there is acceptance of the concept that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, the research shows that people in business prefer not to focus on past injustices, rather aiming to treat people as though we are all the same now. This has the potential to shut down the ability to extract value from diversity.

Hofstede (2011) developed a model using six dimensions of leadership culture in business, namely, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Long/Short Term Orientation and Indulgence/Restraint. This research focuses only on the aspects of

Individualism and Collectivism, as experienced in South Africa because they are important elements of the different thinking approaches among black and white people in business.

The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) reflects the research project initiated in 1991 by House, from the Wharton School of Business. It was expanded on and confirmed in the 2009 publication, (Chhokar, 2007), which follows on studies of cultural differences, including the works of several authors (Hofstede, 1983; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995; Smith, 2004).

The GLOBE study looked at nine cultural and six leadership dimensions, contending that leadership effectiveness is contextual to environmental, societal and organisational norms and values. The research uses the cultural competency orientations of:

a. Performance
b. Assertiveness
c. Future
d. Human
e. Institutional Collectivism
f. In-group Collectivism
g. Gender egalitarianism
h. Power distance
i. Uncertainty avoidance

Source: Chhokar, Brodbeck, and House (2013, p. 3)

This research only explores the concepts of assertiveness and in-group collectivism from the GLOBE study as they apply in business in South Africa. These dimensions link strongly to the qualities of Individualism and Collectivism mentioned above, as broadly characterised by white (individualism and assertiveness) and black (in-group collectivism) people in business. These aspects are confirmed by the research. Coaching aims to build awareness of

these natural tendencies. Through this awareness, business leaders can choose to stretch beyond their natural behaviour and explore what value can be achieved from operating with broader awareness of these differences.

Chhokar et al. (2013) describe how GLOBE catalogued the socio-cultural styles of countries, dividing them into ten country clusters. In this categorisation, white and black South Africans fall into two separate and distinct socio-cultural groups:

a. White South Africans fall into the Anglo Cultures group along with countries like England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland and the United States
b. Black South Africans fall into the Sub-Saharan Africa group along with countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Zambia and Namibia

These differences in approach aligned with these classifications clearly demonstrate why black and white South Africans may struggle to feel aligned and why they experience difficulties understanding each other's cultural approach at work.

The six leadership styles identified in the GLOBE study are also linked to differences typical of different cultural groupings. GLOBE names these leadership styles:

a. Performance-oriented or charismatic/value-based
b. Team-oriented
c. Participative-style
d. Humane style
e. Autonomous style
f. Self-protective and group-protective styles (Chhokar et al., 2013, p. xv).

These styles also show up differently in South Africa, for example, autonomous being more prevalent in white South Africans and group-protective in black South Africans (Booysen, 2001). The research explores how leaders can move beyond

these stereotypes and how they can broaden their understanding of different cultural approaches by understanding these natural styles.

The separate clustering of the cultural, management and leadership style of black and white South Africans is also highlighted by Booysen (2007) who discussed the difference between Afro-and Euro-centric leadership styles as part of the challenge of retaining black talent in organisations led by white people. Booysen and van Wyk (2007), using the GLOBE categorisations, concluded that white South African managers tend to be assertive, performance and task-focused in contrast with black South African managers who tend to be more people-centred, collaborative and communal. Myres (2014) highlights a lack of assertiveness in confronting senior leaders as a contributing factor to difficulties experienced by South African companies in retaining black talent. The coaching, which is part of the action research, aims to build more assertiveness where that could be beneficial and to moderate assertiveness where that had potential disadvantages.

In one of the first efforts empirically to test the influence of *ubuntu* - the South African word signifying that people are only people through their connection to others - in the workplace, Shrivastava, Selvarajah, Meyer, and Dorasamy (2014) found that the concept of *ubuntu* leads black South African managers to value collaboration and fairness. This concept of collaboration and fairness comes out strongly in the coaching process. The realisations of participants related to these concepts is reported. The research provides supporting evidence of the cultural differences between black and white South African leaders in the categories listed above from the GLOBE report. It also supports the influence of the concept of ubuntu.

Adams (2018) emphasises the vital role played by leaders. She raises the need for leaders to lead the change in behaviour in companies, as Fink (Kramer, 2019) aims to do, rather than paying lip-service to it. The leader needs to see the difference between merely accommodating or tolerating cultural differences and reorganising the system to operate differently. Coaches aim to enable leaders to

work with cultural differences in a non-prescriptive and non-judgemental way, understanding that all cultural orientations have both positive and negative aspects (Rosinski, 2010).

Motsoaledi and Cilliers (2012), like Fink (Kramer, 2019), focus on the need for intentionality in driving transformation in business by addressing unconscious behaviours that impact this process. The ratio of senior managers in South African business related to the percentage of the population reflects a slow movement towards equality (Booysen & Nkomo, 2014). Livermore and Soon (2015b, p. 209) state that “Unless senior leaders embody the vision and values of cultural intelligence, those ideas become nothing more than words”.

Wittenberg-Cox (2015) emphasises the importance of leaders setting the example by actively driving diversity within the organisation and holding their managers accountable. The relevance and truth of this theory is demonstrated throughout this research report.

The two coaching groups represented examples of a company with the leader focused on driving diversity and a division of a company where leaders tend to pay lip-service to the concept of diversity. The impact of a leader-driven focus on valuing diversity came out clearly in research conversations. Where leadership actions do not demonstrate the clear diversity intention, lip-service leads to disillusion and impacts morale.

### *2.3.1 Proposition 1*

Leading people from diverse demographic and cultural groups requires executives to understand the different cultural orientations and leadership styles that are typical of the cultural grouping represented by the people they lead so that they can recognise and adapt to different cultural norms and values by changing their behaviour or approach in appropriate ways. There is also an imperative for a clear vision of the diversity aspect of their leadership so that their followers have clarity on the leader’s focus, actions and direction related to diversity.

## 2.4 Demographic and cultural diversity issues in South African business

St Claire (2005) states that social-anthropological thinking claims that all people are born the same and, they are shaped by their environment and early life experiences, while Rosinski (2010) argues that understanding cultural differences is not enough. We need actively to value those cultural differences. If South Africans achieve the status of understanding the common potential espoused by St. Claire and the need to value differences offered by Rosinski, we have the potential to realise the value of our cultural diversity, as described by Livermore and Soon (2015b). The research explores the potential to achieve that state through coaching leaders.

While the multi-cultural nature of business is well acknowledged, the need for cultural intelligence is not yet entirely accepted. Livermore and Soon (2015b) describe the concept of cultural intelligence as functioning effectively across cultures - a set of skills that are applicable across a multitude of situations. The authors state that the first step is the development of self-awareness - looking internally and building awareness of bias and assumptions so that these can be adjusted or eliminated.

The research explores the power of self-awareness to achieve a state of openness to other ways of thinking and operating and, through this openness, to drive more effective collaboration with a view to achieving added value. Mattes (2012), writing about people born in South Africa after 1994, supports Livermore and Soon (2015a) in emphasising the importance of changing the way we see each other if we are to achieve harmony. The achievement of this change through coaching is clearly demonstrated in the research.

Livermore and Soon (2015b) conclude that without what they refer to as the Cultural Intelligence Quotient (CQ), leaders run the risk of making themselves or their companies obsolete. Earley and Mosakowski (2004, p. 140) describe cultural intelligence as “an outsider’s seemingly natural ability to interpret

someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures the way that person's compatriots would".

The research shows that this is an ideal situation, which requires consistent focus, learning and awareness. The participants were able to achieve this state at times, but not consistently, due to the coaching lasting for only six months.

Abbott uses the concept of Cultural Intelligence to describe a quality that is in continuously growing demand in the new complexities of working across cultures (Abbott, 2014). Warde et al. (2008) point out the common, naïve assumption that one's own culture is central to all reality. Cultural intelligence is more than an intellectual recognition of difference. It requires one to engage with heart and gut in the legitimacy of the difference (Rosinski, 2010). The model of stages of cultural intelligence developed during the research shows how and where these concepts fit into the achievement of the goal state of actively seeking and extracting value from diversity.

Handin and Steinwedel (2006) showed that leaders with teams made up of people from different cultures need to let go of long-held assumptions, beliefs and behaviours if they are to achieve a deep understanding of how to realise team effectiveness through diversity. The authors identified a process that encompasses communication and reflection as critical skills required in the application of their model of curiosity, cultivation and collaboration. Their model highlights the importance of self-awareness. It describes **Curiosity** as the skill of asking insightful questions as part of building a deeper understanding and relationship. **Cultivation** is defined as the quality of consistent and intentional caring that supports maintaining the process over time and **Collaboration** as the integration of the contributions of the team members through questioning, sharing, espousing ideas and creating a whole that consists of the full range of team wisdom.

These leadership behaviours were explored in the research to identify the extent to which they impact on leadership effectiveness in a cross-cultural context. The

skills that support the model are communication through the creation of channels and opportunities that drive better mutual understanding (Handin & Steinwedel, 2006) and reflection on how the leader and each team member is showing up in every situation (Handin & Steinwedel, 2006).

The participants all highlighted the fact that they had grown through coaching in these two aspects, among others. Better communication and continuous reflection, leading to deeper self-awareness, were named by all participants as being important elements of their increased cultural intelligence.

The basis of this model (Handin & Steinwedel, 2006) is the requirement to have a solid understanding of one's cultural orientation and a deep appreciation for the cultures of other people in the team, together with continuous curiosity. The research outcomes show this model to be important and relevant in the context of extracting value from racial diversity in business in South Africa.

One of the myths that need to be debunked in South Africa, according to Molefi (2017, p. 143) is "I don't see colour" or the pretence that "everyone is the same". This fantasy disrespects the challenges experienced in many contexts and is one of the stages shown in the cultural awareness model developed as part of the research. Some of the research participants realised that it was more comfortable for them to operate as though we are all the same rather than honouring diversity and embracing the potential to extract value from it, which supports Molefi's position.

### *2.4.1 Proposition 2*

The first requirement of South African business leaders leading culturally and demographically diverse teams is to acknowledge and understand cultural differences. This acknowledgement requires self-awareness, openness to other ways of thinking and building an understanding of cultural differences, including the impact of early life experiences. With this understanding, leading diversity requires deep reflection resulting in more skilful and transparent communication.

The typical issues faced by South African leaders related to dealing with cultural and demographic diversity in business are the ability to see and acknowledge difference as a positive and the fear of navigating sensitive conversations skilfully due to a fear of emotional backlash.

## 2.5 Coaching South African leaders to extract value from diversity

This section reviews the impact of coaching on building leadership effectiveness, including the different leadership skills required and the thinking frameworks that will enable more effective leadership in the South African context. It also covers what challenges are experienced and how coaching can create new and more effective thinking frameworks related to racial diversity.

Avolio (2007) looked at the relationship between leaders and followers through the lens of prior, current and emerging context. Avioli describes the importance of following a leader as a shared, relational and complex social dynamic. The concept of a complex social dynamic is particularly applicable to the idea of racial and cultural diversity in business in post-apartheid South Africa (Moodley & Adam, 2000).

The research shows the impact of coaching on enabling leaders to shift from over-simplifying the relationship with followers by operating as though we are all the same to leading with an acknowledgement of the complexity of demographic diversity. Effective leadership behaviours include listening (Rutter, 2003), the use of intuition (Jenesick, 2001), authentic action (Moxley, 2000) and strong ethics (Winston, 2003). Another critical leadership attribute, mainly related to the natural tendency for inter-racial relations to be influenced by the concept of power and superiority, is the application of justice and the ability to be humble (Bower, 1997).

The research looks at what works in the context of South African racial and cultural diversity rather than trying to define a general theory of diversity leadership. Listening, authenticity and trustworthiness (related to ethics) are

shown to be essential aspects of leadership effectiveness in a demographically diverse environment.

The concept of whether leaders are born or made inevitably comes up in this context. Are some leaders naturally skilful at leading people different from themselves, and can this skill be acquired? Cooper, Scandura, and Schriesheim (2005) believe that “trigger events” together with coaching and training all contribute to building effective leadership. Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) suggest that leadership ability is an acquired skill but Cooper et al. (2005) believe that our life experiences and values shape our leadership ability and these are fixed. Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, and Krueger (2007) find that our context when growing up, and then working, overcomes the power of ‘heritability’.

The research shows that, while some people lead naturally, coaching offers the potential to hone leadership skills through building awareness and openness to other ways of thinking. Trigger events (Cooper et al., 2005) did not come up in the research as significant. No participant referred to this concept. Participants emphasised that coaching played a more substantial role than training in building leadership ability due to its personal and specific nature. The concept of perceptions acquired from early life experiences is powerfully demonstrated in the research outcomes.

One of the outcomes of growing up separately in South Africa is a lack of understanding of each other’s life stories. Shamir and Eilam-Shamir (2018) write about the contribution of self-stories to continuous leadership growth.

This concept was well supported in the coaching process. The group of leaders formed a closer bond as peers through understanding each other’s stories and the extent to which they applied this in their teams demonstrated the power of understanding life stories.

In South Africa, there are social differences based on race, gender and income attached to our backgrounds. These subtle “micro-inequalities may include recurring, devaluing messages of prejudice that may not be recognised by the

person delivering them but that often negatively impact the performance of the person receiving them" (Molefi, 2017, p. 31). The coaching for this action research was directed at building deeper self-awareness as part of stretching the individual's thinking about themselves related to others in a leadership context (Lord & Hall, 2005). The study of leadership is a topic that lends itself to further research. This action research study addresses only the aspects of leadership in demographically diverse teams in South Africa. Some participants became aware, or were made aware, of how they are operating in the way that Molefi describes by inadvertent devaluing messages in the way they talk about people from other demographic groups.

The research deals exclusively with executive coaching and not with mentoring. Mentoring is advice-giving in various forms (Barnett, 1995; Bluckert, 2005; Clutterbuck, 2008), generally based on the mentor's experience. Coaching is quite distinct in that the coach works with the client to develop the client's approach to growth and addressing challenges.

Fillery-Travis and Lane (2014) show that executive coaching requires a high level of skill and is delivered by external coaches who focus exclusively on coaching senior executives, and are regarded as masters of this skill. This research fulfilled these stringent requirements through the holding of the highest credential from the International Coaching Federation and the exclusive focus of the researcher on executive coaching.

Coaching creates a safe space for reflection in which the client designs their solutions to the challenges they face (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). The importance of this safe space of complete suspension of judgement was emphasised by coaching participants as playing a role in their ability to build deeper self-awareness and to process some deeply held emotions. Rosinski (2010) claims that coaching across cultures additionally requires that coaches aim to broaden awareness of and openness to different worldviews.

The focus of the coaching was on expanding awareness and openness to other views. The participants confirmed how important this was in opening their thinking up to more potential in themselves and their team members.

“By exploring alternative worldviews and mixing with people from different cultures, you will often feel challenged and may experience higher stress,” says Rosinski (2010, p. xxii). Regular reflection builds deep self-awareness that brings clarity of values, identity, emotions and motives. In this way, leaders create a strong sense of who they truly are, which guides all of their behaviours and decision-making.

During the coaching, participants became aware of their natural tendency to gravitate to people like themselves. They began actively to address this tendency so that they started to build more ease, connection and understanding of people who are different from them. The fact that they could notice this tendency in the moment and choose to behave differently was a meaningful change.

Moule (2009) extends the concept of self-awareness to awareness of unconscious bias as a pivotal contributor to impacting our relationships with others. This self-awareness was a continuous theme in the coaching with participants often being surprised by their answers to questions that exposed their bias. An example of this was an assertion by one of the coaching groups that there was no bias in their company related to selecting new members for a team. When asked by the coach how many teams were made up predominantly of people who looked like the team leader, they were shocked by their realisation of the fact that the answer was, “Many teams.”

Steele (2011) discusses how identity cues that signal stereotypes can negatively impact how a person functions and their effectiveness. He suggests strategies for reducing this tendency in service of levelling the racial playing field.

The strategy used in the coaching was one of gentle questioning that allowed participants to draw their conclusions about their bias. The non-judgmental nature

of coaching enables this to happen in a space of curiosity and learning, rather than criticism, leading to guilt (Rogers, 2012).

Bongwe (2010, p. v) questions the conventional wisdom of the statement that "we should treat others as we want to be treated" and asks whether a preferable approach would be to treat others as they wish to be treated. What works for one does not necessarily work for all. Bongwe emphasises that the complexity of racial diversity in South Africa requires a depth of thinking and sensitivity.

This may seem a minor point, but the realisation among participants of their acceptance of the statement that we should treat others as we wish to be treated came as a jolt to their awareness of the tendency to treat others as though they are the same as we are. The fact that this is not the case was an important realisation. Coaching delivers this message by holding up a mirror to the client so that they examine themselves and their attitudes clearly and can make choices about their growth (Moen & Allgood, 2009).

If diversity is being invited to the party and inclusion is being asked to dance, then coaching the leader in the active inclusion of all members of the team becomes a key role for the coach (Rosinski, 2010). The importance of Rosinki's theory is emphasised by Deane (2013) who claims that inclusion is based on the need to achieve creativity and innovation through eliminating bias and discrimination, conflict, waste and unfairness so that companies make the best use of all talented resources. Deane's claim is an important aspect of this research as the goal of the coaching was to move towards making the best of a diverse range of talented resources.

Thomas (2001) talks about the vital role of coaches and mentors in enabling the continuous development and management of a diverse network of appropriate contacts who can play mentorship and facilitation roles when required. These contacts would also be influential in the organisation. This network should be designed to make the role of the coach unnecessary in the future of the individual as she starts to access support from her network of people. Myres (2014)

highlights how access to established networks plays a vital role in diversity, inclusion and career advancement for black South African executives.

Ninety percent of participants admitted that they did not make the best use of the networks available to them. One participant was appointed to a new role where he can flourish as a result of starting to connect with people in the company. All participants had not thought of making their networks available to their team members to enable the team members to learn the skill of networking and grow from being sponsored in appropriate networks.

Rosinski (2010, p. 40) defines leveraging as “achieving more output than the given input”. Input is team or personal potential combined with different cultural styles. Rosinski says that leveraging is about creating a synthesis which is greater than the cultural contributions taken separately. There should be sensitivity to the potential to develop tolerance of cultural differences rather than seeing them as an opportunity (Ayad & Rahim, 2013). Rosinski, Ayad and Rahim all believe that diversity should be intentionally pursued and nurtured with care.

A key finding of this research is that South African companies tend to tolerate diversity as part of complying with legislation. Participants could think of no company that currently stands out for leveraging demographic diversity as an advantage.

### *2.5.1 Proposition 3*

The coaching in the research always operated from a safe, non-judgemental space created with the intention of enabling the participants to explore their own biases, understand their cultural norms and be positively curious about the cultural norms of the people in their teams. They used mechanisms like sharing life stories, discussing micro-inequalities and having open and honest conversations about racial and cultural differences within their team to encourage openness to other views and possibilities. Additional coaching approaches used were regular self-reflection, reading and journaling to deepen awareness and a

focus on how to extract more value from networks to which both leaders and team members had access.

These techniques were shown to enable the realisation of the benefits of cultural diversity. In these ways, coaching built self-awareness, particularly of bias, drove inclusion, including into established networks and thus enabled the realisation of value from demographic diversity.

**Table 1: List of questions aligned with propositions**

| Research Question | Propositions |
|---|---|
| 1. What are the typical issues faced by South African business leaders who are leading racially diverse teams? | Leading people from diverse demographic and cultural groups requires executives to understand the different cultural orientations and leadership styles that are typical of the cultural grouping represented by the people they lead, so that they can recognise and adapt to different cultural norms and values by changing their behaviour or approach in appropriate ways. There is also an imperative for a clear vision of the diversity aspect of their leadership so that their followers have clarity on the leader's focus, actions and direction related to diversity. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2. Which demographic and cultural diversity aspects within teams did participants believe had the most impact? | The first requirement of South African business leaders leading culturally and demographically diverse teams is to acknowledge and understand cultural differences. This requires self-awareness, openness to other ways of thinking and building an understanding of cultural differences, including the impact of early life experiences. With this understanding, leading diversity requires deep reflection, leading to more skilful and transparent communication. The typical issues faced by South African leaders related to dealing with cultural and demographic diversity in business are the ability to see and acknowledge difference as a positive and the fear of navigating sensitive conversations skilfully due to a fear of emotional backlash. |
| 3. How can coaching support South African business leaders in growing their leadership effectiveness, specifically related to leading people from other demographic groups? | The coaching in the research always operated from a safe, non-judgemental space created with the intention of enabling the participants to explore their own biases, understand their cultural norms and be positively curious about the cultural norms of the people in their teams. They used |

| | |
|---|---|
| | mechanisms like sharing life stories, discussing micro-inequalities and having open and honest conversations about racial and cultural differences within their team to encourage openness to other views and possibilities. Additional coaching approaches used were regular self-reflection, reading and journaling to deepen awareness and a focus on how to extract more value from networks to which both leaders and team members had access.<br><br>These techniques were shown to enable the realisation of the benefits of cultural diversity. In these ways, coaching built self-awareness, particularly of bias, drove inclusion, including into established networks and thus enabled the realisation of value from demographic diversity. |

## 2.6 Conclusion of literature review

This literature review covers the challenges faced by South African business leaders in accessing the benefits of racial and cultural diversity in business teams and the coaching approaches used to enable access to that value. The research uncovered the challenges faced by the sample group as they explored issues of diversity in their teams more deeply, using coaching as a support in their observations and learning. The full spectrum from understanding early childhood experiences, sharing life stories, exploring personal unconscious bias, enabling leaders to see themselves and how they show up in their roles was explored, related to leading people from diverse backgrounds.

Another aspect of the research was the impact of natural, cultural differences between traditional white South African leadership styles of assertiveness, action-goal orientation and individualism in the face of traditional black South African styles of collaboration, community and harmony. The importance of effective leadership behaviour in setting the example and how coaching supported that in the context of leading culturally diverse teams was discussed.

The leader's approach was shown to be critical if teams are to add value and to extract value from diversity. The leader needs consciously to set the tone and the example for all team members related to interaction with people who are different from oneself.

South African businesses aim comply with legislation by achieving diversity at every level. This creates the need to understand and unpack what cultural intelligence looks like and how it operates. It starts with acknowledging differences between us, being conscious of and sensitive to them and then seeking to extract value from them. One of the realisations of participants in the research was a tendency not to acknowledge differences but rather to treat people as though they are all the same.

The researcher found no literature that offers the opposing view that demographic diversity has no impact or has a negative impact on the potential to extract value

from demographic and cultural diversity. There was also no research that disputes the fact that cultural intelligence adds value in achieving business success in a multicultural environment.

Coaching enables leaders to reap the benefits of cultural diversity rather than tolerating it, trying to make it behave like the dominant culture or pretending difference does not exist. Coaching built self-awareness, particularly of bias (Rosinski, 2010). Coaching was shown to be able to drive inclusion, including into established networks and thus enable the achievement of value from diversity.

# CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research approach taken; the design selected, the method of data selection and analysis used in the delivery of this research report. Qualitative action research was chosen due to its relevance to the “pluralisation of life worlds” (Flick, 2018, p. 3) and its approach to studying social relationships. It seeks to capture the individualisation of ways of living and biographical patterns. This individualisation includes dissolving old social inequalities into the new diversity of ways of living, which perfectly aligns with the research topic.

## 3.1 Research Approach

The methodology used in this research is qualitative, and the approach is action research. The research paradigm is epistemological (Yilmaz, 2013) and interpretive (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013) as a subjective approach was applied to the details of the situations being explored to understand the reality behind those details, including subjective meanings and motivating actions. It focuses on seeing and understanding behaviour. The researcher is part of what is being researched and cannot be separated from the process (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Qualitative research analyses data from direct fieldwork observations as was done in the coaching of the research participants. Qualitative researchers engage in curious enquiry, studying real settings, like the coaching in this action research, to generate detailed descriptions and build case studies. Analysis across cases (in this case, research participants) shows up patterns and themes, which are the rich fruit of qualitative research (Patton, 2005).

Action research starts with a question, drawing on and contributing to experiential learning at a personal, interpersonal and group level to study complex issues through partnership and participation (Somekh, 2005). All of these elements formed part of the design of this study.

The research took into account the three ideal conditions for conducting interpretive research (Yin, 2012) by asking questions to uncover the 'why' or 'how', through not controlling behavioural events as coaching requires that the choice of action is made personally by the coachee and through focusing on contemporary actions and events.

The requirements for constructivism (Wahyuni, 2012a) are demonstrated by the researcher's intention to understand the participants' experience and reconstruct that as a possible coaching approach, through the use of individual reconstructions adding up to a form of consensus, through the authenticity and sophistication of the teams of executives being coached and the fact that both coachees and the researcher (coach) could be categorised as passionate participants in the process.

## 3.2 Research Design

The qualitative research style chosen was action research, as this democratic and inclusive research approach (Bradbury, 2015) is appropriate for the topic. This claim is based on the fact that coaches work to enable clients to design their solutions rather than giving advice. Bradbury describes action research as bringing together theory and practice, action and reflection, in seeking a practical solution to an important question. This is an excellent description of what the research was designed to achieve. The definition goes on to describe action research as "knowing *with* not *about* people." That is simultaneously a description of how coaching works and how the research was planned.

The coaching on which the action research was based follows Varela's approach (Bradbury, 2015, p. 200), described by Scharmer (Senge & Scharmer, 2008), of suspending old ways of thinking, seeing the problem through the eyes of other people and letting go of thinking patterns in the process of allowing in new ways of thinking. Primarily, following Scharmer's thinking, the action research focused less on the experience of the coaching than on what the participants realised and did differently as a result of the experience. McNiff and Whitehead (2011)

recommend the use of action research to evaluate whether what is done affects the learning of self and others. This learning focus was a powerful motivator in the research planning process. Lewin (Adelman, 1993) is recognised as the founder of action research and his approach of discussion, decision, action, evaluation and revision was followed.

Lewin's research approach includes four types of action research (Adelman, 1993) and this research includes elements of three of those types; namely Diagnostic which produces a need for a plan of action (a suggested coaching approach and tools), Participant Action in which participants are involved in coming up with a solution (each participant chose which of the possible actions offered felt authentic for them) and Experimental Action, which covers a controlled study of the effectiveness of a range of techniques in similar social situations (each participant was leading a diverse team). The type less applicable in this research is Empirical Action as there was no day-to-day record keeping of experiences other than how each research participant chose to journal their experiences, which was personal and not shared.

The advantages of Lewin's scientifically pragmatic approach are the dialectic process of seeking the best fit for each research participant and the immediacy of acknowledging and recording the learning in each coaching interaction (Somekh, 2005). The data is thus cumulative, advancing with each coaching interaction, both group and individual coaching. This approach allowed the coach to adjust the plan during the process to accommodate the learning or to refocus on an area which seemed important. Examples of this are the power of life stories to create connection and the impact of talking about demographic difference as a potential value addition.

The disadvantage was that the design of the process was not clear and fixed at the start of the process. The coach knew the planned outcome, which evolved throughout the period based on learning and observation (Somekh, 2005).

## 3.3 Data Collection Methods

The action research participants were two groups of business leaders from two companies. These business leaders were questioned at the start of a six-month coaching process and again at the end to ascertain the impact of the coaching on their ability to lead in a culturally diverse environment in South Africa. Both of these questionnaires were divided into the three research themes driven by the research questions, namely Leadership, Diversity and Coaching. These research instruments are found in appendices A (pre-coaching interview guide) and B (post-coaching interview guide).

The process ran as follows:

- Each of the leaders of diverse business teams based at two different companies was interviewed at the start of the study to assess their current sense of effectiveness in leading their culturally and demographically diverse teams.
- Each team of leaders experienced a monthly, three-hour group coaching session, focused on a specific theme highlighted as important by the group, e.g. sharing life stories. They experienced six of these group sessions over six months. The intention was for them to learn together in a supportive way and to learn from each other's experiences.
- Each of the leaders also experienced a one-hour, one-on-one coaching session every month for six months in which they dealt with their personal challenges related to leading diverse teams effectively.
- After the six-month coaching intervention, each participant was interviewed again on how coaching had impacted their ability to lead diverse teams.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews designed to enable participants to share their perspectives, stories and experiences related to the three themes. Although the questionnaires contain a large number of questions, it was often not necessary to ask all of the questions as participants' answers

regularly covered several questions. The detailed question list was more a guide to the researcher to ensure that all aspects were covered. By the end of the coaching process, the close-out interviews benefited from the depth of the relationship built between the researcher (coach) and each participant. This led to a deep understanding of the participant being questioned based on experiences already shared during coaching sessions and resulted in the focus of the questions in the close-out process being on extracting meaning and learning from the experiences of the participants.

The actual coaching was a circular process of action (coaching), reflection by the coach and the participants on the content of the coaching session, what effect that had, what learning the coach and participants experienced in the delivery of coaching, how they applied that learning and what result they achieved from what they did differently. Then, based on this learning, what each coachee would do differently in the future. After each group coaching session and each one-on-one coaching session, the researcher (coach) sent each participant a personal e-mail with reflections on the discussion held in that session and suggestions of possible reflections or actions for the participant.

Through this continuous process of discussion and reflection in the service of learning, the action research process fulfilled the research role of generating new ideas, knowledge and theory (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 71).

Data collection included:

a. Pre-coaching interview
b. Post-coaching interview
c. Researcher/coach reflection after each coaching session and on the differences between pre- and post-coaching interviews

The data audit trail is in Appendix G.

The data was collected, always following the three themes of Leadership, Diversity and Coaching. The researcher/coach conducted all of the interviews

and personally transcribed each interview, as the transcription process embedded the knowledge gained and aided reflection. Each interview recording and each interview transcription was labelled only with the first and last initials of the participant. They were divided into the two companies involved. All hard copies printed for the purpose of analysis were shredded after use.

## 3.4 Population and Sample

### *3.4.1 Population*

The population was racially diverse South African business leaders of racially diverse teams of South Africans in the private sector.

### *3.4.2 Sample and sampling method*

The sample was business leaders in the private sector in Johannesburg, as the economic hub of South Africa. Each of the business leaders selected is the leader of a team of racially diverse South Africans. The group of business leaders in each company was also racially diverse. Patton (2002, p. 230) recommends that a small sample of participants with abundant knowledge and insight, as this sample possessed, should be chosen for qualitative research.

The sample size was seventeen business leaders. This number is considered sufficient for this research as described above, based on the guidance of Somekh (2005) that a restricted number of participants is appropriate.

Participants drew extensive learning from listening to each other's experiences, opinions and knowledge in the group sessions, as demonstrated in the post-coaching responses and from the confidential discussions held in the one-on-one coaching sessions, also shown in these responses.

Two companies were chosen as the cultures of different companies related to racial diversity added to the richness of thinking and learning. Participants signed a letter of agreement, which confirmed that they were volunteering to participate, described the research and asked for confirmation from each participant that they

understood that the sensitive topic might trigger emotions. This agreement also describes the coaching approach to be followed (Appendix D).

## 3.5 The Research Instrument

The coaching instruments were an interview guide for the pre-coaching semi-structured interview and another interview guide for the post-coaching semi-structured interview.

The pre-coaching interview guide was divided into the three themes and aligned with what the research aimed to learn about the thinking of the client before the start of the coaching related to:

Leadership

- Challenges experienced
- Influence of early life experience
- Adaptation to the workplace
- Current behaviours

Diversity

- Unconscious bias
- Attitudes
- Perceptions about the value of diversity
- Challenges in this regard requiring focus in the future

Coaching

- Perceptions or experiences of coaching
- Interest in the topic

After the coaching, participants were interviewed on its impact, particularly on their ability to work effectively as leaders of people from different demographic and cultural groups in a manner that extracted value from this diversity. They

were asked about the impact of coaching on their ability to lead a team of racially diverse people.

## 3.6 Procedure for Data Collection

After obtaining clearance from the ethics committee of Wits Business School, interviews were arranged with each of the participants. These took place at the companies where they work so that participants were experienced in their work environment. There was a focus on building a relationship of mutual trust and mutual learning with each participant as this is a requirement for effectiveness both of the coaching and participation in research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Each semi-structured interview took at least an hour, and each was followed by a debrief discussion. The coaching skills of building rapport, asking powerful questions and active listening (Whitley, Kite, & Adams, 2013) were used. These actions are also all part of the coaching core competencies (International Coach Federation, 2018). The recordings were transcribed by the researcher as part of the data analysis process (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

## 3.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The research followed a qualitative thematic analysis approach, as recommended by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), in the analysis and interpretation of data. As indicated in the literature review, the data was divided into the themes of Leadership, Diversity and Coaching.

Using the guidelines of Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the researcher transcribed each interview, read through each transcript to deepen familiarity and understanding, highlighted concepts and meanings in the three themes, clustered and categorised the data and explored how each data set related to others within the themes by dismantling, segmenting and reassembling the data to build meaningful findings and thus draw learnings (Boeije, 2010).

The participants are not identified in any way in their comments (e.g. Participant 1), as the small size of the different demographic groups create the potential for participants to be identified, especially by the other participants themselves if they read the research report. Examples of this include one participant referring to himself as, “a black dude” and another white female talking about an African name as “a funny name.” The firms are also not identified as Firm one and Firm two due to their very different leadership structures, which could risk identification.

## 3.8 Limitations of the Study

The sample chosen naturally impacted the results achieved by this research. A similar research project in the public sector would probably produce different results as the demographics and work approach would be different. The sample was limited to private sector business people in Johannesburg.

## 3.9 Transferability, Dependability, Credibility & Conformability

Tracy (2010) explored eight important quality markers in qualitative research. They are worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. These eight aspects offer a useful learning model and provide a language of qualitative best practice that can be recognised as common across a variety of audiences.

This research was an honest attempt to extract knowledge from the lived experience of the research participants about how coaching (theme 3) impacted their ability to lead (theme 1) diverse teams (theme 2). The effects of realisations during coaching were continuously captured and tested by the participants as to their efficacy. Each participant had a vested interest in the research as each learned from the experiences of their colleagues as well as their own experiences during coaching. The ethical requirements of Wits Business School from a research perspective and of Comensa (Coaches and Mentors South Africa) and the ICF (International Coaching Federation) from a coaching perspective, were rigorously applied.

### *3.9.1 Transferability*

The fact that each research participant contributed immediate impressions of their experiences ensured that this need was met. These impressions are relevant to other business leaders in similar situations and form a list of relevant potential actions and approaches that other business leaders could follow.

### *3.9.2 Dependability*

The research was tested in a number of ways, as suggested by Wahyuni (2012b). The interview guides were piloted with other coaching clients of the researcher who were interested in the topic of the research but not research participants. This pilot process showed that the interview guides were fit for purpose.

The participant and coach reflections after each coaching session and the check-in at the start of the next coaching session on how participants applied what they had learned and the outcome of that application deepened insights and added to the learning.

These insights on reflection and action created a set of optional actions that are repeatable, clearly designed and explained to form a potential management approach.

### *3.9.3 Credibility*

The criteria given to the two companies were that the research participants should be representative of South African racial diversity, and each lead a team that includes demographically diverse South Africans. This supported a state of internal credibility. Accuracy in what was observed came through the personal e-mails from the coach to each participant after each coaching session and was consolidated in the findings from the post-coaching interview. These findings confirmed that the study tested what it intended to test.

### *3.9.4 Conformability*

Each group had the same coaching experience. It is thus reasonable to assume that the outcomes reported by each group conform to the same research requirements.

## 3.10 Ethical Considerations

Close association with the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and Coaches and Mentors South Africa (Comensa), ensured adherence to the rigorous ethical standards of both coaching bodies. At the time of the research, the coach (researcher) held the Master Coach Credential from the International Coach Federation and the Member Coach Credential from Coaches and Mentors South Africa. The coaching ethical requirements of these bodies include:

International Coaching Federation (International Coach Federation, 2019)

a. Having the professional competence required by the organisation for claiming to be a coach
b. Operating at all times in service of the client's learning with due care for the client's psychological and physical well-being
c. Partnering with the client to maximise their personal and professional potential
d. Maintaining integrity in the coaching relationship
e. Keeping client information confidential
f. Continuous learning on the part of the coach

How this was applied:

a. The coach holds the Master Coach Credential from the International Coaching Federation, indicating a high level of coaching competence, as assessed by the organisation
b. All participants were fully briefed on what to expect before the coaching process and invited to express any discomfort they felt at any point in the

process so that the coaching could be adjusted to accommodate all of the participants' coaching needs

c. The basis of all coaching is maximising the coachee's potential, and the coaching programme was designed to meet this objective
d. Coaching is a partnership of trust between the coach and coachee. It is based on continuous contracting to check in on the integrity of the partnership
e. All coaching information must be kept confidential. No recording of coaching took place. The only recording of data was as described and with the express permission of the client
f. The coach continuously reflected on the learning in each coaching session and designed future sessions based on that learning.

Comensa (Comensa (Coaches and Mentors of South Africa), 2015)

a. Coaches are committed to being held accountable for their actions, primarily to their clients and also to Comensa
b. Coaches are inclusive in that they are non-judgemental, accommodating and unconditionally inclusive of all people they interact with
c. Coaches demonstrate integrity by operating at all times in the interests of the client and with the appropriate qualification for the work they undertake. This undertaking includes being aware of potential conflicts of interest either commercial or emotional and not exploiting relationships. Client relationships are continuously assessed related to progress and, where no progress is made, the relationship is re-evaluated.

How this was applied:

a. Current Comensa membership and the Registered Coach Credential were in place. This was a demonstration of commitment to upholding the coaching requirements of Comensa
b. Continuous contracting with the coachees as to their level of comfort with the process and their personal experience of it was applied. The nature of

the coaching programme was to build non-judgement and inclusivity into the way of being of the coaches, and the coach set the example of these qualities

c. Integrity of the process was part of the contracting with each coachee. Both companies were fully aware of the other company involved, and no company-specific information was shared. Non-disclosure agreements were signed with both companies.

As in any coaching situation, the participants could have been affected by coaching in a way that caused conflict or caused them to become emotional. This is in line with one of the requirements of the core coaching competencies of the International Coach Federation, to take the client to sensitive places in service of their growth (International Coach Federation, 2018). Coaches are trained to deal sensitively with these situations in a way that embeds the growth and keeps the client safe.

The research also satisfied the ethical requirements of the Wits Business School in that:

a. Participation was voluntary
b. Participants were fully informed at the start of the process of each step in the process
c. All information was held and managed to ensure confidentiality
d. Names and identities of individuals are not disclosed
e. Participants signed consent forms which included full information about the process
f. The necessary documents required by the Wits Business School Ethics Committee were completed

These research ethical requirements of the Wits Business School were adhered to at all times.

# CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

## 4.1 Introduction

This section reports on the experiences of the participants during the coaching process.

The research findings are presented under the three propositions. The description by participants of their shifts in thinking, feeling and behaving as a result of coaching demonstrate where change occurred and where nothing changed during the coaching process.

The research participants represented a racially diverse group of executives who each led racially diverse teams.

The demographic make-up of the participants was:

**Table 2: Demographics**

| **Race Group** | **Male** | **Female** |
|---|---|---|
| Black African | 1 | 2 |
| White | 1 | 5 |
| Indian | 5 | 2 |
| Coloured | | 1 |

The participants were split almost equally between two companies. One team works in investment and the other in technology.

In each company for six months, a monthly group workshop was held to focus on a specific aspect of the topic. Each participant also engaged in monthly one-on-one coaching sessions with the coach.

After six months of coaching, all of the participants said that the research coaching had exceeded their initial expectations *"A positive 10 out of 10!"*, with eight of the seventeen participants emphasising the quality of connection with the coach as an essential factor for coaching to be successful. *"The connection with the coach is an important factor. I may not have got as much out of the process with a coach who I felt less comfortable with."* "*In any group, people tend to hold back. What you managed to unlock for us was to be open with ourselves and each other*." *"I enjoyed sharing how I feel with you with no judgement."*

All participants felt strongly that coaching is an important support tool for leaders, both as a sounding board and a continuous process of reflection on what they are doing and achieving. *"Like in sport, leaders require coaching to operate optimally to deliver on their mandates." "Many leaders naively believe that they have all the answers."*

While white and Indian people were eager to participate in the coaching, only three black African people volunteered. When the black African people were questioned about the fact that their representation was not aligned with their representation in the population, the responses indicated a sense that black people did not need to learn how to work with other races. This was not overtly stated but was understood based on questioning about why black people were not as eager to volunteer for the research coaching. When asked about levels of understanding of other race groups, the black and coloured participants felt they were doing better at this that white and Indian participants, *"I think I'm doing pretty well, but there's always the opportunity to learn more."*

## 4.2 Findings pertaining to proposition 1 – Leadership challenges

The typical leadership issues faced by South African leaders when leading demographically and culturally diverse teams include the following:

- Lack of early life exposure
- Feeling and giving respect
- Lack of ability to see and acknowledge difference as positive
- Fear of navigating sensitive conversations skilfully
- Fear of emotional backlash, including on social media
- Corporate focus on compliance and tolerance

All participants had little or no interaction with people from other demographic groups when they were children. The exceptions were people who had been part of a family business or who grew up on a farm.

Interaction with other demographic groups began for most of the participants in late high school or at university. Often this remained limited, as people tended to associate with students who were similar to themselves. For most, active interaction began in the workplace. "*At work, it's very different because we all have to meet the company's criteria, so once you've achieved that you should all be equal. I think in the workplace, I feel more equal that outside the workplace."*

Most participants experienced this separation as normal because it was the law of the land at the time. *"Being separate felt normal. It's how it was in those days."*

A minority whose parents were activists through religious or other reasons remembered being conscious of unfairness. There was a general consciousness among all participants that early life separation and inequality led to the formation of unconscious bias about other demographic groups.

*"I didn't think about it until I got to varsity and had black and white friends and discovered that they were just like me."*

*"It felt normal for me. Now I have a child who goes to a multi-racial school, and it's a very different upbringing from mine. Very privileged."*

*"We were told that white people hate us. The only whites we were exposed to were the police. Once you start interacting, you learn that is a myth. As a child, I didn't question the way things were, but as I grew up, it became a barrier."*

### *4.2.1 Feeling and giving respect*

Participants who are not white talked about how they had started their working lives having to deal with feeling insulted and excluded due to their demographic difference and how they had come to terms with that. *"When I started working in banking, I had to tolerate being called derogatory names with no action taken to support me. We are now less subservient, and I have also learned to adjust better. I try to understand what the other person is thinking."*

The concept of performance is also complicated. Black African people want to feel they are in positions because of their ability rather than their demographic group. *"When I got to university, I was exposed to all races but still did not feel equal. Even when I started working, I still didn't feel equal. I had to decide to look at things differently. This change of mindset was hard after growing up in a differentiated society. It requires a conscious choice."*

Other powerful comments related to coming to terms with the changed circumstances included:

*"I think people who grew up pre-1994 have difficulty shedding racial bias. Unless you live with people and understand their daily circumstances, it's hard to put yourself in their shoes."*

*"Things changed, and white people said we should just get over it and move on, but they never understood how hard it was growing up without things."*

White people were initially seen as supporting each other in work situations and promotion opportunities. This concept of race-based support is seen to have

extended to black African people doing the same. The result is that Indian and coloured people feel at times that they have no champions. *"White people had their old boys network and now black people have their own networks. Indian people are like the lettuce in the burger."*

*"Although we've technically been equal for twenty-five years, we're still so conscious of race and our differences that this discomfort impacts the ease with which we interact with each other. We are still most at ease with people like ourselves."*

Participants described how coaching had enabled them to discuss race and to see difference as positive. Group coaching helped them to know and experience people differently through being able to share thoughts and experiences and learn from others who work in similar roles in a safe, non-judgemental environment. This experience helped them to lead differently. *"The team dynamic changed because I took the time to understand people beyond their work."* This change included *"letting go of my fear of offending people."*

Coaching enabled participants to move beyond their natural bias in a range of ways. *"It's less around perceptions of race groups and more about people's individual stories. You realise how baseless generalisations are. I no longer develop perception around race but about individuals*."

*"I built bias based on being used to being with people like me. People not like me could be the enemy. Restrictions made us feel we had less worth than others, and we built an inferiority complex because of how we looked. Only people who looked a certain way could access privilege."*

*"I've became conscious in the coaching of my blinkers and the fact that I see things through my history. The fact that I now extend beyond myself is making people see me differently. I got much more out of coaching than I expected."*

*"I've been able to help my team understand each other better. They tended to jump to conclusions based on little evidence. The team members now trust each other and collaborate more."*

*"I was at my wits end with my team. The race-based questions offered as a team exercise between coaching sessions completely changed the dynamic in my team and enabled us to get on the same page in how we support each other."*

*"My stereotyping hasn't gone, but I've learned not to be as judgemental as I used to be. I now try to hear what people are not saying."*

*"I was previously tolerant rather than allowing myself to be immersed. Now I even appreciate different styles of music. I can be open and curious, watching others enjoy things. Letting go of tolerance and immersing myself more has changed my life experience."*

*"I'm aware now of stereotypes and how un-useful they are." "The Rugby World Cup win brought us all together as South Africans. It was a moment that showed us what's possible through capitalising on diversity. We need more of those."*

These quotes demonstrate participant's realisations about themselves and those they work with, through the coaching experience.

#### *4.2.2 Lack of ability to see and acknowledge difference as positive*

White participants tended to realise that they were treating everyone as though we are all the same, which shut down the potential for diversity to add value. By acknowledging difference, the potential increased.

*"It helped me to step back and listen more. I've been hugely impressed by what my team delivers now. We are doing things faster and so much better through collaborating effectively and each contributing our talents."*

*"I have a deeper appreciation that my diverse team brings an amazingly diverse perspective. I realised that if we were all the same, I'd have missed out on so*

*many insights both on the team and the organisation as a whole. Their uniqueness brings richness in our solutions."*

Consciousness was built that, within each demographic group, there is rich diversity that adds to the complexity. There is a need to respect each other in simple things, like not talking a language that others in the rooms do not understand. *"One of the ways I am made to feel excluded is when black people speak their own language, knowing that I don't understand what is being said."*

Through coaching, people became more comfortable to be with and converse with others who were different from them. The coaching challenge had been actively to seek out different people in every work situation and to associate with them rather than only with people similar to themselves. One participant said*, "It's easy in lifts or team areas, and it leads to all sorts of interesting conversations." "I'm willing to ask more questions to understand cultures instead of my previous reticence or looking uninterested."*

Coaching enabled participants to stop pretending that they do not see colour. They learned to accept colour differences and see them as opportunities*. "I find myself being more strategic about how I use racial difference – how I team people up or who I use to get better business results."*

*"I've shifted from feeling that I need to behave differently when I'm at work to realising that people respect me because of who I am rather than who I think I need to be."*

*"I've become conscious of race beyond just at work. I've realised I need to be more conscious of and sensitive to culture in all aspects of my life. The reading we did changed my perceptions of race significantly."* This statement is a demonstration of a focus of the coaching, which was to build curiosity towards a better understanding.

Participants acknowledged that there was more listening happening in their teams. The way they talked together encouraged the contribution of different

ideas. *"They understand what's common and are open to what's different. They've shifted from separateness to working well together."*

#### *4.2.3 Navigating sensitive conversations skilfully*

Differing levels of emotional maturity and racial sensitivity due to past diminishing experiences also come into play, making performance discussions an area than many leaders dread.

*"There's a fine line between what different cultures regard as respect in the workplace. Respect, boundaries, and what people hold dear have caused conflict. There are both race and emotional maturity aspects to conflict. I'm also curious about what drives people to perform. I see some white people being complacent in their jobs while many black people are studying because they want a career. I believe my experience is typical of South African business."*

*"Managing conflict in a way that doesn't seem racist is hard. Many managers shy away from it and avoid the conflict, which creates problems in the team and can lead to suspicions of favouritism. I also battle with white people feeling there are no longer opportunities for them. This assumption can create silos along race lines. There's a lot of underlying anger."*

A minority of black participants felt inferior – *"everything black symbolised bad, and everything white symbolised good."* This opinion led to a deep sense of exclusion or inferiority in some and anger and resentment in others. Those feelings have not been entirely eradicated and can still emerge when triggered.

There was a strong sense among some participants that black people should stand together and support each other. *"There is still a part of me that doesn't trust equality."* Business experience, however, had taught black participants that black people do not automatically support each other. This realisation led to a level of disillusionment. *"I've learned the hard lesson not to take support from people who look like me as a given."*

Conversations had often not been happening. *"Coaching promoted conversation with my team. Prior to coaching, I had made assumptions, and now I ask questions in a way that makes people feel safe to be honest."*

The power of tolerance and respect in achieving positive outcomes and mindset shifts was an important discovery for fourteen out of seventeen of participants in *"easing the work environment."* This related to a realisation that there is not only one right way.

There was a general acknowledgement from all participants that learning how to hold difficult conversations more effectively rather than avoiding them, was a positive way to ease relationships and built support and collaboration. *"Coaching has given me the courage to ask questions, which I shied away from before. I now stand up for myself in a positive, unemotional, respectful way."*

#### *4.2.4 Fear of emotional backlash, including on social media*

Regular flare-ups of racial accusations on social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, have created a sense of fear, particularly among white participants, of having their words or behaviour interpreted as racist. This fear impacts on their ability to hold honest conversations or discuss opinions. Ultimately, it creates the *"walking on egg-shells"* feeling of staying safe by not mentioning anything related to race. Many South Africans who are not black African avoid the topic of race altogether, which shuts down the potential for finding ways to extract value from our diversity. The potential for race to be emotional and contentious shuts down the opportunity to see the advantage in it. *"Some people come to work charged with resentment and can derail the team. People are so sensitive about race. Is it too important to address or not important enough? In that gap is where perceptions, assumptions and corridor talk can start and become toxic."*

An important realisation for participants was that people have the same basic needs, hopes and dreams for themselves and their children. The racial differences are the layers added by life and cultural experiences. These are the

things that have the power to produce different thinking, solutions and approaches to opportunities and challenges. *"I realised that people are fundamentally the same regardless of their race."*

One of the big take-outs for some participants was a deeper consciousness of what is in their control. This realisation helped them shift from victim mode to taking the actions that are in their power. The effect of that action built their awareness of the systemic nature of personal and business interaction. Participants who stepped into their power were astounded by how this mindset shift empowered them to effect change that had previously seemed impossible.

*"I now have different conversations because I think of things from the other person's perspective. This perspective makes it safe for them to be honest with me. We collaborate better through improved conversations."*

*"By talking about race, we created initial discomfort and then used the experience to get closer and more comfortable with each other."*

*"I now have daily stand-ups to build consciousness of people's challenges and potential. I suspend judgement about behaviour and am curious and supportive. More tolerant. Now I reach out to people and consult to understand their perspective. It shifts how we work together and the results we achieve."*

#### *4.2.5 Corporate focus on compliance and tolerance*

None of the participants could identify or describe their company's vision for demographic diversity beyond compliance with legislation. During the research, one of the companies announced a decision that 90% of all appointments and promotions must be black African, which pointed to a focus on compliance.

Diversity training within companies was overwhelmingly focused on understanding and getting on with each other. The topic of extracting value from racial diversity was never touched on.

Feedback from participants was that racial diversity is seen as a requirement rather than deliberately planned as an advantage.

#### *4.2.6 Conclusions*

The key leadership issues faced by participants related to leading demographically and culturally diverse teams were aggravated by a lack of normal exposure in early life to people of other race groups. This lack of exposure created complex feelings for some about finding their rightful place in the business world, the lack of an ability to see racial difference as a potential positive and anxiety about their ability to talk about racial difference skilfully and without offending. The participants all found ways to address these issues and realised that, at the level of basic human needs, they were all very similar. They were able to distinguish the difference in their coaching experience of leading diversity in a way that unlocks the potential added value and the corporate training approach they had experienced, which focused on tolerance and compliance.

### 4.3 Findings pertaining to proposition 2 – Diversity issues

Coaching supports South African business leaders in growing their effectiveness when leading people from diverse demographic groups in the following ways:

- Builds leader self-awareness
- Builds leader situational-awareness
- Enables leader behaviour change
- Enables leader recognition of and adaptation to different cultural norms and values

Demographic difference, commonly referred to as race or racial diversity, was identified by all participants as one of the most critical topics in business in South Africa at this time and also the most emotionally charged, *"I think the topic of this research is the most important topic in business today." "Race and South Africa – you can't say the one without the other", "I was looking at problems within me. Coaching helped me think about resolving issues rather than personalising*

*them."* This state is driven by impatience for racial transformation among black African employees and fears about the personal impact of transformation targets among white and Indian employees. *"I'm more understanding related to where people are related to the effects of our history. We tend to forget about the scars that need to heal. Coaching created more understanding about the back story of others."* This heightened emotion makes race a difficult topic, resulting it being avoided – participants often talked about the feeling of "*walking on eggshells*" when having to address anything remotely linked to race, including performance. "*They don't take up poor performance because it might be seen as racist." "I didn't realise how much of an undertone race is here. There's a lot of work to do. I was surprised by some of the things that came out in group sessions."*

The safe route seemed to be to operate as though everyone in business is the same, which then shuts down the potential to extract value from diversity. Most participants were curious about how their behaviour should differ when dealing with people of different demographic groups. There was a general eagerness to learn more about other demographic groups. *"My behaviour has shifted. I realise I need to do more work to understand people of different race groups." "It's a new field of thinking and understanding for me."*

Participants admitted when asked to select their most usual approach to working with people from other demographic groups from the range of:

- Tolerating their differences
- Pretending they are the same as you
- Making allowances for their differences
- Seeking to use their differences to add value to your thinking or way of being
- Hoping they will quickly learn to operate the way you do

that they had not previously been conscious of any of those approaches and, on reflection, they were aware of themselves using all of the options at different times. All participants acknowledged that, before coaching, they were operating

least in the option of seeking value from difference. *"I previously was aware of making certain assumptions. I know now there's a gap I need to work on." "This process enabled people to be very real about their perceptions." "I now acknowledge the differences. It's better to understand others and work together, knowing we're different."*

All participants desired deeper understanding and self-awareness in navigating demographic diversity in business. *"This is hugely important to me. I have a racially diverse team, and sometimes we don't realise our unconscious bias. We do and say things without realising that they are disrespectful." "I need a deeper understanding of how I show up."* There was a real curiosity about how to extract value from diversity, "*I think if everyone embraced diversity instead of fighting it, we would be more productive," "If we start incorporating the richness of diversity, we will make better and more responsible decisions,"* and a general consciousness that people behave at work as though all people are the same *"There are often things we shy away from because we're afraid of the connotation of racism"*, while at home and when relaxing, they align strongly with their cultural and demographic group, *"…we go home and do our Indian things in Sandton"*. This reality was graphically demonstrated in the large canteen of one of the companies, where on any day, less than 10% of the more than 100 tables included people of more than one demographic group sharing meals. There was a consciousness of how generally superficial people's understanding of their colleagues is related to demographic and cultural differences.

All participants rated their understanding of people from other demographic groups as average and were open to being proved wrong and to learning more. *"I'm scoring myself two-and-a-half out of five because of my experiences. I thought I knew, but I'm learning that I don't."* "*It's difficult to understand people from other race groups as you haven't walked in their shoes."* There was a real awareness of the impact of growing up separately and the fact that interaction with other demographic groups only began for this group of executives in late high school, at university or in the workplace, so there is still much to learn,

*…thank goodness I had varsity and high school, so I had time to adjust to how things are – even simple things like eye contact. Without that transition opportunity, I could have been overwhelmed by suddenly working with white people."*

Thirteen of the seventeen participants hoped to learn how to normalise their interaction with other demographic groups so that there was more comfort and ease which would open up the potential to work better together and thus extract value from their differences, *"I shy away, I don't feel confident that I'm managing it in the most effective way that is fair to everyone"*. The remainder already felt at ease with racial diversity, *"Right now, I'm not experiencing any difficulties*." They were open to learning how to adjust their style of leading to becoming more inclusive and accessible. There was also a great deal of reflection on how we normalise the present and future based on the inequality of the past. *"Sometimes, I'm amazed at the different people's perspectives." "I think it takes a lot for us to understand the people we lead, especially in big teams."*

#### *4.3.1 Building self-awareness*

There was a real desire among participants to explore how to extract value from diversity, *"It's about people respecting, learning and appreciating. It doesn't mean I have to behave like a black dude; it's about being people together to have more impact*.

Participants believed that some of the things they needed to do personally to interact better with members of other demographic groups included building deeper awareness and reaching out more to build friendships. One participant commented, *"This conversation (the intake questionnaire) has made me conscious of my level of discomfort and my low amount of exposure beyond being in the same business meetings."* Another aspect of building connection that was identified was understanding the everyday circumstances of colleagues, for example, the level of difficulty they face getting to work *"If someone has to take three taxis to work, there needs to be a level of understanding of the complexity, although this doesn't mean lowering the standard of work output."* There was a

general sense of the need to spend more time talking to each other, listening and understanding rather than pretending we and our lives are all the same. This realisation includes the ability to accommodate different beliefs and values. A profound comment was*, "I think I need to be equipped with better skills to handle difficult conversations and situations better. I shy away from them, withdraw and don't show up properly. My long-term conditioning can make me feel victimised."*

When asked about the level of agreement with the McKinsey and Company research finding (Hunt et al., 2015) that diverse teams have the potential to deliver 30% more value, all respondents agreed that, in theory, this sounded correct, *"I think that's true, especially if you look at South African demographics*. *We are very lucky in our demographics. It helps companies to get diverse input for their markets".* There was a general lack of understanding about how to shift from acknowledging the theory to practically extracting that value related to demographic difference.

One of the critical take-outs from the coaching process for all participants was the power of reflection -the need not to respond too quickly. *"To be able to lead from the back in good times and be out in front in tough times. Listen to people, reflect and then answer."*

#### *4.3.2 Building situational awareness*

Participants were asked to rank the demographic groups in their companies related to the power each held. They were then asked their opinion of what the ideal ranking would be. Without exception, they acknowledged that, while companies need to reflect the reality of South Africa, ranking power according to race is not the answer. Ability must be the deciding factor in selecting and promoting people so that companies continuously grow through remaining competitive and profitable. *"I don't think there is an ideal ranking. There can't be. It would become window dressing. You can't do quotas for talent and leadership."*

When asked about the appropriateness of Western business culture in an African country, participants acknowledged that aspects of Western business culture are

necessary due to the global nature of business. They identified the opportunity to bring in elements of African-ness in the way people interact and even in their dress so that all employees have a sense of belonging rather than feeling pressurised to conform with a way of being that is entirely foreign to their upbringing. *"A South African way of doing business is a mix of African, Western and Eastern culture. If you get it right, it engages head, heart and gut. Embracing diversity is very important, but first, we need to trust each other. Other countries have a passionate value system and patriotism. We need to build on moments of united pride, like the Rugby World Cup win."*

When asked what needs to happen for all South Africans to interact more effectively, the responses were roughly divided into three categories. Some participants identified the need for more respect, acknowledgement of the past and active focus on addressing what needs healing so that we can move on. *"We need to recognise the past but not let it stop us reaching the future. We need to move beyond seeing what separates us and see what's common. We need to hold courageous conversations."*

Others felt that we need more active and conscious exposure to each other, at work, socially and in our homes so that we connect on our similarities and enjoy learning about our differences. "*Getting to know each other better and letting other people know me. I've made progress in this. I've shared my current situation. Previously I didn't share even significant things."*

The third group felt that greater financial equality is the key to building a great sense of being part of one nation. "*We need to understand that politics is a show. Inequality and poverty is the biggest problem we have."* At the end of the coaching process, the opinions about what we need to do to live together more effectively had not changed.

Participants talked about the coaching building increased awareness of how they think and talk about people different from themselves and what their children overhear them saying related to race. *"I've become very conscious of what I say in front of my children so that I don't infect them with my perspectives."* They

developed the ability to understand who needs space and who needs support, which enabled the participants to achieve more team effectiveness. *"It felt like the beginning of a journey and made me question what I'd always believed."*

Another participant mentioned being called out by a colleague for referring to an African surname as *"a funny name"*. This comment had been interpreted as insulting although she intended to express her inability to remember the name. She was immediately aware of her thoughtlessness and disrespect in the way she had tried to compensate for her lack of ability. This incident was a perfect example of the description of micro-inequalities, implying that my name is normal, and yours is *"funny."*

#### *4.3.3 Awareness of unconscious bias*

All participants commented on the power of being made to reflect on their attitudes and behaviours. All acknowledged in the pre-coaching interview guide that they held unconscious bias related to other demographic groups and could cite examples of those. They also admitted that, when challenged by the research questions, this consciousness came to the fore but that in their everyday lives up to that point, they had not thought of those ingrained perceptions as bias. Things they were unconscious of or did not previously question, became front of mind through coaching. The group coaching created a safe space to ask questions people were usually too nervous to ask and to have robust conversations about race in a constructive, unemotional way. This ability to have honest conversations led to deeper personal awareness of what individuals bring to the table. Barriers were broken down and paradigms "debunked". Participants learned from each other how to support people in achieving their goals so that the team benefits in the process. *"Because I've been thinking and talking about it, I believe I am more conscious. I pause and notice myself so that I can approach things differently."*

The reflection, reading and team conversation tasks that were given to participants also drove learning. Reading and thinking about reflection questions asked ahead of the next coaching session drove focus and attention on the topic.

*"A lot of the reflection questioning and the depth of understanding achieved. We tend not to reflect at this level. Having a sounding board was powerful."*

*"I really liked the reading material you gave us, but the highlight was the group coaching because we got perspectives from other leaders in the group."*

*"The challenges you gave us made us go and think and achieve something within a given timeframe. Sometimes I did it because I wanted to and sometimes because you would hold me accountable."*

The experience of coaching significantly raised awareness of an even more extensive range of bias related to demographic diversity. Participants were continuously questioning themselves about their thoughts, perceptions and assumptions. They were more aware of subtleties in their behaviour and thinking. The result of this awareness was that their team members felt more comfortable to come to them with things that might previously have been regarded as too sensitive. *"It's improved. I no longer jump to conclusions, e.g. when someone struggles with English. I don't jump in any more and correct them. I aim to give out a silent message of acceptance. When you connect like that, it's great. It moves relationships to a different level when you are open about accepting them."*

Consciousness of not infecting their children with their own bias was an important take-out for participants. They also became more aware of how their children view society related to demographic groups. "*I'm a lot more aware and likely to think about what I say, not only at work but at home where my children may be influenced by my views. My daughter may make assumptions from off the cuff statements I make. Being conscious of this is now important."*

There was a general sense of being more patient with people, once participants had built awareness of bias. Patience and decreased judgement were common themes among most participants related to how they had grown through the coaching process. This led to an ability to see the value in different thinking - *"hearing other people's views on problems and solutions that better suit the*

*situation." "I no longer allow myself to be restricted in my thoughts and assumptions."*

*"My team members are more trusting than in the past. Our conversations have built this trust. I invite open challenge when I am misdirected and can gently challenge other's misdirected perceptions. I choose to resolve rather than to be confrontational."*

In the first group session, the ego encapsulated in the commonly held belief that we should treat others as we want to be treated was highlighted, and this was an eye-opener for many related to their natural bias. *"I became more aware of the differences rather than ignoring them."*

*"Coaching has made me more effective through being less intimidated by who is sitting on the other side of the table, which was definitely linked to race. I've been able to put that stuff aside. I only had to change the angle of my thoughts. That was the turning point."*

There was a general sense that awareness about unconscious bias was a work-in-progress and that more coaching would have had a more significant impact on this aspect of participants' behaviour "*It's not perfect, but I think before I speak."* All participants realised that their bias was about their own life experience "*It's not perfect, but I think before I speak."* All participants realised that their bias was about their life experience and not the reality of the situation. "*I've become more conscious of my blinkers and the fact that I see things from the perspective of my history." "It's less about them and more about me." "In the first group session, you spoke about treating people the way they want to be treated, which flagged things for me, and you've helped me to address this through the coaching process."*

#### *4.3.4 Changing behaviour*

The introduction of tools such as telling personal stories and contracting clearly with team members and other stakeholders helped deepen engagement, understanding and a sense of safety. "*Understanding people's lives and*

*challenges has changed my relationship with them. I also know how to support them better. We're in a better space now."*

The fact that discussions about race initiated by participants with their team members as part of the coaching all took far longer than expected was an indication of how much eagerness there was to engage on the topic generally. *"I'm starting to have people engaging me and talking to me about things they are struggling with related to diversity. The fact that I have extended my reach beyond myself is attracting others who see a different me. They are engaging me on things they are struggling with."*

For some participants, the personal shift achieved from coaching was building self-confidence to *"let go of the timid person inside me and discover my power".* It was positively powerful for each participant in a different way, and this kind of change was initiated in the one-on-one coaching process where personal perceptions were addressed. *"Coaching gives you a great appreciation of the people you're with, and it helps you work out where the power is. It made me braver about engaging with people who are more senior than me. We need to put more into understanding people through a race lens."*

Another aspect raised by more than fourteen of the seventeen of participants was the experience of not previously being able to talk freely about racial diversity in the space of deep listening. By talking through perceptions and experiences, participants could process what was going on for them with more perspective and less personal emotion. The lack of judgement in the coaching experience enabled more balanced thinking. *"I enjoyed sharing how I felt with no judgement. Sometimes I carry a situation inside with a lot of emotion, but I'm too afraid to talk about it as I could be seen as racist, disrespectful or inconsiderate. It's good to share a scenario with you and get perspective."*

All participants felt able to build empathy and understanding, which led to their team members feeling more accepted and understood and thus becoming more productive. *"In the group sessions, you were able to reframe things so that they*

*were safer and easier to discuss by letting go of judgement in service of understanding. It's about building empathy and demonstrating caring, which leads to more productivity where people feel accepted and understood."*

Many participants experienced coaching as taking them into areas they had been avoiding. Some noted *that "doors were opening to them as a result of their being more open"* themselves. Mainly, it was about becoming braver and continuously challenging themselves to bring up topics previously avoided. Once the participants' team members understood each other better, based on personal stories or conversations in the team, their way of working together changed to being more trusting and interdependent.

Another positive aspect of one-on-one coaching was the ability to judge where to focus attention to achieve positive change and what to let go of so that self-torture decreased. This ability to let go generally came from having been able to talk through deeply held perceptions or old beliefs in the deep-listening, non-judgemental space. *"I calmed down a lot. I now accept what I can do and what is out of my control. My approach to things that bother me changed due to coaching. I've stopped wasting energy on things I can't change."*

*"I realised that leadership extends beyond my team. I started sharing what I'd learned with other teams, and people started coming to talk to me to find perspective or to resolve a situation in which they find themselves. I've become a leader more broadly."*

#### *4.3.5 Recognition and adaptation to differences*

The areas in which the majority of participants felt they had grown included being more patient, and understanding, based on a realisation that people are different and so treating them as though they think, feel and behave similarly to yourself is not optimal. One candidate captured this as*, "I no longer glaze over difference."* All participants built more confidence to address issues in a racially diverse team rather than avoiding them. *"I now think about what I allow and what I don't. How*

*I pass things on to people. I can let go of things at an appropriate point and leave the rest to others.*

An important realisation was that each person in a team brings their own value. There is no need for team members to fit in and be like the dominant race group in the team. Their contribution is through difference rather than sameness. *"It helped me cope with change. The biggest thing I realised was that I don't need to fit in and try to be like everyone else but rather to be my authentic self, build relationships and contribute through my difference as well as my technical skills."*

All participants started thinking about diversity as a potential asset rather than just the way the team is. Mainly white respondents felt empowered to address problem behaviours in their teams that they had avoided previously, due to concern about raising a specific non-performance issue that

might be seen as racist. *"I didn't have skills around race. We avoid it because of fear. It's such a hot topic. You're always wary of being put on the spot or making a wrong move that could offend, so you rather stay away from it. Coaching gave me the tools to address the subject on an open basis and make it comfortable for the team to talk about it without feeling persecuted".*

The group coaching discussions helped participants to realise their blind spots related to race so that they could address these. The feeling that any conversation about race was potentially explosive due to racial sensitivities diminished when participants could remove emotion and address factual situations in a supportive manner. "*The group sessions were useful for seeing other people's perspective in a safe environment with no bias or judgement." "The group sessions showed us that we all experience the same challenges but from different angles and in different areas. We could share and learn from each other. I realised I had issues I wasn't even focusing on, and I was able to address them".*

For half of the participants, racial diversity was not even *"on their radar".* The coaching put the topic of valuing racial diversity firmly into their thinking about their teams. Coaching enabled participants to address the issues they had been

avoiding. Those who felt they knew all about racial diversity discovered how much more there is to know, including the rich diversity within each race group. "*We need to see each other as value-adding individuals rather than being so focused on compliance numbers. Connect more, listen more, be more curious, accept more and prepared to be surprised in a positive way."*

Participants also became more aware of their way of being and how their behaviour and words can be interpreted differently by different people. "*Largely from an awareness perspective - how I treat people, how I speak to them and listen. Being aware of differences and the needs related to that. Knowing who needs space and who needs support."* There was a sense for some of being able to let go of scars from the past, based on a better understanding of different perspectives. Some also developed an increased ability to manage different demographic groups upwards, rather than feeling intimidated. One black participant started to address queries and criticism from senior white executives constructively, rather than her previous approach of *"caving in"* and accepting their views. "*I realised that the wrapper doesn't make a difference. I'm just as good. Just as brilliant."* The McKinsey and Company article (Hunt et al., 2014) on the value addition possible in racially diverse teams gave participants a positive entry platform into the discussion of demographic diversity in their teams. One candidate commented that just putting the topic of race on the table eased relationships in her team, rather like *"a sigh of relief."*

Experiencing the suspension of judgement in the coaching process enabled participants to work with suspending their judgement in team situations. One candidate commented, *"When you create an environment where people feel safe, they can be completely honest, and you get the best out of them. You are your best as a leader when you know where you stand with people".* All of the participants emphasised the power of their new focus on relationships rather than purely on delivery.

#### *4.3.6 Conclusion*

The responses from the participants at the end of the coaching experience demonstrated the positive impact of all the aspects of diversity awareness listed in this proposition. They become deeply conscious of their thinking and behaviour patterns and their potential to avoid issues of racial and cultural diversity. They realised their potential to infect their children with bias and shed it themselves in the process. Experiencing the impact of non-judgement during coaching enabled them to model that state and to deepen their listening, patience and level of understanding of others. An element of behaviour not mentioned in the proposition is the fact that the pressure to understand and interact better with people who are demographically different from ourselves is felt more by white and Indian leaders and significantly less by black African leaders, *"Coaching raised awareness of how to deal with different cultures and how I should be managing my team in a more effective way"*. Black African leaders, however, gained equal value in understanding how to extract value from demographic diversity in their teams through the coaching process. *"It didn't make a big difference as I am black, but my approach to diversity as a whole has been helped. It also helped me manage diversity upwards."*

### 4.4 Findings Pertaining to Proposition 3 – Coaching Approach

A closing comment from a participant summarises the research coaching experience. *"As a South African, you never really focus on what racial diversity means and what it brings to the context of our everyday lives. Coaching has made us focus on this and how we can each use it in an authentic way. Six months was not long enough to do more than plant the seed. I hope it grows many branches over time and that we each find more places where we can harness diversity as a value-add. It's not only useful in corporate life but something we need to learn to use at every opportunity. When you understand what racial diversity offers, it opens up a new dimension of human interaction. The more effort we put into knowing people, the more value they add in our lives. Coaching has planted this*

*conscious thought about what we can learn from people of other races and how we can create great things when we align."*

The coaching techniques in this research were one-on-one and group coaching.

Included in this process were:

- Self-observation and reflection
- Journaling
- Discussions with team members about what is and is not working related to extracting value from diversity
- Relationship building in the team and networks

A three-hour group coaching session was held for each of the two groups each month. Each group session had a focus topic and a brief slide deck designed to stimulate conversation and debate. Other activities in these group sessions were designed to demonstrate the power of sharing and connecting, e.g. each person brought a symbol of their culture and talked about what aspects of their culture enable them to add value in a team.

All participants experienced the group sessions as powerful learning spaces as participants engaged with their peers to understand other experiences and perceptions than their own. "*The group coaching dynamics were fascinating for me, and I learned a lot. I think that in all levels of the organisation there are people who deal with things differently. I was amazed at the difference between people who've worked here for years and newer people." "The group sessions are useful for seeing other people's perspective in a safe environment with no bias." "It was really good that we had group sessions so that we shared messaging. This doesn't always happen in groups. This group experience was so useful in honest sharing and being able to say anything."*

Sharing life stories also formed part of this process and was acknowledged as extremely powerful in building an understanding of and appreciation for each

other. *"Now we own our baggage, and we can articulate it a lot more easily. We found a lot of commonalities. The conversations created deeper connection."*

The one-on-one coaching process started for each person with setting a personal coaching goal. These goals were not necessarily race-specific but formed a golden thread into which the topic of the value-add of difference was woven. For example, one respondent's goal was to move to a new team where he felt his talents would be better used, with more stretch for him. He achieved that through the networking process he designed as part of his coaching and through being open with his managers on what he wanted. The members of the new team were all a different race from his. Coaching addressed his concerns about this as he designed the best possible way to integrate into the new team.

Included throughout the coaching process were a focus on:

#### *4.4.1 Self-observation and reflection*

This process of building awareness and of reflecting on how each person was being experienced by others was highlighted by fifteen of the seventeen participants as one of the most important parts of the coaching programme. The topics discussed in the group sessions built awareness among representatives of each demographic group, of how other groups perceived certain behaviours. This process naturally led to greater awareness of and reflection on common behaviours.

*"I struggled to choose between ways of extracting value. The coaching helped me address this. I've shifted people in my team from being victims to feeling fully enabled. When I turn people, I know I've done well."*

Nine of the participants felt braver and less afraid to make mistakes related to talking about race. The practice in group sessions of talking about race safely showed them how to have conversations about race with curiosity and no emotion.

*"The provocative questions offered took my breath away, and then it became okay."*

*"One of my biggest take-outs was asking rather than assuming."*

#### *4.4.2 Journaling and reading*

Participants were asked to reflect on questions raised in the group and individual coaching between sessions. They received articles to read and books were recommended.

Looking inward enabled participants to impact aspects of their lives. *"Realising the power within me meant I no longer feel inferior to other people. We are the same. We have the same fears. Melanin is the only difference. I'm just as brilliant."*

The books introduced as part of the group coaching were repeatedly referred to as having opened many minds to different ways of thinking about race as a contributor. *"Coaching is far more intimate than being taught the theory because it's so personal and specific. It's about real-life application – where the rubber hits the road."*

#### *4.4.3 Discussions with team members about what is and is not working related to a sense of inclusion and extracting value from diversity*

One of the tools shared towards getting more value out of team members was a practical delegation framework. There was a deep realisation from eight of the participants that they were not getting the outcomes they hoped for because they were not delegating effectively. *"I didn't give people enough information to be able to do things in the way I wanted. I do it so well now, and everyone can deliver better."* The additional benefit of building these skills was that team members who were empowered to deliver good work felt validated and more confident in their role in the team.

Another tool was the identification of signature skills, both in the participants themselves and in each of their direct reports. *"The skills exercise we did in the*

*last group session opened my eyes to the signature skills of each of my team members and their different contributions to our success."* This process of identifying and acknowledging that each member of the team has a standout skill that they contribute to the work of the team created evidence of the power of diversity to add value and enabled each team member to see clearly how their contribution was characterised and recognised.

#### *4.4.4 Relationship building in teams and networks*

Participants were encouraged to have regular team conversations related to how their diversity was adding value in specific pieces of work to the solution or output. They were also given specific race-related topics and questions to introduce into team conversations.

All participants were challenged continuously to talk to people from different race groups whenever the opportunity arose at work, rather than gravitating to people like them. They were asked to have informal coffee sessions with their internal stakeholders as part of building relationships and raising their profiles within the organisation. These conversations were intended to build awareness of what was going well and what could improve so that they continually refined their delivery.

*"I didn't previously see the value in making an effort to meet and talk to other people beyond my immediate team. The tasks between coaching sessions made me do this. My move to a new team came from one of these meetings. Experiencing this value will help me sustain this as a habit."*

The challenge to actively seek out and interact in a social setting with people of different races built comfort with integration and opened a range of opportunities for unexpected connections and surprise discussions and realisations.

#### *4.4.5 Conclusion to Proposition 3*

Participants derived deep learning from each other through the themed conversations in the group coaching sessions and from sharing their life stories. They started to model these behaviours and learning in their teams by engaging

in planned conversations about racial and cultural diversity and how this can add value. Each participant also set a coaching goal as a focus for their one-on-one sessions. These goals were all achieved alongside the overarching research goal. Coaching enabled them to deepen their ability to self-observe and to draw meaning from their behaviour and thoughts and the behaviour observed in others. Journaling and reading helped to embed this learning. They experienced the power of relationships and networks positively to impact the quality of their work experience.

## 4.5 Summary of the findings

The participant comments under each of the themes of leadership challenges, diversity issues faced and the impact of coaching demonstrate their journey from the initial position of being unsure of how to operate in a way that acknowledges the value of demographic and cultural diversity or even to talk about it effectively and with ease. As a result of their coaching experience, they each developed a personal approach through which they were leading in a way that enabled them to extract more value from this diversity. They had a set of tools and approaches to support them and to share with their teams. They had happier, more productive teams and were feeling more confidence and effectiveness as leaders related to the realm of racial diversity. They had developed a deep appreciation and respect for diversity rather than avoiding the topic whenever possible.

# CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

## 5.1 Introduction

The findings reveal that the application of coaching supports the ability of leaders in business to extract value from demographic diversity in teams in South Africa. This premise is based on the research of Livermore and Soon ( 2015b), Rosinski (2010) and St Claire (2005). Livermore and Soon showed that CQ (Cultural Intelligence) in the form of the ability to understand and engage positively with people of different cultures is a requirement for extracting business value. Rosinski argued that actively valuing these cultural differences is vital and St. Claire claimed that people are born the same and then shaped by their environment and early life experiences. These premises are borne out by the research of McKinsey and Company (Hunt et al., 2015, p. 5) which states that "Companies in the top quartile of racial/ethnic diversity were 30 percent more likely to have financial returns above their national industry median."

The St Claire premise that all people are born the same is strongly supported by 100% of the research participants who independently concluded during coaching, that Mazlow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2007) is race agnostic and applies equally to all humans.

The research findings confirm and explore what is revealed in the literature, adding findings where those were discovered through the research process.

Chapter 4 described the impact of coaching on:

1. Building leadership effectiveness designed to realise the opportunity in demographically diverse teams including
    - Self-awareness, including awareness of behaviours and ways of being
    - Situational awareness
    - Awareness of unconscious bias
    - Ability to recognise and adapt to cultural norms and values other than their own

2. The typical diversity issues faced by South African leaders of demographically and culturally diverse teams
    - Lack of ability to see the positive potential in demographic diversity
    - Feeling respected and giving respect
    - Lack of ability to hold difficult conversations effectively
    - Fear of engagement in areas that could become emotionally charged
    - The tendency to focus on tolerance and compliance rather than seeing demographic diversity as an opportunity

3. The coaching techniques used to achieve these outcomes are also linked to the literature. These include:
    - Building self-awareness through reflection
    - Journaling and reading
    - Team discussions
    - Relationship building and networking

In this chapter, that exploration is linked to the writing discussed in the literature review and other works included in the research process.

## 5.2 Demographic profile of participants

The demographic make-up of the participants was:

**Table 3: Demographics**

| Race Group | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| Black African | 1 | 2 |
| White | 1 | 5 |
| Indian | 5 | 2 |
| Coloured | | 1 |

The participants include all of the dominant South African demographic groups. The requirement that participants volunteer to participate meant that the demographic make-up of the group did not exactly match that of South Africa (Booysen, 2001). Every executive who volunteered was included. When it was realised that there were no black African males, both companies tried to find volunteers to fill this gap, and one participant came forward.

Eight of the participants had experienced coaching in the past, but that did not impact the coaching outcomes as all participants had a clear understanding of what coaching is and what it is not and thus had a sound understanding of the process for which they were volunteering.

## 5.3 Discussion pertaining to proposition 1 – Leadership challenges

### *5.3.1 The role of leadership in driving change*

Adams (2018) emphasised the vital role that leaders play in driving behaviour change in companies, related to diversity. This role was demonstrated at a high level in the two organisations in which the research took place. The one company, led by predominantly black African people, had an aggressive demographic transformation approach designed to align the demographics of the company with those of South Africa. This goal was transparent in all actions and decisions and was clearly understood by everyone in the company. The other coaching group was in a large division of another company. The executive committee of the division was predominantly made up of white males. While lip-service was paid to demographic transformation, it was always described as a "work-in-progress," and progress was slow, leading to a sense of disillusion and cynicism. Leaders in that division did not actively seek out people who were racially different from themselves, which resulted in appointments often being made in the image of the leader. Segregation was still practised through having a separate entrance for executive committee members. This example supports the finding of Livermore and Soon (2015a, p. 40) that, "unless senior leaders embody the vision and values of cultural intelligence, those ideas become nothing but words."

This proposition focuses on building leadership effectiveness designed to realise the opportunity in demographically diverse teams including:

### *5.3.2 Self-awareness and situational awareness, including awareness of behaviours and way of being*

All participants confirmed that coaching had enabled them to build the intention and ability to engage more frequently and consciously with people of different race groups and, in the process, to build deeper self-awareness. This experience made them more aware of all aspects of their behaviour and thought patterns related to how they engaged people of different races from their own. This awareness aligns with Rosinki's (2010) finding that mixing with people from

different cultures can feel challenging and will build deeper awareness through reflection.

#### *5.3.3 Feeling respected and respecting others*

All participants confirmed that their consciousness of how history had impacted their impressions of themselves and others had grown significantly through the coaching, to the point at which an element of their awareness included continuously noticing their perceptions in situations related to other race groups. This understanding confirms Steele's (2011) discourse on identity cues that can negatively impact on human interaction.

One of the triggers that brought participants to this realisation was Bongwe's (2010) questioning of the validity of the commonly held belief that we should treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves. This questioning of what they regarded as common wisdom opened up awareness for more than five of the participants about the lack of validity of many of their long-held assumptions.

#### *5.3.4 Ability to adapt to cultural norms and values other than their own*

A model of the continuum of cultural awareness (see Table 4, below), which was developed and presented in the first group coaching session created a great deal of awareness of specific behaviours and thought patterns in which participants were operating. The level named The Delusional was added in the group coaching as it was identified as a missing stage in the model.

**Table 4: States of cultural awareness as described in the literature.**

Source: Own creation

| TEST YOUR LEVEL OF CULTURAL AWARENESS | |
|---|---|
| Centrality of our own culture to our reality in the world<br><br>(Warde et al., 2008) | **THE SUPERIOR** - ***My culture is the best*** *– I teach people to do things like I do – "Treat people as I want to be treated"* |
| The danger of tolerating difference<br><br>(Adams, 2018) | **THE VICTIM** - ***I tolerate differences*** *– see no potential for value* |
| Pretence, trendy self-delusion of not seeing skin colour; "grey world"<br><br>(Molefi, 2017) | **THE POSER** - *I claim* ***not to see differences in colour*** |
| Added by research participants | **THE DELUSIONAL –** *1994 made everything equal and normal* — ***"It's all okay now, we all have the same opportunities"*** |
| Curious observer<br><br>(Rosinski, 2010) | **THE CULTURALLY CURIOUS** - ***I am curious*** *about what I can learn from differences* |
| Value extractor<br><br>(Livermore & Soon, 2015a) | **THE CULTURALLY INTELLIGENT –** *I* ***seek out differences*** *to add value to what I aim to achieve* |

This model of where participants were operating related to styles of their cultural awareness, which was presented in the first group coaching session proved to be an essential reality check for all participants. Participants could acknowledge awareness of operating at different times and in different circumstances at each of the levels identified. The level least used by all participants at the start of coaching was actively seeking to use diversity to add value. This way of thinking began to change by the end of the coaching.

*"I thought I was doing well until coaching made me realise what I wasn't seeing about myself. There are so many subtle pieces I became aware of. The team is a lot more comfortable coming to me."*

*"I now keep catching myself in my perceptions, especially when I'm stressed."*

*"There are instances when I'm realising why I think and act as I do. I'm aware and able to acknowledge it."*

*"Originally I behaved as though we are all the same. Now I am more cognisant of my mental processing. I notice other people's perceptions about racial diversity."*

*"Saying that you don't see colour is a lie. I'm aware of the difference."*

#### *5.3.5 Conclusion*

Coaching built awareness of all of the leadership aspects highlighted in this proposition. Awareness had not been present previously in at least fourteen of the seventeen of participants, and it became a continuous part of the consciousness of all participants. All participants moved from not consciously thinking about diversity beyond the pressure for compliance to being actively conscious of how they were showing up related to people of other races. They all became actively curious about how they could extract more value from racial diversity.

## 5.4 Discussion pertaining to Proposition 2 – Diversity issues

The typical issues faced by South African leaders of demographically diverse teams listed in this proposition reflected the premises of the literature to a large extent. Additional aspects not covered in the existing research also became apparent.

### *5.4.1 Lack of ability to see the positive potential in demographic diversity*

It was interesting to note that, while the three black African participants were exposed to racial diversity in their broader teams, a significant majority of their direct reports were also black African. This situation could mean that they are intent on righting the imbalances of the past, or that the pattern of leaders appointing people who look like them is repeating itself in this post-democracy generation of leaders. Booysen ( 2001) speaks of the group-protective nature of the leadership style of black South Africans, and this seems to be borne out in this research experience.

There was also evidence of the challenges of talented black people being led by white people (Booysen, 2007), with the potential to co-operate but with an eye out for an opportunity in a company where black people feel more included, rather than tolerated.

Booysen (2007) also highlighted the performance-task orientation of white leaders, leading to a lack of patience. The research outputs demonstrate that more than a third of participants actively identified increased patience and less judgement as two of their achievements through coaching.

The potential lack of assertiveness in black African culture highlighted by Myres (2014), was overcome through building confidence to question and revert on facts by one participant and referred to by another participant as ‘crowd-sourcing’, which seeks to engage the team in finding solutions.

### *5.4.2 Lack of ability to engage skilfully in difficult conversations and fear of engagement on emotionally charged topics*

It became clear during group coaching discussions that, outside of this group coaching experience, there was a lack of honest conversation taking place in one of the groups due to the absence of the ability to engage in difficult conversations. The concept of 'Talking about things that matter' as described by the Harvard Negotiation Group (Stone, Heen, & Patton, 2010) was introduced as a set of principles, actions and questioning frameworks in a group session. All of the participants in that group found this tool valuable and immediately adopted the framework with results that they found empowering. The other group had previously undergone training in this skill and seemed more confident to engage effectively in potentially sensitive conversations.

This topic showed up more broadly in the emotional potential for conversations that touched on race. Most participants were cautious about introducing the subject of race into their team discussions. Using the McKinsey and Company (Hunt et al., 2015) research article which highlights the value addition of racial diversity, they were able to ask team members how the team was accessing the value addition described in the article, which the participants referred to as *"The Diversity Dividend."* This positive question opened up communication channels and put race on the table as a positive topic.

Four of the participants later used a list of relatively controversial statements about race, offered to participants as a tool, as the basis of additional honest team conversations. These proved positive in opening up communication channels among team members and with the team leader and, in one team, lead to a noticeable improvement in performance. The fact that the conversations took far longer than planned and that team members chose to come back and spend more time on them demonstrated the value that team members found in being able to air their thoughts and feelings about race in a safe space.

### *5.4.3 The tendency to focus on tolerance and compliance rather than seeing demographic diversity as an opportunity*

Adams (2018) warns of the danger of losing the potential value of diversity by seeing it as a reality to be tolerated rather than an asset on which to capitalise. Throughout the research, this danger was evident. Participants tended to look for ways to get on with others in a calm, professional and peaceful manner, rather than actively seeking out diversity for its value-add. This situation was partly caused by pressure to comply with legislation designed to drive more demographic representation in the workforce.

The sense from participants was that only once legislative targets are met will companies see potential to move on to the stage of actively seeking value in diversity. That assumes that the demographic majority will choose to engage in a value-seeking way with the minority rather than merely tolerating them. Until then, based on conversations in group coaching, the potential merely to tolerate people different from oneself is high.

"*Let go of malicious compliance. Acknowledge the differences and understand common ground."*

*"South African companies are not remotely enlightened about the value of racial diversity. They are oblivious to the benefits. It's about window-dressing and lip-service."*

*"The results come when people do it for the right reasons, not compliance. Getting beyond compliance is the only way to achieve success from diversity."*

*"I rarely hear value as the reason to drive diversity. Our leaders need to be educated so they can reframe how they talk about diversity. We need case studies of the value-add of diversity rather than race as the key influencer of why people do or do not have a job."*

*"A lot of companies are just window-dressing and not extracting value."*

*"People are comfortable with people who look like them. We're not embracing the value of diversity."*

*As long as we focus on scorecard value rather than the collective wisdom, it's just compliance, not value-seeking. It's about diversity of thought, not the BBBEE scorecard. Once we have diversity of thinking we need to design how to harness that to unlock our collective value."*

*"I don't see South African companies realising benefit. We are so focused on compliance and numbers that the realisable benefit is completely lost in the process."*

#### *5.4.4 Conclusion*

Actively championing the concept of diversity as a value-add in organisations is a challenge for leaders and requires deep commitment and continuous focus to avoid being dumbed down into tolerance. The potential for people to tip-toe around each other to avoid tough conversations is high and, without honest conversation, tolerance rather than value-seeking is inevitable. When leaders are brave and skilful enough to open the space for frank discussions about race, teams tend to engage positively. Even the opportunity to air views and hear the opinions of others relieves racial tension and enables team members to trust each other more and collaborate better.

These conversations were driven initially by the question about how the teams were accessing the Diversity Dividend and, at a later stage in the coaching by more provocative statements. In response to these statements, listed below, team members were asked to choose red to show disagreement, green to show agreement or yellow if they were uncertain or felt the statement was sometimes true.

1. South Africans generally believe that, as a business community, we are doing better at engaging with racial diversity than we currently are because we manage

to get on with each other at work rather than having conversations about consciously accessing value from racial diversity.

2. The way parents talk in the home about race in South Africa has a profound impact on what children believe about themselves, their race group and other racial groups.

3. Many South Africans who are not part of a business environment hold onto old stereotypes about the levels of ability of other race groups.

4. In South Africa, we see skin colour first and the person inside the skin second.

5. White people are often oblivious to what's truly going on at a race level.

6. In business, we tend to tolerate racial difference rather than seeing it as a value-adding opportunity.

7. White people are terrified to talk about race due to social media sensationalism and many things being attributed to racism.

8. If we are polarised by black versus white racism, we are in danger of focusing on this battle rather than on extracting value from diversity to get the economy moving in a positive direction.

9. If we do not talk about diversity, related to accessing value from it, we have the potential to fail as a nation.

10. We need all racial groups in South Africa to actively and positively engage with each other if we are to become a winning nation.

When these statements were used in team discussions, they created positive engagement and a sense of relief about the opportunity to engage on a sensitive topic. The questions were only used in team situations where all the team members knew each other well and were led by a trusted team leader who managed the safety of the space for discussion. *"The way I was enabled to change my team dynamic, so everyone is on the same page was the biggest*

*impact of coaching. For me, that was the biggest contribution. I was at my wits end. From the team perspective, the openness we've achieved on the topic of diversity has made everything so much easier. It's so much more comfortable. We no longer have to watch what we say or how we behave."*

*"As soon as I put race on the table, the dynamic changed. It definitely made a difference to how people work together. Once you are open about things it opens up channels."*

## 5.5 Discussion pertaining to Proposition 3

Coaching was delivered using techniques designed to build trust, a sense of safety and the experience of being deeply heard in an environment where judgement was suspended (Stout-Rostron, 2014a).

The first group session was focused on creating connection and trust in each of the coaching teams. It was made clear that controversial feelings could be expressed in a safe way in service of building understanding in the team.

The coaching techniques used to achieve these outcomes are also linked to the literature. These include:

### *5.5.1 Building self-awareness through reflection*

Gray (2007) describes the power of reflection in enabling leaders to learn from their experiences. This power was evident through the coaching as participants described situations they were dealing with and then tried their solutions in resolving those situations. The act of talking about what they were experiencing was powerful in enabling participants to make sense of how they were feeling and how valid those feelings were. After each group and each individual coaching session, participants were challenged to reflect on specific topics or questions, or they read a recommended book or article as part of expanding their thinking on the topic.

### *5.5.2 Journaling and reading*

Each participant was given a blank journal at the start of the coaching in which they were invited to capture their thoughts during and between coaching sessions. Koortzen (2010) talks about the power of this kind of journaling as a tool in executive coaching. These journals became a history of the participants' thoughts and critical learnings throughout the process. They were also used to note references and readings mentioned if the participant chose to follow up on that reading. The essence of coaching is that it is client-driven. There was no instructions but many offers and suggestions which participants were entitled to use or not, based on what felt authentic to each of them.

### *5.5.3 Team discussions*

Throughout the coaching process, participants were encouraged to hold continuous conversations with their teams. One of these was the question, based on reading the McKinsey research (Hunt et al., 2015), about how the team was accessing the Diversity Dividend. The intention was that this should be a continuous question in the team to maintain awareness of the desire to extract value from demographic diversity. Another important team process was the telling of life stories (Shamir & Eilam-Shamir, 2018). It became clear as participants reported back on this action that the thoroughness of the process used to share life stories had a direct impact on the extent to which this process shifted the level of trust within the teams.

Another option was discussion of the statements about race developed as a tool and listed in the conclusion to proposition 2. Some participants found that the statements had a powerful impact. Others preferred to offer the statements one at a time as they feared emotional overload. Where these questions were effectively used, the positive effect was noticed, even by people outside the team.

Thirteen of the respondents talked about their team members being comfortable to have more open and honest conversations with them, resulting in shifting from polite working relationships to deeper trust and the ability to question and

contribute more. These participants also noticed increased trust among team members and the sense of safety in offering ideas rather than merely obeying instructions (Groysberg & Slind, 2012).

#### *5.5.4 Relationship-building and networking*

One of the aspects that potentially holds black executives in South Africa back, as identified by Myres (2014), is the lack of business networks, which tend to be more skilfully used by white executives to drive advancement.

In the coaching, this concept was approached from two perspectives, building networks to drive personal growth, and enabling team members to access the team leader's networks as appropriate to drive their growth in and understanding of the business.

All participants were conscious of the importance of building and participating in networks for their professional growth. They used these to differing degrees, but only two seemed to be making the best use of networks. All made some effort to improve this aspect of their career and personal brand management, often related to specific goals identified as part of the coaching. These situations were generally driven by a conversation/s that needed to be held. About half of the participants drew real value from this process during coaching (Knoke, 2018).

None of the participants had considered opening up their networks to team members as part of driving career growth and knowledge. All were open to the concept of including team members in relevant meetings, inviting them to business events and introducing them to people with whom they could usefully connect. This process started slowly. One significant achievement was a team member being moved to a new team where his talents were being stretched and better used.

One of the Indian participants noted the existence in business at this time of both white and black African networks that drive career progression. The feeling was that Indian executives, as a minority group, do not have access to this benefit.

The assumption was that in-company networks are race exclusive, which is not always the case or the intention (Forsgren & Johanson, 2014).

#### *5.5.5 Conclusion*

The value of the tools of self-observation, reflection, journaling, team discussions and networking was clearly demonstrated through the coaching process. The effectiveness of their use by participants determined the quality of the outcomes achieved. All of these tools were intended to increase awareness and connection in different ways with the ultimate goal of building human connection in which racial diversity is acknowledged as an asset to be shared in building value. One of the books participants were encouraged to read is *Betting on a Darkie* (Nyati, 2019). In this autobiography, Mteto Nyati, Chief Executive Officer of Altron in South Africa, clearly demonstrates what is possible when the right leaders aim to extract value from racial diversity.

## 5.6 Chapter conclusion

All of the recommendations and positions of the literature used in this research were confirmed through the coaching process. The results reported in Chapter 4 demonstrate that:

Coaching builds awareness of and the ability continuously to question unconscious bias. The participants developed the ability to see and use demographic difference as an opportunity. Continuous reflection, journaling and reading about the topic supported deeper self and situational awareness. The power of relationships and networks was demonstrated. Leaders were able to change behaviours as they became more aware of and open to different cultural norms and in this way, achieved more value from demographic diversity in their teams.

Aspects of the research not covered in the literature tend to be specific to South Africa with its history of inequality. They included the continuous fear of race-based emotional outbursts, both face-to-face and on social media platforms because of the unresolved anger about unequal treatment in the past, the focus

of companies on achieving compliance with legislation about racial representation in business and the effectiveness of being able to explore in a non-judgemental, deep listening space, the wounds of the past or fears about the future, through this process to develop personal ways to build a positive future in business.

The results of these situations are that racial diversity tends to be ignored by operating in business as though people are all the same. In this way, people do not develop trust-based relationships, and collaboration suffers. The focus on compliance with legislation completely overlooks the richness of racial diversity as an asset. The result is that the 30% additional potential value identified by McKinsey and Company (Hunt et al., 2015) is not realised. The absence of a way to safely explore deep emotion in the business environment results in the suppression of wounds and fears which are not dealt with in a way that allows people to let go of negative emotion and build a more positive future.

# CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 Introduction

The action research aimed to demonstrate how coaching can support leaders in South Africa to build their ability to extract value from racial diversity in their teams. The process lasted for six months, during which each of the participants experienced twenty-four hours of group and individual coaching.

This chapter summarises the main findings of the research, provides recommendations on how the research results can be used by business and makes recommendations for further research in this field.

## 6.2 Conclusions regarding Research Question 1 – Leadership challenges

The first research question asked how coaching can support South African business leaders in growing their leadership effectiveness to realise the potential added value offered by demographic diversity.

The research shows that the answers to this question are:

- Through building self and situational awareness related to demographic differences. This awareness includes acknowledging racial difference and operating in the knowledge of the potential of this difference to add value.
- Through the provision of a safe way for leaders to explore strong emotions held as a result of the historical inequality of South African society. This safe space would include a non-judgemental, trusted, thinking partner with whom they can soundboard their experience of their past as they create their authentic approach to a positive future.
- Through the provision of tools and skills designed to achieve deep trust within teams and among team members and to support the ability of each member of the team to deliver their best work

Although the creation of a safe, non-judgemental thinking partnership is not specifically discussed in the literature on racial and cultural diversity in business, it is always implied as a component of coaching.

All of the other findings in this research support those described in the literature.

## 6.3 Conclusions regarding Research Question 2 – Diversity issues

This research question explored the typical diversity issues faced by South African leaders who are leading racially diverse teams. These are:

- The tendency to operate as though people are all the same in the workplace, which denies the potential of racial difference to add value
- The avoidance of any discussion that could become emotionally charged, resulting in essential topics, e.g. performance or divisive behaviours not being discussed
- The tendency for people to associate with those of their own race when not working, which shuts down the potential to build trust relationships and close collaboration in teams
- Companies focusing on legislative compliance, which blinds them to the potential for racial diversity to add value
- The human tendency to tolerate difference rather than embracing it as a potential opportunity to add value

Of these topics, Adams (2018) talked about the danger of tolerance of diversity in shutting down the potential for value-add. Molefi mentions the tendency for people to associate with their own race group because that is more comfortable (Molefi, 2017). Both recommend consciousness of this tendency as a first step to changing it.

The remaining aspects of this answer are specific to South Africa, based on its history of inequality and are not covered in the literature.

The research showed that these tendencies are best addressed by exposing them, building awareness of personal and company tendencies related to them and developing authentic approaches to creating change or a new way of operating that accesses previously overlooked value.

## 6.4 Conclusions regarding Research Question 3 - Coaching

The final research question asked how coaching techniques could be applied in support of achieving more effective leadership of racially diverse teams.

The combination of group and individual coaching proved useful in creating communities of leaders from different demographic groups who were able to talk about race in an unemotional and curious way. The coach asked questions or presented premises in an unemotional, factual and curious way, which enabled the members of the two groups to have these discussions in a way that built a deeper understanding of themselves and each other as representatives of their race groups.

These discussions became more profound and personal in individual coaching sessions. In this way, each participant could explore their deeply held emotions and positions on issues in a supportive environment that enabled them to create their own solutions and authentic future behaviour.

Additional tools offered were:

- Reading and journaling to support reflection and build awareness of how each participant was thinking and behaving
- The article on the McKinsey and Company research (Hunt et al., 2015) as a basis for broaching race as a positive topic in team discussions
- A framework of potential attitudes to other races and cultures to build self-awareness of attitudes to difference races
- Continuous awareness and questioning of unconscious bias
- A model for effective delegation to enable better performance by all team members

- Tools to enable more skill in holding potentially difficult conversations
- A list of provocative statements about race to support deeper discussion in teams about race so that the topic was aired in a safe way, rather than suppressed
- Encouragement to focus more on the power of networks and relationship building for personal growth. To include team members where appropriate, in networking opportunities, open doors for them and to set the example to them of the power of this activity

All of the approaches recommended in the literature proved to be effective. The research added a model of attitudes to race that was built out of the literature. This model proved effective in building self-awareness of attitudes to race.

The tools for team discussions about race were also developed as part of the research and not included in the literature. Their development was driven by the identified tendency not to talk about racial difference and to be fearful of conversations that touched on racial difference. Opening up the topic of race proved effective in easing tensions and making team members feel acknowledged for who they were and for their personal history.

## 6.5 Recommendations

### *6.5.1 Recommendations for business leaders*

The primary recommendation to each member of this group is first, to examine their own bias, attitudes and motivations. This should include building awareness of bias, identifying the potential to be tolerant of difference and avoid acknowledging and using it, and being honest about the motivation for driving racial transformation towards more equitable racial representation in business. This reflection is a personal process that could be supported by a coach who asks questions that open up the opportunity to challenge and explore deeper thinking on the topic.

Once the leader has achieved a deep level of self-awareness on each of these topics, they will be able to identify whether they see value in working with a coach

to increase their ability to extract value from racial diversity in their teams. This is a personal decision. Imposing coaching on an unwilling candidate would be a waste of time and money.

### *6.5.2 Recommendations for human resource practitioners*

Driving racial transformation in business in South Africa at this time, in an effective way, is an essential task for human resources practitioners. There is a temptation to operate on numbers, scores and tick-boxes. The dangers of this approach are people who feel they have been appointed because of their race rather than their ability, executives who resist and keep appointing team members who look like them, the tendency for people to avoid the topic of race, people who feel they have no career prospects because they are 'the wrong colour' and the tolerance of racial diversity in business because 'it is the law' rather than because of its obvious advantages.

These challenges are not suited to traditional training interventions as each is experienced in a very personal way, meaning that a single approach for everyone will not be practical.

This research shows how effective coaching of executives can be in driving systemic change through the organisation. Care needs to be taken in identifying coaches who are suited to this work. It is clearly not classic coaching and a coach who is dealing with issues related to race herself could do more harm than good.

The process cannot be squeezed into a low number of coaching sessions to save money. It requires time, careful planning and continuity. It needs to be designed with the knowledge of what training the executives have already done and of their level of executive sophistication so that they are never bored and they never feel patronised.

The combination of both group and individual coaching is essential for exposing the executives to peers of different race groups in honest, learning conversations about race, culture and attitudes.

## 6.6 Suggestions for further research

One of the topics repeatedly mentioned by participants was their wonder at realising the richness of diversity within each of the race groups in South Africa. For example, one of the black participants said that she had regarded Indians as a single, homogenous group of people before the coaching, which had made her aware of the richness of diversity that exists in this group. The black African group is made up of many tribes, each with different cultures, histories and natural skills. White people are predominantly of Afrikaans or English extraction, each with very different characteristics. Coloured people are different, based on their heritage and where they live or grew up. This level of difference opens up the potential for more in-depth research into the potential value-add of racial diversity in teams. South Africa seems to offer more abundant racial diversity that most other countries and it is a richness we tend to ignore, tolerate or even resent.

The research took place in Johannesburg as the business hub of South Africa. It would be interesting to explore regional differences in a national study of this topic.

The private sector business experience was the exclusive focus of the research. The situation in the public sector will be different, based on different levels of rational representation. This sector would also contribute interesting outcomes to the research questions.

One of the areas that raised questions during the research was the ability of human resource practitioners to influence attitudes in business to racial diversity. This was made up of the issue of influencing leaders to appoint people who do not look like them and the question of identifying diverse talent, employing for diversity and then embedding new appointees in a way that enables them immediately to deliver value. There is also the potential for the human resources department in companies to be the champions of extracting value from diversity rather than allowing it to be avoided or to become a compliance exercise.

Research into the current state of thinking of human resources practitioners related to this topic would both add value to present understanding and areas of lack of ability as well as drawing attention to the issue as a whole, among practitioners.

When asked which South African companies are already achieving added value from our racial diversity, there were a few guesses, and it was clear that there is currently no case study material which demonstrates this. Researching which South African companies are realising the Diversity Dividend and how they are doing that would be an exciting and valuable opportunity to build case study material around this critical topic and to draw attention to it in a positive, motivational way.

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# APPENDIX A: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT – PRE-COACHING INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Name of interviewee……**

**Date of interview……**

**South African demographic group of interviewee…….**

**Section 1 - Leadership**

1. What challenges have you faced to date in leading people from other demographic groups than your own?
2. Why do you believe you are experiencing this?
3. When you were growing up, how much exposure did you have to children from other demographic groups?
4. What form did this exposure take?
5. How did it impact you?
6. As a child, what were your beliefs/perceptions of people from other demographic groups?
7. How were these beliefs formed?
8. How did they impact your life at that time?
9. At what stage in your life did you have full exposure as equals to people from other demographic groups?
10. How did this experience impact you?
11. How did you early life perceptions change as a result of this exposure?
12. What would have helped you to adjust more quickly to this full, equal exposure?
13. Why is that the case?
14. With people from different demographic groups to your own do you find yourself:
    - Tolerating their differences
    - Pretending they are the same as you
    - Making allowances for their differences
    - Seeking to use their differences to add value to your own thinking or way of being
    - Hoping they will quickly learn to operate the way you do
15. Why do you select this option?
16. To what extent (a scale of 1 to 5) do you believe that cultural diversity in a team has the potential significantly to improve the output of the team?
17. On what do you base your rating?

18. As a team leader, how do you currently address that belief?
19. What effect does that have?

**Section 2 - Diversity**

1. What is your understanding of unconscious bias?
2. What examples of unconscious bias are you aware of in yourself?
3. How does this affect you?
4. How did your early childhood conditioning related to other demographic groups in South Africa help or impede your ability to work effectively with other demographic groups in business?
5. To what extent do you believe that Western business culture should take precedence over cultural differences in South Africa?
6. Why is that the case?
7. If you had to rank the different demographic groups in South Africa related to the amount of power they have in this workplace, how would you rank them?
8. On what do you base this belief?
9. What would the ideal ranking be?
10. If that were achieved, how would your current experience of leadership be impacted?
11. To what extent are you aware of the life stories of the people in your team?
12. Why is that the case?
13. What do you believe South Africa needs to do to get people working together more effectively?
14. Why is that so?
15. What do you need to do to work more effectively with your colleagues from other demographic groups?
16. Why do you believe that?
17. McKinsey & Company global research shows that companies that embrace diversity deliver more than 30% better returns than companies which do not. How do you feel this applies in South Africa?
18. On what is your belief based?

**Section 3 - Coaching**

1. Have you been coached?
   If Yes – In what ways did coaching add value for you?

   Would you recommend coaching as a leadership development tool?

   If No – What are your perceptions of coaching and how it works?
2. This action research focusses on building leadership ability to lead racially diverse teams in South Africa. What about that topic is of interest to you?
3. Why is that important to you?
4. What specifically do you find interesting about it?
5. How does that show up in your current leadership experience?
6. What do you, personally, hope to get out of participation in the coaching?
7. How will that change your experience of being a leader?
8. How would you rate (on a scale of 1 to 5) your current level of understanding of people from other demographic groups in your team?
9. On what do you base that ranking?
10. Where do you feel your greatest areas of need lie related to of understanding of people from other demographic groups in your team?

# APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT – POST-COACHING INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Name of interviewee…….**

**Date of interview……**

**South African demographic group of interviewee…….**

**Section 1 - Leadership**

1. What challenges did coaching enable you to address in leading people from other demographic groups than your own?
2. How have you addressed those challenges?
3. How have your perceptions about people from other demographic groups changed as a result of the coaching?
4. How have your perceptions about yourself related to people from other demographic groups changed as a result of the coaching?
5. What was most impactful for you in the coaching programme?
6. Why was this significant?
7. What would have liked more of in the coaching programme?
8. How would that add value?
9. What would you have preferred less of in the coaching programme?
10. Why do you say that?
11. To what extent (a scale of 1 to 5) do you believe that cultural diversity in a team has the potential significantly to improve the output of the team?
12. On what do you base that ranking?
13. How has coaching enabled you to increase your ability to extract value from cultural diversity in the team?
14. What evidence do you have to support that?

**Section 2 - Diversity**

1. How aware are you of your natural, unconscious bias as a result of coaching?
2. What has changed related to your unconscious bias?
3. Why do you believe that?
4. How has coaching helped or impeded your ability to work effectively with other demographic groups in business?
5. What evidence do you have of this?

6. To what extent do you believe that Western business culture should take precedence over cultural differences in South Africa?
7. Why do you believe this?
8. What has changed about the perceived ranking you initially gave to the different cultures in this organisation and your team as a result of coaching?
9. What has led to this change?
10. What was the impact of learning the life stories of your team members?
11. How has this learning impacted relationships in your team?
12. What do you believe South Africa needs to do to get people working together more effectively?
13. Why do you say that?
14. What do you need to do to work more effectively with your colleagues from other demographic groups?
15. Why is that significant for you?
16. McKinsey & Company global research shows that companies that embrace diversity deliver more than 30% better returns than companies which do not. How do you feel this applies in South Africa?
17. On what do you base this belief?

**Section 3 – Coaching**

1. Did coaching live up to your expectations?
   - What stands out for you from the coaching experience?

   -Why was this significant for you?

   -Would you recommend coaching as a leadership development tool?

   -Why is that so?
2. This action research focused on building leadership ability to lead racially diverse teams in South Africa. To what extent did the coaching support you in achieving that goal?
3. Why do you feel this way?
4. What specifically do you find useful in the coaching approach?
5. Why was that important to you?
6. What did you, personally, get out of participation in the coaching?
7. Why was that significant?
8. How would you rate (on a scale of 1 to 5) your level of understanding of people from other demographic groups in your team after having experienced the coaching?

9. On what do you base that ranking?
10. Which of your former areas of lack of knowledge or skill has the coaching enabled you to address?
11. Why was that the case?

## APPENDIX C: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Wits Business School

Parktown

15th March 2019

Dear South African Business Leader

I am looking for eight business/team leaders in your organisation who are interested in participating in a six-month coaching programme free of charge. The coaching will focus on how you lead in a racially diverse environment. It will form part of the input to my research for the Management Masters in Business and Executive Coaching at Wits Business School.

The programme will include a monthly group session for the eight leaders in which we will discuss common themes that we will design in collaboration based on the participants' needs and experiences in business. They could include, for example, topics like my sense of self, my early childhood conditioning, unconscious bias etc. In addition to the monthly group sessions, each participant will receive a monthly one-hour one-on-one coaching session to address personal areas of growth related to this topic. The theme of my research is the contribution of coaching to supporting leaders who lead racially diverse teams. It will not address racism or gender diversity. The participants should be racially diverse.

Executive coaching is designed to unlock even more of the client's potential in their personal and business lives in service of their career progression and their delivery of value to the organization. I have more than ten years of experience in coaching senior leaders in business and government. My coaching profile is attached as additional information.

This coaching programme is planned to start in March 2019 and run until August 2019.

By participating in this academic research, you would be contributing to the body of knowledge about diversity leadership in addition to growing your thinking and effectiveness in the field of leadership.

Yours faithfully

Pat Roberts

082 441 4623

## APPENDIX D: AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Wits Business School

Parktown

15th March 2019

Dear Research Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project to study coaching as an enabler for South African executives leading racially diverse teams.

By signing this agreement, you agree to all aspects of participation in the research project. In this way, you will contribute to the body of knowledge about this topic.

Participation in this research will include:

1. A pre-coaching face to face interview as a benchmarking exercise ahead of the commencement of coaching which will be recorded and transcribed for research and kept confidential. Neither your name nor your employer's name will be mentioned.
2. Six three-hour, group coaching sessions with seven of your colleagues
3. Six one-hour, one-on-one coaching sessions with the coach
4. All coaching sessions are confidential and will not be recorded. At the end of each coaching, a brief question and answer session – five to ten minutes long will be recorded with your permission about the impact of that coaching session. All of these recordings will be confidential and used by the interviewer only.
5. After the completion of the six-month coaching programme, a one-hour interview will be held to assess your opinion of the impact of the coaching on your ability to a lead multi-racial team in South Africa. This

interview will be recorded and transcribed for research and kept confidential. Neither your name nor your employer's name will be mentioned.

Coaching is a voluntary process. You choose to participate and have not been coerced in any way. If you become uncomfortable with your participation, you may choose to end your coaching. Your discomfort or your leaving the company are the only reasons to discontinue your participation. You commit to making the time to participate in the full programme once you start. Being too busy is not a reason for withdrawing during the process. That decision needs to be made before agreeing to participate. The coaching programme will run from March/April 2019 to August/September 2019. You thus commit four hours per month during that period to participation in this research project.

Executive coaching is designed to unlock even more of the client's potential in their personal and business lives in service of their career progression and their delivery of value to the organisation. I have more than ten years of experience in coaching senior leaders in business and government. My coaching profile is attached as additional information.

The quality and confidentiality of the coaching is governed by the ethics and standards of the International Coach Federation, Comensa (Coaches and Mentors South Africa) and the non-medical ethics of Wits Business School.

By signing this agreement you indicate your acceptance of the process outlined above.

Name:

Employer:

Date:

Signature:

Coach and researcher:

Yours faithfully

Pat Roberts

patroberts@change.co.za

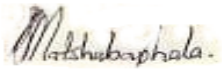
082 441 4623

# APPENDIX E: WBS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION ETHICS COMMITTEE**
**CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: WBS/BA9601153x/766** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | Coaching as an enabler for South African executives to navigate a diverse business environment |
| **INVESTIGATOR** | **Ms** Pat Roberts |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR** | MMBEC |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 10 December 2019 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Approved unconditionally |
| **RISK LEVEL** | LOW RISK |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 28 February 2020 |
| **ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE** | 17 February 2020 |



_____
(Dr MDJ Matshabaphala)

cc: Supervisor: Dr Nomusa Mazonde

## APPENDIX F: TURNITIN REPORT

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ORIGINALITY REPORT

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# APPENDIX G: LETTER FROM PROOFREADER CONFIRMING BOTH FIRST SUBMISSION AND THIS SUBSEQUENT SUBMISSION WERE CHECKED FOR ERRORS INCLUDING THE INDEX

**CONFIRMATION OF PROOFREADING**

This serves to confirm that I have proofread this thesis and have made the necessary corrections, suggestions and emendations:

**Coaching as an enabler for South African executives to unlock added value from demographically diverse teams**

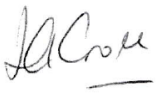
**By Patricia Roberts**

- Please note – I have now proofed this document twice.

I have been proofreading articles, Honours, Masters and Doctoral dissertations, research reports and theses for the past 14+ years for, *inter alia*, the following institutions: University of the Witwatersrand; GIBS; University of Cape Town; Milpark; Mancosa; University of KwaZuluNatal; University of Johannesburg; Unisa; Tshwane University of Technology; Stellenbosch; Henley Business School, Regenesys, University of Pretoria and, more recently, the Da Vinci Institute.

I have also undertaken proofreading for publishers, such as Oxford University Press, Knowledge Resources and Juta & Company, companies, institutions and non-governmental organisations.

I have a major in English, and excellent knowledge of Afrikaans.



Jennifer Croll

BA(Wits); H.Dip.Lib. (UCT); B.Tech.(LIS), B.Inf.Sc.(Hons)(Unisa); MM(Research), MM(Strategic Marketing)(Wits).

Email: crolljennifer@gmail.com

Mobile: 072-351-7997

Date: 2nd September 2020

## APPENDIX H: AUDIT TRAIL OF DATA

| Data Sources | Collection and storage |
|---|---|
| Signed agreement to participate in the research | The researcher kept a personal folder for each participant, and this agreement was the first document in each folder.<br><br>All folders were stored in a locked cupboard between coaching sessions. |
| Pre-coaching interview recordings | These were recorded on an MP3 recording device, then downloaded and stored on the researcher's laptop, which is password protected. They were categorised with the first and last initial of the participant. The recordings were then deleted from the recording device. |
| Pre-coaching interview transcriptions | These were transcribed by the researcher and stored on the researcher's laptop, which is password protected. They were categorised with the first and last initial of the participant. They were printed as input to this dissertation and then shredded. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Coaching reflections after each coaching session | These were in the form of e-mails sent by the researcher to the e-mail address of each participant. The researcher's laptop is password protected |
| Post-coaching interviews | These were recorded on an MP3 recording device, then downloaded and stored on the researcher's laptop, which is password protected. They were categorised with the first and last initial of the participant. The recordings were then deleted from the recording device. |
| Post-coaching interview transcriptions | These were transcribed by the researcher and stored on the researcher's laptop, which is password protected. They were categorised with the first and last initial of the participant. They were printed as input to this dissertation and then shredded. |
| Participants folders | The hard copy documents in the folders kept for the researcher's notes on each participant were shredded after being used as input to this dissertation. |

# APPENIDX I: CONSISTENCY MATRIX

| **Research objective 1** Articulate the leadership challenges faced by South African business executives as they lead teams made up of people from different cultural and demographic groups. | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Research sub-objective** | **Research sub-question** | **Literature Review** | **Proposition** | **Data collection method** | **Source of data** | **Type of data** | **Analysis method** |
| Articulate the leadership challenges faced by South African business executives as they lead teams made up of people from different cultural and demographic groups. | What are the typical issues faced by South African business leaders who are leading racially and culturally diverse teams? | Moodley & Adam 2000<br>Molefi 2017<br>Lord& Hall 2005<br>Livermore & Soon 2015<br>Mattes 2012<br>Earley & Mosakowski 2004<br>Hofstede 2011<br>Rojon & McDowall 2010<br>GLOBE study 2009 Molefi 2017<br>Livermore & Soone 2015<br>Oslan & Bird 2003<br>Rosinski 2010<br>Shrivastava, Selvarajah, Meyer & Dorasamy 2014 | Leading people from diverse demographic and cultural groups requires executives to understand the different cultural orientations and leadership styles that are typical of the cultural grouping represented by the people they lead, so that they can recognise and adapt to different cultural norms and values by changing their behaviour or approach in appropriate ways. There is also an | Pre-coaching benchmarking interview<br>Brief post coaching reflections after each coaching session<br>Coach observations & reflections<br>Interview at the end of the coaching to assess the impact of coaching | Coachees will be interviewed before being coached, after each coaching session and after the coaching process is completed.<br>The coach will reflect on observations, learnings and experiences throughout the coaching process | Qualitative | Thematic analysis |

| **Research objective 1** Articulate the leadership challenges faced by South African business executives as they lead teams made up of people from different cultural and demographic groups. | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Research sub-objective** | **Research sub-question** | **Literature Review** | **Proposition** | **Data collection method** | **Source of data** | **Type of data** | **Analysis method** |
| | | | imperative for a clear vision of the diversity aspect of their leadership so that their followers have clarity on the leader's focus, actions and direction related to diversity. | | | | |

| **Research Objective 2** Explore the demographic and cultural diversity issues that the participants chose to work on within a coaching partnership | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Research sub-objective** | **Research sub-question** | **Literature Review** | **Proposition** | **Data collection method** | **Source of data** | **Type of data** | **Analysis method** |
| Explore the demographic and cultural diversity issues that the participants chose to work on within a coaching partnership be more effective leaders | Which demographic and cultural diversity aspects within teams did the participants believe had the most impact? | Rosinski 2010<br>Livermore and Soon 2015<br>St Claire 2005<br>Mattes 2012<br>Abbott 2014<br>Warde et al 2008<br>Handin and Steinweidel 2006<br>Molefi 2017 | The first requirement of South African business leaders leading culturally and demographically diverse teams is to acknowledge and understand cultural differences. This acknowledgement requires self-awareness, openness to other ways of thinking and building an understanding of cultural differences, including the impact of early life experiences. With this understanding, leading diversity requires deep reflection resulting in more skilful and transparent communication. The typical issues faced by South African leaders related to dealing with cultural | Pre-coaching benchmarking interview<br>Brief post coaching reflections after each coaching session<br>Coach observations & reflections<br>Interview at the end of the coaching to assess the impact of coaching | Participants will be interviewed before being coached, after each coaching session and after the coaching process is completed.<br>The coach will reflect on observations, learnings and experiences throughout the coaching process | Qualitative | Thematic analysis |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | and demographic diversity in business are the ability to see and acknowledge difference as a positive and the fear of navigating sensitive conversations skilfully due to a fear of emotional backlash. | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

| **Research Objective 3** Identify ways in which coaching supported the participants in gaining a different perspective on the demographic and cultural diversity challenges they were dealing with that enabled them to be more effective as leaders. | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Research sub-objective** | **Research sub-question** | **Literature Review** | **Proposition** | **Data collection method** | **Source of data** | **Type of data** | **Analysis method** |
| Identify ways in which coaching supported the participants in gaining a different perspective on the demographic and cultural diversity challenges they were dealing with that enabled them to be more effective as leaders. | How can coaching support South African business leaders in growing their leadership effectiveness to realise the potential added value offered by demographic and cultural diversity? | Shamir and Eliam-Shamir 2018<br>Molefi 2017<br>Avolio 2007<br>Lord and Hall 2005<br>Clutterbuck 2008<br>Fillery-Travis and Lane 2014<br>Passmore and Fillery-travis 2011<br>Rosinski 2010<br>Steele 2011<br>Rogers 2012<br>Bongwe 2010 | The research coaching operated always from a safe, non-judgemental space created with the intention of enabling the participants to explore their own biases, understand their own cultural norms and be positively curious about the cultural norms of the people in their teams. They used mechanisms like sharing life stories, discussing micro-inequalities and having open and honest conversations about racial and cultural differences within their team to | Pre-coaching benchmarking interview<br>Brief post coaching reflections after each coaching session<br>Coach observations & reflections<br>Interview at the end of the coaching to assess the impact of coaching | Coachees will be interviewed before being coached, after each coaching session and after the coaching process is completed.<br>The coach will reflect on observations, learnings and experiences throughout the coaching process | Qualitative | Thematic analysis |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | encourage openness to other views and possibilities. Additional coaching approaches used were regular self-reflection, reading and journaling to deepen awareness and as focus on how to extract more value from networks to which both leaders and team members had access. These techniques were shown to enable the realisation of the benefits of cultural diversity. In these ways, coaching built self-awareness, particularly of bias, drove inclusion, including into established networks and this enabled the realisation of value from cultural and demographic diversity. | | | | |