

**University of the Witwatersrand**  
**School of Human and Community Development**  
**Discipline of Psychology**

**MASTERS RESEARCH DISSERTATION**

Exploring the Motivation, Goals and Contradictions Faced by Employment  
Equity and Transformation Practitioners in the South African Corporate  
Environment

“Employment Equity implementers in South Africa: Checking Boxes or  
Building a Shared Future?”

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## DECLARATION

Completed towards the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree: Masters by Research in the Discipline of Psychology. The research is submitted under the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

I hereby declare that this entire dissertation is my own original work, save instances where authors and researchers have been quoted and referenced as part of the theoretical grounding and discursive analysis pertinent hereto.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the personal goals and motivation behind employment equity implementers working within this field and one or more of three broad areas namely: 1) Transformation, 2) Empowerment, and 3) Diversity.

The study aimed to explore what it is (ultimately) that these individuals are working for and towards in their day to day lives and professional roles. Were they working towards bigger goals than just compliance with the Employment Equity Act and if so- what were these?

Further, the study looked to explore the results of operating in an environment where there are very often competing goals and visions of success, with a final view to understanding what personal tactics and methods implementers deploy to cope and succeed in this context- should an environment of conflicting, competing or contradictory goals exist. The research methodology was a content analysis of in depth semi structured individual interviews.

The analysis highlighted the varied views, end goals and conceptual understandings on part of implementers. In every case however a sense of duty or calling emerged which seemed to serve as the key motivator and source of resilience in trying and complex situations. The role constructions that participants undertook also varied and seemed to be linked to the initiatives they busied themselves with as well as their personal motivations in terms of their work. All interviewees experienced some degree of dissonance and or tension between their ultimate goals and views of the subject area from the organisations in which they worked, with different personal responses manifesting.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Introduction**

Very little research has been done in terms of the personal and psychological realities faced by employment equity implementers in large entities with regard to the subject areas described above (employment equity, transformation, empowerment and or diversity). The rationale for this study developed from this perceived gap. I wanted to explore two things. Firstly whether an initial understanding could be gained of the types of personal motivation behind implementers in relation to the field in which they work- as they define and view it.

Further, I wanted to understand means through which individuals are able to cope in work contexts that are often a) ambiguous or poorly / loosely defined, 2) under a good deal of scrutiny and 3) contradictory in many ways to what participants are aiming to achieve from a personal goal perspective within a group or organisational context.

In pursuing the research aims, five individuals (three men and two women from varied ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds) were selected. Each needed to have worked at a senior level within the ICT sector for over two years. The sample was Johannesburg based and needed to be for purposes of the research design and limited budget. There was one, senior independent consultant interviewed who had broad experience across sectors, including ICT.

Responses were recorded in .m4a format and analysed by way of content analysis. Various emergent themes arose including: why people choose to work in transformation/ empowerment/ employment equity/ diversity in the South African context, how they envisage and define success, what they think the relevant concepts mean at the level of a working definition, as well as how they navigate, cope and successfully pursue personal goals in environments often characterised by goals different from theirs.

## **1.2. Research Aim**

The study aimed to explore and understand the subjective world of individuals involved with implementing large scale employment equity and related programmes within large ICT based entities. The research also aimed to unpack a number of aspects relating to their personal experiences in and around their careers.

## **1.3. Research Questions**

- 1) What is it that “employment equity implementers” are fundamentally motivated and driven by in terms of their current careers?
- 2) What are they (“employment equity implementers”) working towards in their professional roles, in terms of an overall goal or vision?
- 3) Are their goals in harmony with those of the environments in which they work?
- 4) What tactics and methods do “employment equity implementers” deploy to cope and succeed in a context where there is a conflict between their personal goals and or vision of success and those of the organisations in which they work?

Parenthesis has been used above as it became clear that employment equity was only a partial feature of a broader landscape that the respondents were engaged in.

#### **1.4. Research Rationale**

There is a gap in the literature regarding the subjective experiences of implementers within the fields relevant to this study. Further, the research points in many ways to the difficulties in working effectively in an undefined conceptual space (Van Tonder 2002), especially with relation to the broad topic of transformation as it operationalises in South Africa. Further, the complex interplay between political and professional concepts is something that warrants study on behalf of those trying to navigate and succeed in that space. Questions like “do implementers even understand the broader conceptual framework they are working in?” were top of mind after reading much of the available literature.

Much work has gone into the subjective experiences and responses of employees from different groups in work settings where employment equity initiatives and related are underway. Mare (2001), Jongens (2006) and others have all produced work looking at the impacts of implementation, what determines success and failure and what factors best lead to a successful Employment Equity initiatives being completed. Burnett’s 2003 work also highlighted the importance of inclusion work where diversity is to succeed.

One purpose of Employment Equity is the representation of difference in the workplace, so one would then argue that a lot of the work relevant to sustaining new levels of diversity must to some extent focus on inclusion work. Is this the focus of implementers? If not what is taking up most of their time?

A final part of the rationale was to look at the business case aspects of diversity which all implementers spoke about freely, and about which there is a large body of literature. In their quests towards building more representative workforces, are implementers even conscious of the business case as it relates to their work, do they know what it espouses and if so- does the work they do reflect this in any way?

To come back to Burnett (2003) - the point of diversity work is inclusion. I wanted to understand that in cases where implementers were not busying themselves in this space, what did this feel like for

them? Are they working in a space of contradictory personal and organisational goals and if so- what do they do to remain fulfilled and satisfied within their roles?

The construction of a body of knowledge on the subjective experiences of implementers, why they do what they do, how they navigate complex spaces, what it is they believe they are ultimately achieving is. I view this as an important piece in understanding and enabling the work of professionals in South Africa, especially those whose work focuses directly on bringing about a synergy between the broad “transformational” aims espoused in the South African constitution and the productive outputs of business as a whole. Though a small step in that direction, it is hoped this research will contribute to this body of knowledge.

### **1.5. Structure of the Report**

The structure of the report is indicated in the Table of Contents.

Chapter Two provides a detailed account of the literature available to the researcher in light of the selected topic. Chapter Three details aspects such as the research design and methodology and procedures deployed for the study. This chapter will also provide an explanation of the researcher’s reflections regarding the research process. Chapter Four provides the description and discussion pertinent to the findings of the discourse analysis. Chapter five is brief and details the limitations of the study as well as any implications for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1. Introduction**

The literature reviewed as a part of the research falls into three broad conceptual categories. Firstly, a portion of the literature on the topic of diversity and diversity management in organisations research was reviewed for the purposes of completing this study.

Secondly, an attempt is made to ventilate some of the literature that relates to four broad subject categories as they manifest in South African organisations. These are empowerment, transformation, employment equity and diversity. More importantly- I have included articles that link the subject of psychology with these four concepts.

Studies on individual and group impact of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) legislation in Western settings were explored to some degree though the predominant amount of focus was placed on research conducted into the impact of Employment Equity legislation in South Africa. A particular sub focus was placed on the personal, group and organisational impact of implementing such programmes.

Where relevant and related, some information on South Africa's Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act and Codes is included in this review.

A third and final broad area included in this literature review relates to some of the body of knowledge pertinent to personal psychological concepts and constructs that I deem relevant to a first-hand attitudinal and behavioural study of people actively involved in the type of work relevant to this study. Examples include goal directed behaviour, resilience, work identity and organisational justice.

## **2.2. Diversity and Managing Diversity**

### **2.2.1. Diversity**

Diversity, for the purposes of this study is best defined by Cox (2001) as: “Variation of social and cultural identities among people existing together in a defined employment or market setting.” (p3)

Other researchers have suggested that the concept of diversity goes beyond “differences” or variance and includes similarities between people. Essentially, diversity is difference and similarity, with the attributes of difference and/ or points of similarity aligning closely with those presented in Cox’s definition.

Lewis Griggs has worked extensively in the field of diversity. Much of the original writing on the business case on managing diversity was influenced by his work and his writings remain a feature of practice to this day. In his book *Valuing Diversity: New tools for a New Reality* he explains diversity as having many levels of operation and describes what he terms “primary and secondary” dimensions of diversity. Primary differences are said to be either innate or those that have a strong impact on our identity formation and socialisation (Griggs, 1995). They will continue to have an effect throughout the life of a person. His six primary dimensions are listed as: age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities, physical qualities and race. Not only do these impact individuals strongly, they are also often “overt” dimensions i.e.: visible to others who form opinions using those as “moving parts”. Griggs’s secondary dimensions of diversity can be changed throughout one’s life and are not necessarily overt or visible differences. Examples are marital status, geographic location, socio economic status, education, experience, religious beliefs, and personal preferences.

Literature focused on diversity as understood by the above looks at 1) what diversity is, 2) what it means in the context of organisations and/or interactional settings as well as 3) approaches and means of utilising diversity in organisations as a means of enhancing an organisation’s performance, creativity and or effectiveness (for example). This extension from understanding “what diversity is”

to looking at “how differences are used in organisations” opens up the conversation on what is termed “Managing Diversity” in organisations, essentially accommodating and utilising “differences” represented in employees to build more inclusive organisations that are more productive and essentially more profitable.

### 2.2.2. Managing Diversity

This researcher was interested in studies focusing on the personal and interpersonal impact of working in an environment characterised by difference and what this meant in terms of overall organisational productivity and culture. Where programmes have been put in place by organisations to accommodate and “harness” differences for the purposes of building better, more profitable organisations one also needs to examine where such attempts are successful and where they are not. Another important step is in understanding critical or important factors in connecting the idea of designing organisational practices and processes with a view to capitalising on personal “differences” (such as different attributes, characteristics, skills, backgrounds etc.) inherent in employees or groups of employees.

Cox (2001) notes, *“The challenge of diversity is not simply to have it but to create conditions in which its potential to be a performance barrier is minimized and its potential to enhance performance is maximized”* (p.236)

This particular view typifies much of the focus of the idea of “Managing Diversity” in organisations. It is of interest to this study to see whether or not this broad outcome features in the understanding of diversity that participants bring to the research.

Burnett (2003) believes that focusing on diversity is a misdirection, and that the real issue is (should be) inclusion.

While he can see diversity as a process that will contribute to the equal representation of “minorities” within organisations, he does not see how that will fail to prevent those individuals from being

excluded. Hence the issue of inclusion is one of being involved in the process of creating societies and organisations in which all people, irrespective of their diversity, can prosper and progress. His view of inclusion is similar to that of ‘valuing diversity’ in Friday and Friday’s (2003) continuum. Burnett (2003) defines inclusion as a process where we ‘recognise difference and the value that all people can add to our business’ and ‘we strive to create an environment where everyone can fully utilise their gifts’, which is in line with April’s (2006) definition that ‘inclusion is about creating empowering environments of difference, where people can be themselves, comfortably contributing their full selves and all the ways in which they differ from others’.

Burnett (2003) and April (2007) claim essentially that the whole purpose of managing diversity is to create inclusion.

The results of Burnett’s study also show that expectations can drive the creation of inclusive communities, as can individual courage and determination. In the absence of formal diversity management programs, individuals undertake “personal diversity management” to ensure their own inclusion. An example of this is attempting to conform with the majority as in the case of a black man assimilating to the white counterparts’ sports and social habits. Confrontation was also used as a form of personal diversity management in the case of a Muslim woman using abusive terms to colleagues abusing her. However, such “personal diversity management strategies” take a level of energy, drive and resilience that should not be necessary in the workplace, and indeed not every member of a diverse group has the confidence or courage to see such personal challenges through, for example a man who does not stop his boss making racist remarks for fear of worsening his relationship with him. This, in turn, impacts on an individual’s identity, both in terms of the extent of their difference, and the extent of their inclusion in the community.

Diversity management programs in organisations tend to focus on multiculturalism and raising awareness. This research shows that the psychological issues relating to identity, intention, expectations, power and inclusion should be included. Inclusion, both in a working environment and

within the social context, was found to make individuals feel valued, confirming Burnett's (2003) and April's (2007) work.

Ironically, affirmative action or employment equity programs which are deployed to redress diversity issues, can actually exacerbate feelings of exclusion by leaving employees feeling undervalued and un-affirmed in their own identity, as they see themselves as not worthy of the promotion when previously they would have viewed themselves as more than competent. This further excludes the individual from the team, group or community. Hard work and excellent performance against exacting standards, rewarded by promotion and peer acknowledgement, makes people feel valued.

Diversity management programmes, particularly those that focus on raising awareness rather than understanding, unfortunately may be treating people in boxes or categories, rather than as individuals in their own right. By labelling people, they feel stereotyped and exploited as a group, and resentful individually, which leads to ineffective workplace production as well as dysfunctional, even devious, workplace relations.

Evident from Burnett, April and Friday is that diversity management should be about creating inclusion for anyone, and with any form of difference from the dominant group. Initiatives to tackle the issue should be based on psychological principles rather than multiculturalism only. Whatever the root of the difference, diversity management needs to focus on everyone feeling included, rather than excluded, on the grounds of their difference. A concern to the current study is whether this is in fact happening in the context of employment equity and transformation, or whether there is a simple and reductionist focus on race and gender representation.

April, Ephraim and Peters (2011) investigate the psychological issues underpinning diversity management training, focusing in particular on identity, intention, expectations, power and inclusion. The study is based on an analysis of the personal stories of respondents (junior managers and students at the UCT Graduate School) through storytelling, interviews and written accounts. These stories were then subjected to content analysis classifying the textual information. Inclusion was shown

conclusively to be the key issue with regard to diversity management supporting earlier research by April (2007) and Burnett (2003).

The researchers view diversity as a continuum framework delineated by three potential states of address: acknowledgement, valued and managed. Their research indicates that most organisations are at the stage of merely “acknowledging “diversity and in fact the acknowledgement is bringing unwarranted attention to differences that might not otherwise have been noted.

In terms of the diversity concerns, perhaps unsurprisingly “racial issues” emerge as the biggest cause of diversity concern (771 counts) followed by gender (331 counts) and religion (65 counts). With regard to the psychological diversity constructs being analysed in this study, inclusivity was identified as the major concern (773) followed by identity (282) and expectations (206).

Inclusivity was therefore shown by April, Ephraim and Peters to be the key issue with regard to diversity management supporting April and Burnett’s contention that “the whole purpose of diversity management is to create inclusion.”

### **2.3. The Business Case for Managing Diversity**

The “Business Case” for Managing Diversity looks at why it is a good idea from a profit and / or productivity perspective for organisations to invest in accommodating, valuing and utilising the differences reflected in their employees. A central idea is that different individuals bring with them different and often unique sets of skills, experiences, viewpoints, abilities and perspectives that may not be brought to bear in the context of highly homogenous organisations (Gwele, 2009).

Bringing said differences together in a way that contributes to and enhances the creation of services, products and solutions is the ultimate goal of many initiatives focused on managing diversity. The business case is well encapsulated in the following quote from Griggs and Louw (1995): *More and more, organizations can remain competitive only if they can recognize and obtain the best talent; value the diverse perspectives that come with talent born of different cultures, races, and genders;*

*nurture and train that talent; and create an atmosphere that values its workforce.* (p9) This type of elucidation of the business case remains central to conversations and practice, and in fact does not seem to have evolved much beyond this.

Valuing employee differences and embedding this value for difference in teams and organisations is linked to potential competitive advantages such as enhanced customer contact, greater employee satisfaction, heightened employee contribution, improved problem solving processes and greater innovation. Robinson (1997) lists some of the factors worth considering in terms of the business case for diversity. These include cost savings through lower absenteeism and reduced legal encounters, winning the “competition for talent”- seen as a critical part of organisational success and linked to how well companies manage diversity, driving business growth through improved market understanding and increasing creativity and innovation, as well as producing higher quality problem solving and enhancing leadership effectiveness. Again, Robinson has been cited given the centrality of these types of facets that remain within the business case argument.

The acceptance of the business case behind diversity and the management thereof is not universally accepted and research seems to be inconclusive at this stage. Two studies highlight the difficulty in assessing the merits behind the business case.

In a highly comprehensive and much cited study Neale, Northcraft and Jehn titled “*Why Differences Make a Difference: A Field Study of Diversity, Conflict, and Performance in Workgroups*” (1999) studied the effects of three types of diversity on workgroup outcomes. These were titled social category diversity, value diversity and informational diversity.

“Value diversity” i.e.: diversity of values which must be separated conceptually from the idea of “valuing diversity”, was the only type that was viewed as having negative impact on certain aspects of what the researchers deemed outcome clusters. The study proved (which is relevant to the current research) the positive contribution of social category diversity to a number of aspects of the outcomes (p16).

To clarify, the following quote from the study helps to illustrate the findings: *“If the type of diversity measured is informational diversity, group performance may be enhanced by diversity. If the type of diversity measured is social category diversity, the most positive effects will likely be on worker morale (satisfaction, intent to remain, commitment, and perceived performance). In contrast, groups that have greater diversity as measured in terms of values may suffer significant performance decrements (being less effective and efficient as well as having poorer perceived performance) and diminished worker morale (decreased satisfaction, commitment, and intent to remain in the group).”* (p76)

On the other hand a 2003 study conducted by Kochan, Bezrukova, Ely et al showed little relationship between diversity and performance outcomes (as much as “performance” and “workgroup outcomes” were defined somewhat differently by the two studies). They encourage a more nuanced view of the benefits of diversity and encourage readers to look beyond the business case as an imperative for diversity and diversity management.

Marx, Pons and Suri studied diversity and team performance in a Kenyan organisation in 2015. Their findings included an interesting contrast in that horizontal (team member to team member) homogeneity in terms of ethnicity was linked to increased performance whereas what they term “vertical homogeneity” whereby the manager or supervisor is of a different ethnicity was linked to decreased performance, i.e.: teams managed by someone with a manager who was ethnically different from the team performed better.

The Kochan et al study looked into the relationship between race and gender diversity and business performance, carried out in 4 large American firms by the BOLD initiative (Business Opportunities for Leadership Diversity). Kochan et al assert that there has always been an assumption posited in the literature that there is a clear-cut business case for having a diverse workforce which is related to improved business performance. This research study represents the first definitive piece of research assessing this link. The results suggest the need to move beyond the business-case argument and emphasised the complexities of conducting research into the business case theory.

Their research results show that diversity in organisations is very difficult to study because of the sensitivity of the issues it seeks to illuminate; furthermore the relationship between diversity and the bottom line is more complex than is implied by popular rhetoric. Diversity can have negative as well as positive effects.

The research indicates that the organisational context/climate is key to harnessing the benefits of diversity; furthermore the effects of diversity on organisational performance are likely to be more favourable if group leaders and members build on team members' creativity and information.

In one of the four companies studied gender diversity was seen to increase constructive group processes while racial diversity inhibited them. However neither gender nor race diversity had a significant effect on performance. Overall the results showed that racial and gender diversity do not have a positive effect on performance, at least not consistently and under all conditions. However diversity does not necessarily have a negative effect on group processes and where it was shown to have a negative effect this could be mitigated by training.

The business case behind managing differences in organisations, as mentioned above, is not universally accepted.

Another challenge to the idea of managing diversity is typified by a study conducted by Gerhard Mare from the University of Pretoria. His challenges to the notion are expressed in the summation of his research below.

His 2001 study "From Traditional Authority to Diversity Management; Some Recent Writing on Managing the Workforce", Mare unpacks much of the current thinking on diversity management as it applies to the South African labour context. In a highly provocative work, He explores many of the traditional stereotypes historically applied to African people, particularly those along ethnic and tribal lines.

Further, he aimed to understand the extent to which these stereotypes and assumptions were carrying through into modern workplace practice, whether in new or recognised disguise. Mare lamented the

state of much diversity work in South African organisations, pitched often, in his words, as a means to “mediate the work of the exotic other”. In his view, far too little emphasis was placed on the class experience of workers, with attempts to understand and value diversity often translating to little more than modern day stereotyping and an attempt to apply tribal and ethnic characteristics to workers as a means of “soft control”.

Mare questioned the focus of leading practitioners such as Knowledge resources whose overt focus, in his appraisal, appeared heavily focused on redress and very little on actual diversity (differences as defined by Cox such as race, gender, ability, social class etc.). He further highlighted what he saw as a false equation in South Africa between race relations and labour relations. He saw this as further propagating primordial differences and separation that proved to be a root of conflict rather than alleviation thereof. The new terms for black and white, in his view have become “employer” and “employee”.

It is Mares strong view that diversity programmes play into many of the above pitfalls and exist solely to draw the conversation away from bigger questions around the capitalist economy. He argues that race is only partially relevant in a capitalist structure and that for diversity to be truly valued and managed, the very foundations of the capitalist economy needed to be revisited.

His view is well summed in the following quote, (remembering he had published this in 2001):

*“How will race, for we are talking here of racialized diversity, ameliorate the effects of capitalism here at the tip of Africa? Will black managers, or white managers employing “African management styles” work against the trend of a “lost concern for the human condition” ...? What do new captains of industry, such as Cyril Ramaphosa or Nthato Motlana or Thami Mazwai bring.... other than the political clout of the new order and the ability to produce profits?”* (Mare, 2001) A key link with Mare’s observations and this study will therefore be in answering whether the profit motive appears indeed to be the overarching motivation where such initiatives are concerned, or whether implementers have indeed found it possible to make fundamental shifts in their respective environments, beyond merely changing the face or wording camouflaging the profit motive.

In the study “*Organisational Justice and Employee Responses to Employment Equity*”, Esterhuizen and Martins (2008) relate the concept of organisational justice with responses to employment equity. What emerged from the study were two key aspects. Firstly is the difference between decisions that are perceived subjectively as fair, versus those which in the broader organisational context are considered “just”, which is unpacked below.

The second, related emerging idea is that the idea of organisational justice is a key consideration in the way in which efforts such as those tied to employment equity will be received. The authors assert that when decisions are perceived to be just, even if individually unfavourable, their implications are much more palatable and accepted more widely.

Drawing on the work of people like Greenberg (1987), Esterhuizen and Martins assert that there are three components to organisational justice, namely: a) Distributive justice (distribution of resources, information and opportunity), b) procedural justice (organisational procedures formal and informal) and c) interactional justice (the way in which interactions are characterised across groups and different individuals). Essentially what the study found was that employees were far more likely to accept employment equity outcomes in situations where employees felt there was justice (as per above three dimensions) in the decision and associated efforts.

This places a great degree of onus on implementers to focus on the operationalisation of employment equity or to use a colloquialism- the “how” of implementing. This is an important consideration for this study and the concept of organisational justice will need to be built in while assessing views and perceptions of related activities.

The study concluded that although a decade (at the time) since the inception of the employment equity act, many employees still experienced instances of perceived unfair discrimination- which to them pointed directly to the failings to instil a sense of organisational justice. This is critical when one considers that the overarching chapter of the act- relevant to all employers regardless of size and turnover, focuses squarely on the prevention of unfair discrimination, making no mention of numerical goals and targets. Important areas (among others) included perceptions of unfairness in

Human Resources policy and procedure, as well as perceived unfairness in process and communication with regards efforts towards employment equity. Recommendations were drawn accordingly.

Again, in terms of this study, it will be important to understand 1) whether diversity and related initiatives are in some way designed towards bringing about a sense of organisational justice, 2) whether diversity and related initiatives are helping in bringing this about, or whether they are being conducted to support compliance under labour and business legislation and 3) the implementers who support diversity management programmes adequately recognise the business case.

#### **2.4. Psychological Studies on Employment Equity and Affirmative Action in South Africa**

A great deal of the literature specifically focused on Employment Equity has been focused on individual and personal responses to Employment Equity being implemented in South African organisations.

Booyesen (2007) conducted research into the barriers faced by organisations trying to implement Employment equity programmes. Further, the study looked into the issue of retention when it came to black managers. The study was conducted using largely face to face data collection through interviews and focused strongly on perceptions held by various workers and representative groupings, as well as the interplay between these perceptions. Organisational culture was viewed and perceived differently by members from different racial groups. Using the researcher's terms, black and black female respondents consistently scored lower than their white counterparts when it came to matters of organisational culture. One particular area of interest was the perceived "hiatus" between recruiting, developing and retaining black talent. "Career-pathing" and succession for black managers as well as meaningful training and development opportunities were listed as further examples of barriers to the retention of black managers (middle and other).

White males were viewed as central to the culture of organisations with the researcher going as far as describing the culture experienced by the sample as “white male culture”. Key to the Booyesen study was that in terms of retaining and developing employees intended to be beneficiaries of Employment Equity, an organisational focus on the human need for accommodation and growth that appeared most critical. Even more important, according to the researchers, than concerns such as remuneration and reward. A further interesting point was that even EE based initiatives were often done in line with company values which were in essence set out by powerful white role-players. Initiatives were said to lack an “African” feel and in many cases to be excluding those supposedly intended to be beneficiaries. Key success factors included creating a shared vision and understanding of EE within the company. Another finding of the study was that strong communication would need to follow the development of this vision, with meaningful development, coaching, mentoring and succession initiatives in place.

An attached factor was seen as the management of “white male fear”, with the idea that support groups should be set up for white males in order to deal with their “predicament”.

An aim of the proposed research will thus be to explore to what extent many of the key success factors and conclusions carry through into this sample. Where do they rank concepts like creating a shared vision and strong communication in relation to what they see as success (in terms of their own broader goals and outcomes)?

Many of the success factors in the Booyesen study relate to qualitative interventions that have little mention in any of the legislation, remembering that the legislation gives little guidance in terms of creating a supportive organisational climate and culture. This points directly to the inescapable emergence of subjective interpretation and implementation on behalf of implementers, wherein a lot of the implementers’ motivations and drivers are bound to manifest. This gives further impetus to the need to investigate the relationship between personal ideation around employment equity and related initiatives and the shape they take as a result.

Leonard and Grobler (2006) used multiple qualitative methods to conduct research into the management of Employment Equity communication at “corporate level” in South Africa. The study aimed to understand the numerous societal viewpoints and messages around employment equity (EE), and looked to contribute to the creation of a model that would “bridge the divide “between different viewpoints and dialects” on EE.

Findings from the study included “transformation fatigue” in terms of business stakeholders- a process positioned by the researchers as one of “offering up more and more of their business and identity”. White employees’ feelings of fear and insecurity” were said to be sizeable factors in terms of what organisations needed to manage when implementing employment equity initiatives.

Further considerations uncovered included the complications involved when implementing what was termed a “top down” approach to Employment Equity. There was supposedly a need to contextualise Employment Equity as well as B-BBEE more effectively as well as a need to manage what was termed “divisive sentiment”. The research also pointed to poor understanding of terminology by the general public as having direct impact on the success of communicating around EE in organisations.

Cyclical communication (annual reports) and the B-BBEE influence on communicating externally (marketing successes) were said to be viewed by organisations as trumping any focus on internal change. A key question then becomes, are organisations more interested in the appearance of change, or in driving long term, substantive initiatives in the areas of focus under this study.

The location of conversations on transformation as means of enabling business credentials such as B-BBEE certification was seen as a hindrance to creating and sustaining what was termed “buy-in” from internal role-players at different levels of the organisation. All of the above was found to impact greatly on the ability of an organisation to communicate on Employment Equity initiatives and transformational change. What was not said, or at least overtly, was whether there is a broader relationship between the motivation/ intent behind communication initiatives and how these are in turn received by employees.

It was hoped that in terms of the above, the study would in part explore the way in which implementers' work is communicated to other stakeholders versus what it is implementers think they are moving towards (from a goal perspective). This did not ultimately form a significant portion of the information collected.

Pillay and Kramers conducted a study into the clinical psychology profession in South Africa. The study looked at the Midlands hospital in KwaZulu Natal and the internship programme they operate for clinical psychologists. The study focused on the lack of increase in black internship candidates over time. Further, a high number of qualifying white interns were found to have left South Africa in order to pursue careers abroad. This was after they had been accepted for and completed internships as part of the programme forming the basis for the research. Europe was the largest beneficiary of this purported "brain drain". A final factor of interest was the apparent lack of suitability of many of the internship to the needs of the community they were serving while completing their internship.

The research posed serious questions in terms of what was really behind the reported brain drain given the massive overrepresentation of successful white candidates in the internships. Another question lay around what value white clinical students were adding to communities they were deployed in and further, what the cost to society at large could be given the mismatch of communities with interns and reported subsequent departure of such a large proportion of said interns.

## **2.5. The impact of a compliance driven approach**

As part of the broader considerations for this study, I wanted to explore any research that pertained to a charter/ compliance and/ or statutory approach to the work of transformation more broadly, and what had been discovered in this light by previous researchers.

Hamann et al (2008) looked at the charter driven approach to transformation led by the South African government. The study also focused on various leadership attitudes to sectoral charters for implementing Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) and where they located initiatives to bring about socio economic transformation.

The study found government to be a critical partner in the overall approach to transformation in South Africa and further discussed the complexities faced by government in driving an inclusive framework based on constitutional justice. A key question here is what shape “inclusive frameworks” take, and what is meant by “constitutional justice”.

One of the aspects which emerge from this part of the study is the balance that needs to be constructed between economic transformation and transformation as relates to power and interaction frameworks between different groups and communities in South Africa.

Relevant to this study from the above is the import of what are called “interactional frameworks”.

There is no guidance given to any of these concepts in any charter applicable to businesses. Given much of the reading on diversity, it may be fair to say that diversity programmes can be seen as vehicles for changing interactional frameworks and thereby providing some of the “glue” to making charters work, in the sense that the human element becomes incorporated more fully. It will be of interest to see if this is where diversity work is located in terms of the sample for the current study, or whether initiatives are being driven in a manner which aims to see some of the organisational benefits of the inclusion and utilisation of human differences.

This is important when considering the wider transformation objectives that surround employment equity initiatives in South Africa. As evidenced by the above, transformation is complex and requires consideration from various viewpoints. Of paramount importance is how organisations are pursuing transformation based objectives and how closely informed these are by the principles enunciated in the constitution. It further strengthens the assertion that transformation is a separate and far more holistic concept than that of B-BBEE.

Finally it also requires that a view be taken as to whether diversity initiatives are in any way aimed at bringing about cultures in organisations that are more inclusive, and reflective of organisational justice.

## 2.6. Perceptual Studies on Diversity and Employment Equity

A number of studies have been conducted in order to assess the perceptions of employees towards employment equity and diversity initiatives in South African organisations.

Zulu and Parumasur published research in 2009 looking at employee perceptions of the management of cultural diversity and workplace transformation. In the study of the same title, three production companies within Gauteng were examined. A total of 668 respondents made submissions concerning their experiences of working in these companies from the viewpoint of difference and socio economic transformation. The study paid particular attention to the following dimensions:

- a) Systems and structures in place to ensure effective management of cultural diversity
- b) The level of understanding of management and other stakeholders as relevant to the management of cultural diversity “issues”
- c) The level of understanding of the link between workplace transformation programmes and productivity
- d) The relationship between the “South African Transformation Agenda” and workplace transformation
- e) Employee involvement in “matters of transformation”
- f) The contribution of labour legislation to the management of cultural diversity

The sample was drawn randomly from a population of 1259 and a multimodal (questionnaires and interviews) process was followed, allowing for qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The study ultimately concluded that the workplaces reflected a culture that was Eurocentric and undemocratic in its character. The researchers further concluded that though workers had provided a powerful voting base for the current government regime, a disproportionately low benefit had been attained in terms of workers participation in the creation of organisational culture. This may point to the fact that although we have strong legislation in South Africa, much of its intent may not be realised should the “transformational” work discussed by other researchers not be considered in the relevant approach (Friday 2007).

Fouche et al conducted an evaluation of a diversity programme within a South African organisation. The study highlights a number of key concerns with many approaches to diversity management in organisations. Among these are: the fact that programmes are often left to the “Employment Equity Office”, diversity being pitched as a moral imperative (the right thing to do), managers being overtly supportive but not committed in earnest, generic training content for organisations, a disproportionate influence by external consultancies and that training does not bridge the gap between awareness of diversity and providing the skills necessary to manage diversity. The above list is not exhaustive.

Following the above, Fouche then attempted to identify sources of best practice.

Those put forward included developing diversity programmes in collaboration (company stakeholders/ external experts), having senior advocates and / or champions, ensuring skills are transferred from the classroom to the workplace and lastly- ensuring that diversity programmes run in conjunction with other, linked initiatives. Again the list is not exhaustive.

Fouche et al then evaluated a diversity programme that was underway in a major South African organisation. The evaluation was conducted to see if best practice was being followed, and whether common causes of failure were being avoided. The programme the company was implementing was seen as matching best practice requirements well and avoiding many common pitfalls. This being said, improvements were said to be possible with regard to the programmes lack of action based outputs, its generic, “off the shelf” nature and the fact that the programme was not ostensibly tied to any broader initiatives being implemented in the company.

In his 2010 dissertation titled “*Variables Influencing the Management of Diversity in the South African public Sector*”, James Madihlaba highlights the disparate understandings of the concept of diversity management in organisations. He wanted to understand “issues, concerns and challenges surrounding diversity management” and its application in public service settings.

Madihlaba illustrates the challenge many South African managers face. He describes it as one by which individuals who by and large come from a segregated past will often find it difficult to commit to the principles and processes underlying employment equity. Leaning heavily on the human rights

case, Madihlaba points out that diversity management is seen as a compliance imperative, and not something driven from the viewpoint of human dignity, equality and equity. He does not speak to the possible need for diversity management as a means to enabling greater productivity, though does speak of a general absence of proper performance monitoring and measuring (including diversity) within the public sector, citing a lack of required skills and experience.

With a compliance based view of diversity management comes an inability to understand and communicate related concepts such as affirmative action, something he views as breeding resistance to such notions in the public service sector. He advocates a gradual, all-encompassing framework of diversity from understanding to utilising and believes strongly that leadership should be “lead players” in the diversity journey.

Should organisations fail to move beyond a compliance viewpoint, his feeling is that much of the benefit to be gained from a broader process of truly valuing diversity as an organisational resource will be missed if not forgone.

Jongens’ 2006 work *“Perceptions of Employment Equity Implementation at a major South African Financial Institutions”* was described as “taking a thermometer reading” of the climate around employment equity in 2005 and 2006. Key findings from her assessment included a clear distinction between the compliance (labour and trade legislation) and transformative aspects of implementing employment equity. On the one hand, compliance aspects such as labour and trade and industry regulations have to be followed by organisations. Transformation on the other hand was seen as a broader process of incorporating excluded and previously absent voices and perceptions in the formation of the organisation, its culture and its ways of operating. In the research paper, it became clear that in the target organisation the focus was on compliance with regulation, couched in a “transformational” narrative.

This same kind of dissonance may be relevant to the upcoming study. The questions will need to elicit whether diversity initiatives are being driven in order to support inclusive, productive, synergistic environments or whether they are being used as means of sustaining legislative compliance.

The fact that one individual had been tasked with leading transformation/ employment equity was seen as problematic. Sole managers without a mandate and supporting line teams were seen as being put in an unenviable and difficult position. Top management itself was described as largely homogenous (white male) which was seen as having negative effect on employee perceptions with regard to how earnestly the organisation was pursuing change with regards demographic representation. Line managers in the study were responsible (formally) for the success of equity initiatives. What was noted however was the large difference between commitment and responsibility. Jongens found that management commitment to employment equity was low, with many seeing it as over and above their role of “managing”. The organisational perspective was that leading change was part and parcel of management responsibility. An important arising concern is then what it means to be a manager in a diverse organisation in a country underlain by labour laws which enforce representative diversity with regard to the population in which it is operating.

## **2.7. Employment Equity (South Africa) and Equal Employment Opportunity in other countries**

The primary focus of the review was, it must be stated, Employment Equity legislation in South Africa and its impact on people, groups and organisations. The intent is therefore to stay away from providing a technical interpretation of the relevant legislation and compliance frameworks at play. As a somewhat necessary point of departure given its significance to the interviews, a brief summation of the Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998) has been provided.

## **2.8. The Employment Equity Act**

The Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998) hereafter referred to as “The Act” is divided into four chapters, all dealing with different aspects of governance, strategy, implementation and monitoring.

The Act was promulgated with two express aims. These are:

- a) The implementation of Affirmative Action measures in order to bring about representative equity in companies in such manner as to approximate the EAP (Economically Active Population).

- b) The prevention of unfair discrimination in the workplace. Unfair discrimination is viewed as discrimination based on factors unrelated to a person's ability to do a particular job. These factors may include race, gender, HIV status, a person's disability status, political persuasion etc. The above list is not exhaustive.

The relationship between the two aims described above is complex and seems almost inherently contradictory. The interplay is best explained as follows: Affirmative action measures are viewed as necessary in order to bring about equitable representation at all "occupational levels" (Employment Equity Act, 1998) within an organisation.

Affirmative Action measures are in place under the Act to ensure that economic participation is not the exclusive domain of one particular group (e.g. white males), but engaged in by the entirety of South Africa's diverse population. They (Affirmative Action measures) are the measures to which an organisation has committed in the pursuit of an equitably represented workforce, in a manner that is mindful of the obligation to prevent unfair discrimination.

An analysis of factors such as policies, processes, organisational climate and others must provide the basis for the need to implement Affirmative Action measures and these are only permitted to be implemented where an analysis has warranted them, and an agreed Employment Equity Plan has enabled them.

Preventing unfair discrimination means protecting the dignity of individuals by way of existing, human rights focused labour and societal law. This is the domain of organisational culture audits, values identification exercises, diversity interventions and other, less tangible initiatives. More cynically, one might assert that this is where companies limit the financial and reputational risk faced by cases in arenas such as the Equality Court and CCMA (depending on what understanding the organisation has of why an inclusive culture is important to a company).

Preventing unfair discrimination also carries with it the obligation of enacting Affirmative Action where the situation clearly reflects one of persisting inequality. This inequality could refer to representation, remuneration, participation in the organisation’s culture or other areas.

## 2.9. The Commission for Employment Equity

The Commission for Employment Equity is a statutory body set up with the express intention of monitoring EE in South African companies and consulting with relevant stakeholders.

As with previous entities such as the Breakwater Monitor, the Commission monitors the progress of Employment Equity in various settings annually. The number of Employment Equity reports analysed by the Commission increases every year, and so too the accuracy of the picture of the economy they are able to project.

The following table indicates some of the statistics presented annually by the Commission for Employment Equity. The table below indicates two dimensions of representation at the measured Top Management layer for South Africa in 2016, namely race and gender.

TABLE 9: WORKFORCE PROFILE AT THE TOP MANAGEMENT LEVEL BY RACE, GENDER AND BUSINESS TYPE											
Business Types	Male				Female				Foreign Nationals		TOTAL
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Male	Female	
National government	35.3%	5.6%	7.9%	18.4%	19.6%	3.0%	2.9%	6.4%	0.8%	0.2%	100.0%
Provincial government	46.8%	6.2%	3.1%	7.3%	27.0%	3.6%	1.8%	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Local government	53.1%	5.1%	4.5%	9.1%	22.6%	1.3%	1.1%	2.7%	0.5%	0.1%	100.0%
Private sector	6.9%	3.0%	6.4%	60.9%	2.9%	1.4%	2.1%	12.8%	3.0%	0.5%	100.0%
Non-profit organisations	25.2%	5.1%	4.0%	26.2%	12.2%	2.7%	2.5%	18.2%	2.7%	1.1%	100.0%
State-owned companies	38.8%	3.5%	9.0%	14.0%	20.6%	2.7%	3.2%	7.1%	0.5%	0.5%	100.0%
Educational institutions	12.1%	3.7%	3.1%	41.3%	7.3%	1.8%	1.4%	27.0%	1.8%	0.6%	100.0%

The language in the Commission reports talks directly to representation being both an “imperative” and is branded with the phrase “Transformation is good for business”. This is in contrast to previous years in which words like “dismay” permeated the discourse.

It was during the release of the Commission Report for 2010 that impassioned commissioner, Mpho Nkeli, asserted that at the current slow rate of change, “*South Africa’s economy would still be battling to achieve representative equity in a hundred years.*” (Nkeli, M. 2010).

The general pattern of examples is familiar year on year. Progress is real but slow. White males continue to dominate top executive posts, white females continue to be represented above their applicable population figure, African people remain most underrepresented. Gender patterns remain skewed in terms of the population and people with disabilities hardly feature- and so it goes. Though the pattern is most starkly pronounced at the Top Management level (consisting largely of board members and senior executives), similar patterns persist to some degree at all management levels, with the Junior Management level most closely mapping the Economically Active Population.

If the shift in representation evidenced at lower organisational levels is to be translated to a change in the racial and gender composition of business leadership in South Africa, the role of implementers in the space of employment equity, diversity, empowerment and transformation is surely something that needs to be understood. Moreover, it is of key concern to find out what they believe the overall imperative of their work to be and how closely it ties in with the hard questions South Africa is currently asking itself around numerical representation- if at all. The logic is that the greater the pressure from the bottom, the more important it is that those tasked with delivering on the strong aspirations of change resonant in South African workplaces are able and capable of doing so.

#### 2.9.1. The Importance of the Commission’s View as an Indicator of Motivation for Diversity Initiatives

What is immediately obvious from the Commission reports is that despite immense value in terms of monitoring, little is ever offered by way of constructive suggestions to employers. The overbearing message is basically that differences as reflected in South African society are not reflected in organisations and that these differences need to be reflected as a matter of priority. How an organisation actually goes about achieving and sustaining this is another matter, and one scarcely touched on by either the Employment Equity Commission or the Department of Labour.

Very often, as evidenced by the studies of Madihlaba and Fouche later in this review, this poorly lit prerogative is often the sole reason behind why companies invest in initiatives that talk to diversity and managing diversity.

The immediate question then becomes, if diversity management is supposed to be about the benefits discussed earlier (customer contact, productivity, employee satisfaction and engagement etc.), are these ends pursued in earnest where diversity work is being carried out, or are implementers and initiatives investing energy and resource in order to “enable” and “sustain” statutory compliance?

This leads one to ask similar questions of implementers and how they view themselves as actors in this space. What is it that they think they are doing? What are the aims they are pursuing and what in reality is the outcome of the efforts they put in? Are they aware of any disjunction and if so what does this mean to how they play out their identities at work? All of these questions become relevant when one considers the interplay between why individuals and organised groupings of people do what they do, and how these actions in turn then impact the world around them.

## **2.10. Work Identity in the context of transformation**

The only article available in this light proved most useful. In a 2002 study, Van Tonder produced research looking at some of the responses at an individual and organisational level to working within a goal framework that was loosely defined.

He found that managers themselves were poorly informed about key concepts and how these fit in with the organisational narrative. This confusion among senior implementers was directly responsible for a lack of understanding of subject matter on the ground, and in turn responsible for a number of failed implementations.

Fortunately, says Van Tonder, *“some realisation is dawning (albeit slowly) that traditional organisational change models do not provide adequate guidelines for specific contexts and that*

*“successful” change will require translation and application of relevant information to specific contexts.” (p254)*

He found that the term transformation was defined in no fewer than 61 different ways in different environments and in different narratives within those environments. He also discusses how Despite its ambiguous nature, transformation has remained in the change vocabulary of scholars for many reasons. The first in this regard is the concept’s ambiguity, which enables it to be continuously redefined from within the theoretical framework of new or emerging theory.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### 3.1. Research Design

Peter Ashworth (2015) discusses much of the purpose and forms of qualitative research. In his appraisal it is often the case that when a researcher wishes to investigate a person's "*grasp of their world*" in detail, (p11) it is often to qualitative methods that they will turn.

Ashworth covers many of the historical shifts in the world of psychology insofar as more qualitative methods are concerned. He points to James' and Watson's critiques of the study of "things unobservable", more than a century ago and uses these of examples of the types of critiques faced by schools of thought more interested in the subjective experience of being human. While not wishing to distance the study of the subjective from the broader scientific realities of cause and effect, Ashworth does say that the shift towards more observable, positivist paradigms can come at a cost. Part of this cost is a scientific view which excludes the first person perspective and directs attention away from the perceptual approach as well associated modes of intentionality or consciousness like thinking and judging. He further posits that too great a focus on an objective, stimuli response type model misses and omits idiography, meaning, social relatedness and specificity in the use of language in a particular setting. (Smith, J.A. 2015).

Whilst the above critique of the behaviourist view are age old, much of what Ashworth describes as absent from the paradigm will characterise the current study. The exact purpose is to find out more about the exact criteria Ashworth describes (intentionality, language specificity, first person perspective etc.), with regard to the sample.

In Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault's 2015 book *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource*, qualitative researchers are seen as attached to the meaning people attach to things in their lives. It is a key concern that researchers "*suspend or set aside their own perspectives and taken-for-granted views of the world*" (p8) if they are to get to understand this sense of meaning.

This is worth remembering for the current study as the researcher works very closely with a lot of the subject matter and may carry some weighty preconceptions. Within qualitative research there are

numerous paradigms, approaches and methodologies and selecting the most appropriate for this study was informed to some extent by the literature.

The study was a qualitative, phenomenological view of implementers working with employment equity and related subjects, undertaken by way of semi-structured individual interviews with a purposively drawn sample.

A content analysis of five individual interviews formed the basis for this research report.

### **3.2. Participants**

The population group for the study was defined as professionals working in the IT Sector at a senior strategic level, whose job descriptions or major functions related to: empowerment, transformation, employment equity, diversity or a combination of these (with employment equity needing to be included given the title of the study).

Each had to work in an organisation within the IT sector with no fewer than 1500 employees, as a means to ensuring that the overall reach implicit in the decisions and actions of the sample was effecting the lives of a sizeable number of employees in the sector. Each needed to have at least two years of experience in their current roles or at least at their current level of seniority.

The reason a sectoral approach was taken was due to the limited sample size and a desire to have the results generate as much meaning as possible in a given context.

The breakdown by ethnic origin and gender is indicated in the table below.

The researcher wanted to build in as much diversity as possible within a small sample size and it is hoped this was achieved to some degree.

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>African</b>	2	
<b>Coloured</b>		1
<b>Indian</b>		
<b>White</b>		1
<b>Other*</b>	1	
*first generation mixed race, holding foreign citizenship		

### **3.3. Sampling Method**

The researcher wanted to include individuals within the IT sector who worked in the fields described above, either formally or by way of job description. Each participant needed to operate at a senior, strategic level and have at least two years of experience with the subject matter. For this reason a word of mouth, personal referral method was deployed. The final pool was moderated for representation of diversity in that there were a high number of African males available for the study. This could be termed purposive sampling.

### **3.4. Procedure**

- Stating and Refining Research Question

First, an adequate research question had to be framed and decided upon. This did shift somewhat over the course of initiating the study and literature review. The research questions as they were finally decided are reflected in section 3.6.

- Deciding on the method

Deciding the best method of data collection became of key concern. Given that the study was qualitative in nature and that its purpose was to seek rich, personal information on behalf of employment equity implementers it was decided that semi structured, one on one interviews would be the method of collection, with a set of deductive themes linked to the research question.

- Selecting and securing a sample

The researcher was faced with limiting the sample to some degree, given some of the ambitions at the beginning of the study. It was decided that implementers within the IT sector be chosen- as this is the sector in which the researcher works and there was a high likelihood of being able to use personal networks to ensure the participation of an appropriate sample, in the sense of seniority, experience and role focus while at work.

Participants were then individually invited to form part of the study.

Participant information forms were distributed to all participants as well as informed consent and confidentiality documentation relevant to the interview and recording thereof.

- Preparing for interviews

The question list and broad interview schedule was refined with the guidance of the supervisor, culminating in ten broad question areas. Once agreed, the researcher needed to prepare a notebook, reliable recording device and private interview venues.

All of this was successfully achieved, as well as the preparation for the encrypted backups of the recordings.

- Conducting the interviews and transcribing them

Interviews were conducted at the places of work of the sample, except in the case of P5 who agreed to meet at the researcher's office in Bryanston, Johannesburg. All interviews were conducted as per the privacy plan, in private rooms that were not disturbed during the conversation. Interviews were

recorded by way of Apple iOS software and backed up as well as encrypted on the researcher's pc. Copies on the recording device were removed.

In transcribing the interviews, the researcher sought the assistance of a graduate professional. This proved to save a lot of time and allowed for almost immediate analysis of the data. Transcripts were read in conjunction with the audio recordings so the researcher could make final corrections given the complicated and jargon heavy conversation matter.

- Analysing the data

The data was analysed first at an overall level per interview, then overall in terms of all the interviews combined. The data was then analysed in terms of the themes that emerged. Specific themes were codified in relation to the research and interview questions and readied for inclusion into this analysis.

- Describing the results

The results of this study are described in this document as well as in the initial notes made by the researcher. Tied to this description is a discussion of findings for each theme.

Future areas for research are proposed and limitations of the study described.

### **3.5. Data Collection Method**

#### **Data Analysis**

Mayring (2014) indicates the following common steps in terms of Content Analysis:

Step one is the formulation of a concrete research question followed by linking the research question to theory (see literature review). Step three is a definition of the research design (in this case explorative and descriptive) which precedes the process of defining of the sample or and sampling strategy (step four). The final three stages involve selecting the method of data collection, assessment of inductive or deductive themes and conducting a pilot (step 5). This is followed by processing the

results and presenting the study in terms of the research question and finally – presenting discussion in respect of quality criteria.

It is hoped that the above steps were satisfied in terms of the above and also in terms of the detailed methodology provided earlier in this document.

The specific process followed by the researcher in terms of the actual data analysis is best described as follows:

The transcript and audio recording was produced of each interview and initial notes were captured accordingly. A list was subsequently made of the types of information highlighted in the notes. Each item was categorised in terms of the response sets and interview schedules. Attempts were then made to link the categories in such a manner that themes could be identified and described. Major and minor themes were then identified. Themes were then compared and contrasted for each transcript, as well as the overall response set. The relevance of each theme needed to be confirmed in terms of the research question and areas of interest of the study. Themes were then finally confirmed, and the analysis as per Chapter four started to take shape.

### **3.6. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations included (mainly) confidentiality and anonymity.

Ethics permission obtained as the point of departure. Anonymity was impossible given the nature of the sample process and the fact that some of the sample are known to the interviewer. All audio recordings were encrypted and accessible only to the researcher, interviewer and scribe, who worked on the researcher's computer.

In terms of confidentiality the names of the respondents have not been listed in this report. They are referred to as P1 through 5.

Permission to tape and transcribe interviews obtained. Invitations and correspondence were direct and no third parties save the scribe and supervisor have accessed the recordings nor transcripts. No company confidential information was elicited nor was any included in the study and companies in which the sample operate have not been named in this study.

No harm was done during the completion of the study

### **3.7. The Researcher's Experience and View**

The researcher has worked in the fields of diversity, inclusion and employment equity for the last decade. So many questions have developed around the intersection between theory and practice, as well as whether as practitioners we are ultimately moving the dial in the right direction. One of the respondents in this study spoke of a concern that an overt focus on numbers might lead to us "*hitting the target but missing the point*". I have been eager to investigate for some time now whether we are in fact missing or understanding the point.

My hope, through interviewing individuals immersed in the practice of day to day organisational change was to start to develop a picture of how well it is we understand what we are doing, to understand whether we were synergising the concepts and landscape and what degree of authenticity lay behind so much of the speech and jargon used in practice on a day to day basis. I wanted to understand that authenticity both from a place of what is done versus what is said should be done, as well as to understand whether or not the thin line of implementers in this critical space were motivated beyond "having a job" or a nice, hard to pin down exciting job title.

I have also found myself having been in positions of having to assume numerous roles within myself and amongst my peers and wanted to understand whether that was common in my field. The only way to effectively achieve this was through the sort of in depth, lengthy individual conversations planned and executed as part of the study. I hope one day to conduct a larger study with a broader sample.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

The results are described below, in terms of the themes.

- Only Employment Equity is understood (partially) and articulated uniformly
- Deeply personal motivations behind each implementer
- Their visions of success all go beyond compliance and none mentioned financial reward as a motivation or goal
- Their organisations do not share their definition of successful implementation
- Diversity is a much spoken about concept that is elusive in practice
- All implementers develop a means of functioning within an environment of conflicting goals

Themes and sub themes are presented and discussed in the section below.

#### **4.2. Participant Overview**

Individual interviews were conducted with five participants in total. Three were male and two were female. In terms of ethnic origin two were African (male), one mixed race (male), one coloured (in the South African sense of the word) and female with one white female.

All of the sample have significant experience working in organisations within the broad subject framework of transformation, empowerment, employment equity and diversity and beyond this, all of them had experience working in more than one of these fields.

The variance and diversity of motivation was noticeable from the beginning and could well have been due to people's specific areas of background and focus. This will be unpacked in more detail later in this section, under the major emerging themes. One thing that was obvious is that all of the participants worked in their career fields out of either a sense of 1) duty or 2) calling. One question that was asked to each participant was around how long they saw themselves continuing to work in

the same or similar field. Without hesitation each indicated (through various means) that they had no intention of leaving their career fields (unless they chose to stop working entirely).

P1 is an African man from Thokoza in Ekurhuleni East of Johannesburg and described himself (professionally) as the B-BBEE Compliance and Execution Manager for a large multinational headquartered in South Africa. He focuses his professional energy on all the elements of the organisation's B-BBEE scorecard as well as philanthropic activities carried out by the company. He was happy to share his background as a political activist and viewed (at least for the purposes of the discussion) much of what he does in his professional role through this lens.

The conversation with P1 took some time to develop and he spent a lot of time going through in quite some detail what he does (objectively) from a strategic and practical level. After one or two questions he seemed to share more of his personal viewpoint, positions and subjective ideas. He provided one of the most unique viewpoints when it came to discussing the ultimate goals he is pursuing through the work that he does. This was, in his view to *“help create a society that has a different vision of itself”*. What the researcher found worth noting was that of all the participants, P1 was the one who worked most directly with the B-BBEE legislation framework, which many of the other participants viewed as quite cold and measurement based. The general assumption that could fairly arise is that the participant most closely linked to B-BBEE may give the most perfunctory end goal view- and this proved far from the case.

P2 is an African man from Mpumalanga in South Africa. He is the Transformation Executive at a large IT company based in Johannesburg and with offices in London. He dedicates his professional time to transformation, B-BBEE and Employment Equity initiatives and has an extensive background in skills development frameworks as well as community and labour relations. He reiterated at many points the centrality of skills, learning and developing skills through learning in terms of his notion of success with regards his area of work. He delved at many points back into his view of the power of learning and skills development and seemed often to play the role of a knowledge base for his fellow executives in the pursuit of his very human rights and inclusion focused vision of success. He also

focused regularly on the sustainability of business in general in South Africa and viewed Employment Equity as a necessary component in the ability of business itself to survive, given some of the social and other pressures he described as playing out in the current status quo.

P3 is a man of mixed race who grew up outside South Africa. He is the Organisational Effectiveness Executive for a large IT firm based in Johannesburg and is the custodian of initiatives that span from B-BBEE to diversity, employment equity and Human Resources. At many points he indicated that he saw South Africa as a foreign, nonsensical place in many ways when it came to issues of race and gender. He felt that as challenging as it had been at many points, his unique upbringing in a mixed race family in a different part of the world had possibly created in him a special kind of “normal” that he felt he could share in South Africa, given the legacy and impact of its racial past and status quo. He voiced a special level of concern for diversity work in particular throughout the conversation and was absolutely convinced of its strategic importance to the success of business. He in fact described diversity as critical to any business, unless the researcher could think of a business that could succeed forever by “*thinking one way*”. The conversation took flight immediately and had in fact started prior to the formal initiation of the interview.

P4 is a Muslim, coloured woman and works in a large IT company as the Human Resources Executive. Her background is in human resources management and organisational development. She sits as part of the organisation’s executive committee and in that context sees her view very much as bringing together the organisation’s business strategy with what she terms its “people strategy”. She saw diversity as having a critical role to play in the organisational strategy though held quite a dim view of what was able to be accomplished through a workshop based approach. This interview was possibly the most cumbersome and eliciting information beyond the objectively visible proved quite challenging. The conversation did develop over time and yielded some rich information, which will be discussed in later sections of this document.

P5 is a white female with vast experience in all the fields we have discussed (transformation, empowerment, employment equity, diversity). She has consulted at a senior level across the IT and

other industry sectors. She is also an academic, currently involved in the authoring of material relating to human resources management, change management and diversity in South Africa. It must be stated from the outset that given her broad expertise, some questions were posed to her that were not included for the rest of the sample. These were mostly opinion based and related to things such as the proportion companies she has worked with that include talk of diversity in values and other documents though invest little in the process- focusing rather on B-BBEE and statutory compliance.

In terms of overall reflections, some of their job titles are relatively “woolly”. One wonders what the impact of these vague descriptions is on their organisations and subordinates. What exactly is an effectiveness manager, what is he supposed to do? How do you manage and assess organisational effectiveness, transformation etc.? When is a company deemed to be effective and/ or transformed?

In considering the roles, particularly of interviewees 1, 2, 3 and 4 it certainly appears that all are working in roles that reinforce their self-esteem and job satisfaction in spite of a certain role ambiguity.

### **4.3. Themes**

#### 4.3.1. While Employment Equity is well understood, there is no uniform understanding of the broader subject matter

What becomes immediately evident on scrutinising the data is the absolute lack of a shared understanding of many of the key terms involved in the landscape of their profession. Take for example look at the terms empowerment and transformation. Empowerment was described variably by the sample as (in brief): A process, an outcome, the B-BBEE Act and codes and a result- whereby you can become empowered or can be empowered by somebody else. Another participant described empowerment as “about opening up” with regard to particular skills or roles, and opening up with regard to a much broader group of people. Another view was that it was an enabler to transformation.

Transformation on the other hand was seen as (variably): the broader conceptual framework into which all the other areas under discussion fit, a government programme typified by the B-BBEE programme and finally “*a fundamental shift in the way we view and structure organisations*” (P4).

The degree of overlap and dispersion of ideas around these two concepts pointed to the possibility that many of the participants are working in fields which are in fact quite loosely defined, which would open up a lot of room for the development of work and role identity.

Employment Equity seemed to be the most uniformly understood concept and elicited a similar working definition from all respondents. It was viewed as a legislated means by which organisations were compelled to look at issues of numerical representation and the prevention of unfair discrimination. P4 described employment equity as “*hard and fast and about the numbers*”. P3 took a literal interpretation of the term and described it as equality in employment between all people regardless of “*race, gender or creed*”. This is in fact true of much of the act, though would have been better put as “equality of *treatment* in employment”, with a focus on equity *in* employment. P3 was also the only respondent who was able to reflect an understanding of the whole employment equity act and not just the chapter concerned with numerical targets.

Diversity was the concept that all respondents spent the most time discussing. A shared component of their respective definitions was that of difference, and that diversity at its essence was about difference. Diversity was described as being key, central, critical and necessary in relation to the other three concept areas. P4 described diversity as “*the ultimate*” on a continuum that it was about “*difference in its broadest sense*”. “*We are different and being different brings about a variety in ways of thinking, in approaches to ways of work delivery*” was a response from P4 who viewed the appreciation of difference as key to creating the vision of successfully transformed organisation described later in this section. Only P3 and P5 articulated aspects of diversity that are contained in the classic business case, whereas P1, P2 and P4 located the conversation in much softer, accommodation and human rights terms, without being able to clearly articulate what diversity could do strategically for an organisation. P3 put it in blunt terms saying that in today’s context, “*a bunch of Afrikaans guys*

*sitting across the table from a bunch of Zulu guys are probably not going to get the deal*". This being said, all of the participants described diversity in terms that included fundamental criteria such as race and gender, but went beyond this and included concepts such as more subtle aspects such as cognitive and problem solving differences.

All participants seemed to give the idea of diversity some sort of special significance, and linked it directly to concepts such as long term vision, sustainability, cohesion and authenticity.

Something to consider in terms of the above is that unlike almost all other professions there appears to be very little sense of "subject matter". Doctors do medicine and have a clear grasp of subject matter, lawyers have a grasp of the law but the respondents seem to be unclear as to what exactly they are tasked to do.

A 2002 study by Van Tonder found that transformation was not a uniformly understood concept.

*"The concept has the appearance of a fluid and changing character because researchers and practitioners thus far tended to project and inject meaning onto and into a vague transformation "stimulus" in an attempt to make sense of it." (p235)*

One wonders about the personal impact of working within a poorly defined and understood space, as well as the impact this may be having when one looks at things like the Commission for Employment Equity report and the slow pace of representative change it continually highlights.

#### 4.3.1. Powerful and varied personal motivations behind their chosen careers

The questions around the personal motivation on entering the work were varied and each participant provided a clear reason as to why they personally worked in the field. What came through very clearly was a sense of either duty or calling. This sense of duty or calling manifested very differently and was tied to a broad range of different facets and life moments, some of which I have tried to characterise below.

P1 was of the view that this was his answer to a moral challenge presented to many in South Africa who had been active combatants or activists in the anti-apartheid struggle. He saw the choice as a dichotomy between “*making money and making a difference*”, and professed to have chosen the latter. His deep seated belief was that he was working in the pursuit of a South African society that “*sees itself differently*”. A society that viewed itself as capable, deserving and held itself in high esteem. He expressed thinly veiled disappointment with many of his peers in the anti-apartheid movement who he described as having taken “short cuts” and pursued wealth above all else.

P2 was somebody who had lifelong passion for education, specifically and described a moment in his life he believed was central to his later life choices. He described his family notifying him towards the end of his matric year that they would not have the money to send him to university, in spite of his passion and ability with regards academia. He was a successful scholar and had the necessary academic prowess to progress into university. This set him upon a dedicated quest to get himself a bursary towards further study, ending in him securing not one but two sources of financial support for his university degree. Given what he described as little (if generous) support from his family, he began working while studying, aiming to share the kind of opportunity he had created for himself. Over time he was able to turn the engagements he was having with underprivileged youth into a source of revenue and so his birth in the field of development of others as a career was born. At a more personal level P2 admitted being challenged by the thought of his own “luck” as he humbly put it and became increasingly concerned with the idea that many more people with the potential he had, more than he perhaps, would not see the types of opportunity they had created for himself. He also confessed a fear that a society could not operate for long on that basis, saying that the poor greatly outnumbered the more economically comfortable and that we would “*all run away if they came to our security estates.*” He was the only participant that included this fear as at least a partial motivation for the work that he does.

P3 presented one of the most detailed rationales behind why he had entered the work arena he was currently in. P3 was born to an African father and white, Swedish mother. He had spent a lot of his formative years in Sweden and described himself as always being aware of his being different from

the majority of Swedish society. “P3: *I became aware very early that I didn’t look very Swedish*”. A sophisticated, almost jovial take on a reality that for a child must have proven to have been quite difficult at times. He subsequently moved to Lesotho where he entered a social realm that was very different from that which he had experienced in Sweden. Though he described white people as a “visible minority”, he also said that the fixation with race that he would find in South Africa was absent. Children were different yes, but he said he would be hard pressed to tell you “*how many black kids or white kids there were in class*”. He was aware that there were more black children, but not aware to a granular degree in terms of the exact demographic make-up of the class as this wasn’t as much of a fixation- as he termed it, as it was in South Africa. Conflicts he experienced were not centred on race and the idea of merit (which he would refer to a lot later in the interview) as being separate from race was clearly formed in him quite early. His entry to South Africa proved somewhat of a rude awakening. He was exposed to racial stereotyping and other behaviours he had not been so bluntly aware of before coming to Cape Town. Because of his skin tone people assumed him to be coloured, would talk to him in Afrikaans and refuse to take him seriously when he let people know he didn’t speak a word of it. A confrontation with this new, abnormal society awoke in him a desire to share with this society a sense of the normality he had found around concepts such as race, which South Africa, in his mind, was clearly at sea with.

At a life incident level, somewhat of a turning point in his professional career was a racial slight delivered by the Managing Director of a company he was consulting with at the time. He was consulting on a change management process involving changes to the physical environment. The Managing Director had commented on a desire not to install couches as part of a “pause area” as when his African staff saw the couches they would be tempted to have a nap. The realisation that the Managing Director was prepared at the same time to profit from and insult a good 80% of his staff was unpalatable for P3. More so was the lack of reaction and support from any of the senior managers within the client environment, nor his own management seeing anything wrong with the statement. This he described as central to his desire to work formally in a space where he could play his part in

making organisations more accepting and more appreciative of the staff they had- regardless of the differences they represented.

P4 grew up in an area designated for coloured South Africans but went to one of the first truly non-racial private schools in Johannesburg. She stated upfront that she was from what she described as a previously disadvantaged group. She described having first-hand experience of the inequalities of the past and *“what that breeds, from a psychology perspective”*. She defined her role very much in terms of changing that reality and viewed herself as being in a position of *“influencing that change. Being part of it and playing that role”*. Similar to P3, she was highly influenced by a schooling environment of active non racialism and described what she saw as the *“magic”* in *“unlearning”* a lot of previously held concepts around race, racial exclusivity and negative self-image based on race. She is highly motivated by a desire to bring this *“magic”* into the corporate environments in which she works.

Again, as with P3, it was almost a sense of having been privileged through being a part of a racial landscape almost inconceivable to many South Africans and wanting to share the perceived benefits she was able to derive from this with others and in other environments.

She describes *“...just understanding the social conditioning around how we saw ourselves in clusters of race and being in a school where you can actually unlearn all of that and begin to see the person sitting next to you for the human being that they are and appreciate them for the value that they bring in terms of creativity, their thinking rather than the colour of their skin, I think for me was an awfully powerful way of going through teenage hood, as I’ve carried on this journey in my working life”*.

There was also a sense almost of wanting to hold her organisation to account in terms of her belief that it was, ultimately, an ethical organisation. She believed that an ethical organisation would by its very nature be an empowering, transformed, equitable and diverse organisation and that her company was genuine in this pursuit- something she vocalised as central to her being part of the organisation. This talks in part to a need for there to be a reflection in fundamental values in terms of the individual and the organisation.

P5 was of the view that she had always held an interest in organisational change management and that in the South African context, so much of this fell around the recurring four broad subject areas pertinent to this study. She, like P2 held a special view of the role of skills development and the development of ability through learning. She said she was in part motivated by a desire for white privilege to be acknowledged and addressed as a genuine concern in terms of the (numerous- over 50) South African work environments she has worked with in a process framework. She believes that we operate in such a complex society with such an extreme past- it is work that “has to be done”. She does the work in the hope of making a difference.

A commonality across all of the sample was this obvious, deeply personal connection to the work they engaged in. Not one of them indicated a feeling that they had “happened upon” their previous careers nor that they felt they were in the wrong chair. There were differences in inflection around the ideas they were personally motivated by and toward. P4 spoke of an environment that embraced and utilised difference. P1 spoke of a society seeing itself differently. P2 saw human rights as a key characteristic of a “transformed” environment while P3 envisaged businesses that thrived through the power of “*diversity as an asset*”. P5 was focused highly on the creation of positive organisational cultures in which members of the dominant organisational culture (in this case white males) were able to be more humble. All of these we will turn to in more detail when examining participants’ visions of success.

All except P5 exhibited quite a high internal locus of control, seeing themselves as able to alter and impact the environment and circumstances in which they work. P5, as an external consultant to companies, was of the view that she would do all she could to make a difference, though often her work was at the mercy of client decisions, budgets and other realities. There is almost (except possibly P5) a kind of missionary zeal about their work and conversations thereon

#### 4.3.2. Visions of Success Clearly Defined, with Diversity as a Common Thread

When asked what it was that would characterise and define a professional landscape in which they had been ultimately successful with regard to their roles, each respondent was able to answer this

clearly, and to paint a relatively vivid picture accordingly. Diversity and diversity management also came up as a common theme in all of the responses. This contrasted with the feeling that respondents had (in the main) that they spent a lot of their time pursuing successful compliance and credentialing- and not enough time working on long term diversity initiatives.

P1 laid out the idea of wanting to create a “society that saw itself differently”. He was able very clearly to define a definition of success at the level of society, though was more brief with regard his definition of personal or organisational success. He spoke directly to the attainment of a non-racial and non-sexist society and of a society that would refer to “*disabled*” people as “*differently abled*”. He was not able to relate that back directly to the work he does at an operational level, save to say that he sees diversity work as a cornerstone to sustainable change within organisations. Another indicator of success was companies pursuing B-BBEE initiatives and frameworks authentically i.e. not solely with a view to compliance but to “responding to the needs of society”. The same was said with regards diversity, that success would mean implementing a long term, strategic approach, something that was not followed by most companies in his view.

What was interesting was how closely aligned his definition of success with regards to his work was to the aims and aspirations contained in the constitution and the narrative of South Africa’s ruling party. This is not by any means to say this is in itself negative or limiting, it is however (in the researchers view) indicative of the connection P1 has formed between his work and his participation in the anti-apartheid struggle.

Bothma, LLoyd and Khapova (2011) developed a model of a three-layered onion in their study titled “*Critical elements in defining work-based identity in a post-apartheid South Africa*”. They suggest that the outside layers, life spheres, and life roles have an impact on the inner layer (work) and eventually influence the construction of a work identity depending on the importance and salience of specific life spheres, roles or work facets.

Life spheres (the first layer) refer to the prominent contexts in which individuals function (cultural, political, religious, financial or economical spheres). It is from these life spheres (life interests) that

individuals draw significant discourses and discussions in their struggle to maintain a balance between their personal and their social identities, this includes the work identity.

The life roles (the second layer) that were identified as most important and salient according to the Lloyd et al. ( 2011 ) study in SA, are religion, breadwinner and political/change agent roles. The political/change agent roles links with the political life sphere in the outer layer – which explains political activist behaviours in the workplace and may well relate quite directly to P1.

His upbringing (community based), his community activism work, and his activist role during the struggle for democracy appear to combine to form an identity which is replicated in his role in his workplace.

P4 viewed success very much in terms of diversity and not the other broad areas under consideration.

She described success by saying *“I think different ideas, different ways of being, there’s not one way in which people have to fit into. There are different ways that are accepted and even encouraged.”*

Much like P1 she described the need for diversity to be built into the core and the strategy of a business, enabling it to differentiate itself through its culture. Successful companies would therefore be sought after by top diverse talent and clients alike. This definition is very much in tune with a lot of the arguments behind the business case for diversity, though driven from a very different place (in terms of profitability) when one considers the rest of her input.

P3 had such a concise definition of success it was commented upon by the researcher. His view was of *“high performing, harmonious organisations where difference and diversity matter as much as effective delivery”*. He believed, which will turn to later, that organisations had an entirely different notion of success with regards to his work, and that this was reflected through an overt, year to year focus on B-BBEE credentials. P3 spoke anecdotally about his son who is already immersed in a world of difference, and has a hugely diverse family base from which to draw. His wish in terms of him being successful at his current organisation is that his son (should he one day decide to work there) should feel comfortable in the organisation from the moment he sat down in reception. At a societal level he spoke clearly of his desire for white and black graduates to enter business on a truly equal

footing, believing that the difference in preparedness for the business world was still skewed towards white graduates.

P2's vision of success was illustrated through the characteristics and organisation should display and he was very clear in his belief that "the need should determine the form". This being said, his personal vision of success was built around what he termed a transformed organisation. *"...it is about human rights, human dignity, it's about equality, and it's about creating an environment where people irrespective of their background, irrespective of their status feel they are in a safe environment, where they can be at their best. It's about an organisation being non discriminative in its practices. It's about valuing diversity, it's about creating that inclusive culture."* He also defined success in term of an organisation that empowered people. He explained this by way of discussing the immense potential many bring with them into the corporate environment and how given the culture and structure of the environment this potential was often undeveloped and or unrecognised. P2, like P1 also overtly defined success for him personally as being tied to the success of others. His career is seen as a vehicle, not a destination and it is his preference that his vehicle be shared (to continue the metaphor).

P5 spoke of an absolute failure to recognise white privilege in the business world. She saw this as a major exemplifier of where success would be located, with the counter-characteristic in a successfully transformed organisation being humility and acknowledgement of privilege. Her view was that there was a major disjunction behind what she viewed as a truly successful organisation with regard to all the areas we keep returning to. Her view was that companies were focused solely on their B-BBEE credentials and viewed the level or number on their certificate as the be all and end all of success.

She felt a successful company in this light would have a long term and strategic view. The B-BBEE score would be important from a substantive view in that what it was driving was important in terms of structural change. At the same time there would be *"soft, heart and soul initiatives"* focusing on diversity from the intrapersonal to the inter group. Race would be openly discussed along with other aspects of diversity such as sexual orientation. Conflict would be dealt with constructively and people

in the company would value EQ highly in leadership. Importantly the organisation would be aware that it was never going to “be transformed” but that it would constantly be changing and transforming. She feels that the work is ultimately most satisfying in two realms. These are one on one, personal mentorship and development initiatives where the success is visible, and the difference she makes is visible. The second is that of skills development where the end results are also visible, albeit on a larger scale.

Though P4 did not explicitly talk to diversity in his response, much of what he spoke about relates directly to difference, to the incorporation and valuing thereof, and the creation of inclusive work environments.

As evidenced by the above, diversity featured prominently in all of the respondents’ definitions and characterisations of success in their professional areas of interest. Another commonality was the focus on the need for long term, strategic endeavours that went well and beyond compliance. This differs quite starkly from the input provided around how they view company or organisational definitions and visions of success.

#### 4.3.3. Box Ticked. For organisations- Success is all about B-BBEE credentials

Participants were unanimous in their view that organisation defined success in one of two ways. The first was that they perceived success in terms of the overall B-BBEE scorecard and level. Second was their successfully complying with statute and attached administration.

P5 highlighted the fact that there was often open hypocrisy on behalf of organisations who would embed diversity into their strategies, into their marketing collateral and into their values and vision statements, though do absolutely nothing beyond statutory compliance. Diversity at many points boiled down to a buzzword and the aims of what she saw as the encompassing transformational framework were most often side-lined.

Both P1 and P5 expressed their support for the type of structural transformation driven by the B-BBEE act and codes but expressed feeling conflicted at the perfunctory and often insubstantial manner in which companies pursued success under this framework. The discussion with P5 uncovered the fact that satisfying basic compliance such as department of labour visits often signalled the end of initiatives as organisations believed the purpose of the investment had been served.

P4 felt that the focus was more on short term, measurable features and spoke specifically in terms of Employment Equity. She felt that *“if we’re meeting employment equity requirements from a numbers perspective, the organizations are all too happy to sit back and accept that”*. She felt that diversity outcomes were much harder to position and that they were considered alongside, not as part of, the business strategy and goal framework. P3 took a different view, saying quite pragmatically that the B-BBEE compliance framework often provided the only meaningful entry point for some of his broader goals. He was happy to utilise the changing legislative landscape to his advantage and as a means of giving weight and credibility to his initiatives.

What this distinction in definitions of success highlights and elicits, in part is that implementers are all working in a space where there are contradictory goals. They all have one definition of success whereas they view the organisational view as different, myopic, short sighted and oversimplified (variably).

Also it appears that respondents at times have to subvert their superordinate goals, pulling them in line with organisational aims or at least distorting them through this lens. Some appear to take this approach as a means of surrender, others as a perceived opportunity to initiatives that are difficult to position in environments that are motivated by hard, financial goals. Other responses are explored below.

#### 4.3.4. The preacher, the teachers, the merchant, the conscience and the intrepid explorer

Bothma, Lloyd and Khapova (2011) assert that current accepted theories of identity formation suggest that an identity develops through the interaction between an individual and his/her specific life spheres such as the working environment. The literature suggests that working individuals operate in three core contexts, namely, life spheres, life roles and work roles. It appears that three distinct processes are at work in identity formation and that these distinct processes blur and overlap in identity activation and resulting behaviour.

Of significant concern to the current study was to understand what roles (if any) respondents took on when operating in a space where their goals and vision differ from those of the organisation. All respondents found 1) that there was often a contradiction or tension between their personal goals and vision of success, with those of the companies they worked within and 2) a way to manage through role adoption in an environment of competing goals.

P1 believed that organisations often pursued inauthentic and short term goals. While he was not critical of the B-BBEE framework, he was critical of organisations that did not embrace the underlying intent of the legislation, choosing rather to focus on year to year levels and credentials. Similar to P2, P1 saw his role within this contradictory environment as an educator and or pastor. As was reflected in his interview participation, he said he spent a lot of time being the voice of compliance and consequence, ministering to the organisation on the imperatives and nuances of the legislation- with a focus on authenticity and an embracing of the spirit (of B-BBEE).

P2 also saw the reality that organisations were very focused on B-BBEE and statutory compliance and that issues such as diversity and transformation as he defined it were quite far from the central agenda. His primary focus was on educating the organisation as to the sustainability benefits of implementing initiatives, constantly linking the social with the commercial, with sustained pressure and influence over investment in the former. He would look for opportunity in the strategic narrative of the organisation and attempts often to position initiatives in this space, with the notion being that initiatives that are good for people are good for strategy. He earlier provided an analogy of

transformation and that it was like water. It could appear in many forms but the essence was still H<sub>2</sub>O. He said in organisations, the nature of initiatives related to employment equity and other areas would be determined by the imperative (of the company) as he put it. In his case it appears that he would look first to what the organisational imperative was, then position initiatives within this paradigm. It is difficult for the researcher to see how one can be effective in changing, transforming, making more equitable an organisation if implementers are waiting for the organisation to determine the imperative. At what point does the change imperative start to compete with the determined imperatives of the organisation? P5 believed that this was very rarely the case.

P5 described herself as “jaded” in many ways with regard to the impact of her work. She said that at many points strategic projects had been dropped, that compliance and perfunctory initiatives often trumped those of long term and strategic value and that there was a general failure of organisations to position diversity and inclusion initiatives outside of a compliance framework. She had two means of operating effectively (in her view) under these conditions. One was a determined and dedicated focus, with what she termed an unwillingness to give up. She envisaged herself as in a vehicle with a bull bar, constantly pushing through obstacles and harsh terrain, gladly accepting every yard she managed to make.

Secondly as mentioned earlier, she busies herself with two areas of activity. One of these is the one on one mentorship of professionals. Here she believes she can see the visible outputs of her efforts in a much more limited and defined space. This engagement with visible, tangible, individual change appears to serve as somewhat of an antidote to the broad, undefined rapidly shifting and often transitory nature of the environments and contexts in which a lot of her other work is done. The other area worth highlighting again is the focus she has on skills development compliance. Again, this is a place in which volumes of work produce an outcome, where you can work within the bounds of structure and watch annual plans come to fruition.

P4 saw herself as a bridge between the strategic and the human resources aspects of the business. One of the many mechanisms she brought to bear was a focus on what she termed “small wins’ and

allowing those to motivate her. She spoke also of an almost dissociative means of having to move from emotive language towards the language of business. In both instances of P2 and P4, one wonders about the impact of having to describe ideas and initiatives ostensibly aimed at something quite different in language that the business or company would find more “strategically aligned”, or palatable perhaps. *“I think it is a tension, but it is an opportunity as well to, I think part of it is creating awareness, and you know educating, using business examples, where diversity has absolutely lead to growth, to companies being able to better compete – so I think again, you’ve got to come at this from a business perspective, you know look at, use the examples, some of our peers in the telco industry, where it’s not just about the profit motive, where they’ve embraced this and where they have the best people, wanting to work for them because they’re known for, you know for promoting different thinking.”* Again, the agenda is being set by the business. On its terms. As a means of sustaining progress and momentum she busies herself with finding examples, talking to external successes – looking to make the most out of the tension between goals. True to her earlier conversation on the experiential nature and impact of deprivation and conversely inclusion, she has spearheaded an initiative whereby executives go through an experiential programme with poor, black children with the aim of developing them as leaders. For her, though the initiative is couched in terms of leadership development, it is a critical opportunity for to have executives up close to some of the experiences, thoughts and potential of the very people that are currently missing from the sector- in the main. Again, she uses opportunity in available spaces to drive towards some of her larger personal goals- and in this instance quite effectively. P4 almost came across as the soft conscience of the organisation, guiding, exemplifying and providing necessary insights when turned to. She did not come across as somebody who took on many of the other means of approach described for other implementers.

P3 as discussed above was somebody who focused on turning the challenge of a short term, compliance focus into compelling imperatives that would need to be supported by the initiatives he needed to drive. He described himself as being happy that the B-BBEE landscape was shifting and becoming more challenging as he knew companies would be increasingly desperate to succeed under

the new requirements. For him this was somewhat of a boon, and something to be built in to his broader narrative around the why of diversity and other initiatives, including Employment Equity representation goals (which need to be enabled and sustained!). He would, to quote him, “*make lemonade*” where he could. He also drew specific fortitude from what P4 described as “small wins”. On tough days he would remind himself of the small, individual contributions he had made to people’s lives and the thanks he had received accordingly. This appears to be quite similar to P4-moving to the tangible, the visible and immediate results in small spaces as a means of sustaining resilience with regard to the difficult work of operating in a space of competing personal and organisational goals.

All of the respondents displayed some means of adapting to this tension or contradiction and at a high level this came through in the roles they took on. P1 as the preacher and overseer, P2 as the educator or teacher, P4 as the soft conscience or guiding light, P5 as an intrepid explorer doing necessary and difficult work with P3 as the dynamic pragmatist, able at all points to be a “*voice for people*” in the quest to make the most out of numerous adverse situations.

#### 4.3.5. Diversity is spoken about a lot, though time and resource investment appears to be minimal

Every respondent spoke of diversity in highly aspirational terms. The entire sample was able to speak in very fluid terms around what they perceived successful diversity management to be, how it linked to employment equity and sustaining change in that area and so forth. Above all of this, the entire sample viewed diversity as directly linked to the long term success of employment equity initiatives. Conversely not a single respondent felt or indicated that they were in organisations or contexts that had delivered on anything more than a statutory and/ or compliance mandate. Not a single respondent in their definition of Employment Equity (save P3) spoke at all of diversity when defining or explaining employment equity. The contradictions are clearly not just organisation vs implementer. Many of these clearly surface within and through the implementers themselves.

Diversity was always something people were pushing towards, or aiming to build into their organisational “*identity*”, “*strategy*”, “*journey*”, etc. Surrounding the aims of diversity and diversity management was a counterweight of terminology and reasoning as to why it was so difficult to achieve.

P4 spoke of how difficult it was to unpick certain realities, such as the “fact” that people are bound by similarity on grounds of race, background etc. She felt that this had direct impact on who sat on executive committees, boards and the like. P3 spoke of two reactions when one introduces diversity into an organisational “equation”. One was what he described as laagering up of members of the dominant culture and a certain sense of protecting themselves from the difference. The other response was for the same people to try to assimilate as far as possible the “different” individuals and their experiences.

P5 spoke of “*denial*”, “*guilt*”, and “*defensiveness*” on behalf of white business executives and managers with regard to some of the “*necessary conversations*” on diversity. P4 also spoke at length about the need to “*have the right conversations at the right time*” and to understand whether or not we are “*having the right conversations*”. It seems that everybody thinks this conversation needs to happen, but other than P5 who is an independent consultant- nobody appears to be having the conversation (externally) beyond the anecdotal.

The language around diversity is thus a mix of aspirational and highly defeatist. When one considers the imperative the respondents attached to diversity in attaining and sustaining employment equity and transformational goals, it almost beggars belief that not more energy was put into detailing what actual work was happening around all these broader aims. The answer it seems, in the case of this study, was nothing or not much at all.

This was reinforced by P5 who felt that the vast majority of organisations exhibited a total mismatch between the visions of diversity put forward on their marketing and other material, with the scale of investment into diversity that was happening in the companies. She also highlighted a certain

synonymy that she had found in companies- who equated (sometimes intentionally) diversity with employment equity, often using the terms interchangeably.

In the words of P2, “*The imperative will determine the agenda*”. Clearly, until practitioners are given more space to shape the imperative, the agenda will remain the same.

#### **4.4. Conclusions in light of the research questions**

- 1) Implementers are clearly not seeing the conceptual framework the same way and battle to explain succinctly what each concept is and how they relate to one another. The numerical aims of Employment Equity are understood but beyond that the conversation becomes more slippery.
- 2) All implementers interviewed are deeply connected to their fields of work, indicating a sense of personal connection to what it is that they do. Although articulated differently across the sample, all respondents feel they are working towards a higher goal or purpose.
- 3) All respondents indicated a vision of success in which compliance either didn't feature, or featured as a small part of a broader environment. The visions of success were vivid, so too their descriptions of environments in which employment equity and related initiatives had been successfully implemented.
- 4) All respondents felt there was a mismatch, tension or disjunction with regard to their vision of what they are driving towards, and that of the relevant organisation in which they worked.
- 5) In terms of point 3, each respondent also developed a means of operating within this tension, often by framing their own goals through the lens of the nearest match from an organisational perspective. There were other tactics and methods deployed as explained above.

6) Finally- diversity, managing diversity and inclusion work were spoken about in almost ethereal terms. It was viewed as the most important component of sustained transformation and something that would ultimately make the difference when it came to environments that valued and sustained difference. What was so interesting was how little time operationally the sample seemed to spend on this type of work. It was something which they were able to describe and aspire toward, but not something they had positioned or driven effectively in their spaces.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **5.1. Limitations of the Study**

The study was conducted with a very small sample. Although they impact the lives of around 50% of employees employed in large organisations in their sector, very few individuals were included.

As with any form of human interaction there is also always the possibility of limited reliability due to a number of factors, the subjectivity of the researcher being top of this list.

There was some inconsistency in the specific form of the questions though they were broad and theoretical enough to control for this somewhat.

One of the participants gave the researcher the distinct impression that they were talking to the recorder rather than to the interviewer at many points. It is hoped this was not the case with all respondents.

### **5.2. Implications for Future Research**

A much greater understanding needs to be gained as to the subjective experience of employment equity implementers in all facets of the work that they do. The stakes are high, the conceptual landscape is ropery at best and there is a great degree of role overlap and possible confusion.

There is a lot of scope to expand upon the work of researchers like Van Tonder who have started to pick away at topics such as the personal impact of role ambiguity in the space of transformation.

Where you have a high degree of personal commitment and connection mixed with a poorly defined conceptual landscape and slippery job descriptions- the impact on the individual from a stress perspective would also warrant study.



## Appendix 1: Acknowledgement and Informed Consent Form

### Acknowledgement of Informed Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby give consent to participate in the study being conducted by John Lucien Oakley-Smith. The study is being conducted as part of the Masters by Research being undertaken by the researcher. I have read the attached Participant Information Sheet and give my consent to participating as an interview participant.

Further, I give my full consent to the audio recording of interviews in which I participate. I assert that my consent is conditional on the researcher going to every reasonable measure to protect both my recorded input and personal information.

I understand that my input and information is for the purpose of this study alone and will not be used for any other reason whatsoever.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and will not be rewarded nor will I be remunerated in any way.

Finally, I am comfortable in the assertion that should I have any questions, queries or concerns I am knowledgeable on how and where to contact either the researcher or research supervisor.

Signed on: / / 2016

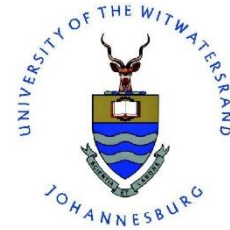
At:

Signature:

Researcher Signature:

Supervisor Signature:

## **Appendix 2 : Participant Information Sheet**



Psychology

School of Human & Community Development

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Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Telephone: +27 11-717-4500/2/3/4. Fax: +27-11-717-4559

Dear

The following serves as an information sheet to explain clearly what will unfold during the completion of the research being undertaken by John Lucien Oakley-Smith. The study seeks to attain and compare perceptions on transformation and employment equity on behalf of role-players working closely with the subject matter. It will further aim to explore links between individuals' personal experience and understanding of difference with their participation in the areas of transformation and employment equity. As somebody who works closely with transformation and or employment equity in your professional life, it is felt that you will bring a great deal of value to the study.

You are, first and foremost, entering the research as a willing participant and at no point will you be compelled to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any point of your choosing, with no penalty to yourself. There is no remuneration for participation in the study.

In terms of the research itself, it is hoped that you will be able to avail 90 minutes of your time for a face to face, confidential interview with the researcher. The interview will be conversational in nature and will rely on your personal input. The researcher will be asking questions based on your memory and personal perceptions on transformation and employment equity. It is not a study in which you will be offering correct or incorrect type answers. The research output will be a document comparing various perceptions and approaches to transformation and employment equity, with a view to how these are influenced by personal perceptions on the subject matter. A summary of this research will be made available to you on completion of the research.

With your consent (separate form attached) the interviews will be recorded by means of an audio (.mp3) recorder. This is to allow the researcher to accurately record and replay interview data. Data will be encrypted and kept under lock and key in a safe at the home of the researcher. Confidentiality will be and your identity as well as that of your organisation protected. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to your name and the name of your company. Neither your name nor the name of your company will be presented as a part of the research dissertation.

Any questions concerning the research may be directed to the researcher (John Lucien Oakley-Smith) at any point through: [Lucien.oakleysmith@za.didata.com](mailto:Lucien.oakleysmith@za.didata.com) . He can be contacted telephonically on 0843333366 / 011 575 6431. The research supervisor, Dr. Karen Milner can be contacted via email ([Karen.Milner@wits.ac.za](mailto:Karen.Milner@wits.ac.za)) or through the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand on: (011) 717 4500.

Thank you once again for your participation and for reading the above.

Kind regards,

JL Oakley-Smith

### Appendix 3: Semi Structured Interview Schedule

Thank for availing time/ participating in study

Given nature of study, your role as X seems to place you ideally to add value to the study.

- 1) Would you mind telling me a bit about what the role entails?
- 2) How long have you been in the role?
- 3) What do the terms transformation/ empowerment/ diversity mean to you personally? Does this have special/ different meaning in the context of business organisations?
- 4) Why do you work in this field?
- 5) In terms of your life so far do you think there were significant moments or factors which led you to want to work in the area of diversity?
- 6) Would you mind detailing/ discussing some of these?
- 7) How does Employment Equity link with the concept of diversity in your understanding?
- 8) What are some of the major differences between the two concepts?
- 9) Where (if at all) do you see overlap between the two?
- 10) Beyond compliance, why should companies be concerned with Employment Equity and related initiatives?

You influence a number of your company's employment equity and diversity related initiatives.

- 11) What do you think the ultimate goal is in terms of what you are implementing?
- 12) Why is this an important goal?
- 13) Describe some of the initiatives you have underway to achieve the goals you spoke about.
- 14) How do you think each of these is linked to the goal / s that you described?
- 15) How does your organisation measure success with regard to Diversity?
- 16) What do you personally believe "success" means with regard to Diversity?
- 17) What do you personally believe "success" means with regard to Employment Equity?
- 18) Do you believe the formal measures used to gauge success address your personal understanding of what successful initiatives are?
- 19) How do you navigate this space if there is not always 100% match?

Different forms of the above questions were asked with different emphasis in certain cases.

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